

Pinch Hits, "Six days in the life of Frantic Frank"

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"They used to say that the toughest job on any club Frank Lane was running belonged to the guy who had to take the team picture."

- Joe Garagiola

April 12, 1960

Tribe Trades Norm Cash for Demeter, Hometown Rookie

Over a six-day period in April of 1960, Cleveland Indians General Manager "Frantic Frank" Lane pulls off two trades - one big and one not so big - that will improve the immediate future - of the Detroit Tigers.

On April 12, Lane trades promising first baseman/outfielder Norm Cash to Detroit for utility infielder Steve Demeter. Six days later, on April 17, Lane angers Cleveland fans when he deals popular outfielder Rocky Colavito, the co-American League home run leader in 1959 with 42, to the Motor City team for outfielder Harvey Kuenn, the reigning American League batting champion (.353).

In their eventual cumulative 19 seasons with the Tigers, Cash (15 years) and Colavito (4), combine to hit 512 home runs with 1,517 RBIs while Kuenn and Demeter will total nine home runs, 54 RBIs in their respective total of two seasons on the shore of Lake Erie.

"The home run is overrated," says Lane in explaining the trade. "I hated to let Rocky go, but I think our chances of winning the pennant are greater with a steady hitter like Kuenn in the lineup."

To add insult to injury, on December 3, 1960, two months before he leaves Cleveland for Charles O' Finley and the Kansas City Athletics, Lane trades Kuenn to the San Francisco Giants for Johnny Antonelli and Willie Kirkland. Luckily, Lane is not around to watch Antonelli go 0-4 with a 6.56 ERA in 11 games before he is sold to the Milwaukee Braves on July 4, 1961; Kirkland does hit 63 home runs in three seasons with the Tribe, but hits a meager .232 and is later dealt to the Baltimore Orioles on December 4, 1963.

On April 12, Lane finally gets his man when he is able to persuade the Detroit Tigers to part with 25-year-old third baseman Steve Demeter for first baseman Norm Cash. Demeter, a Cleveland resident, is expected to "fill" the Indians' need for a right-handed pinch hitter and reserve infielder. He had played only 11 games for the Tigers in 1959, collecting two hits in 18 at bats (.111), but was having a successful spring training season, hitting .319 in 22 spring training games prior to the trade.

Cash, who broke into the majors in 1958 with the Chicago White Sox, was acquired by the Indians only five months earlier (December 6) in a seven-player deal. The Justiceburg, Texas, native had hit only .240 with four home runs in 58 games for the White Sox in 1959, but three of his four round trippers were off of Detroit pitchers.

Demeter will play just four games for Indians, going hitless in five at bats with one strikeout, before being sent to the minors. Cash will eventually unseat the Tigers' anticipated starting platoon of Steve Bilko and Gail Harris to become the Bengals' starting first baseman, finishing the season with 18 home runs, 63 RBIs and a .263 average.

On May 17, Cash is hitting .357 with a pair of home runs and seven RBIs when Demeter is optioned to the Toronto Maple Leafs of the International League on a 24-hour recall. The recall never occurs as Demeter will play another 12 years in the minors, ending his career with the Sherbrooke Pirates of the Eastern (AA) League in 1972. In all, he totals 19 minor league seasons, 14 of them at the AAA level. The Homer City, Pennsylvania, native will finish with 272 career home runs and a .290 minor league batting average and earn all-star honors eight times.

April 17, 1960

Colavito-Kuenn Trade Surprises

