

## HORACE HILLS FORD

By Ellen Knight<sup>1</sup>

A major league baseball player with the Boston Braves, Philadelphia Phillies, Brooklyn Robins, Cincinnati Reds, and St. Louis Cardinals from 1919 to 1933, "Hod" Ford (1897-1977) gave an interview to the local Winchester paper<sup>2</sup> just two months before retiring from the game, telling his own story as given here.



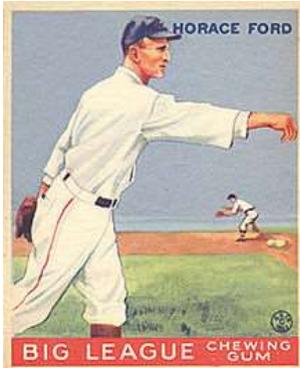
"I have played baseball all my life," he said. "My father was a ball player before me, although he did not stay in the game for long. Before his marriage he was a member of the Connecticut League. His ambition for me was to see me playing Major League baseball. My knowledge of his desire persuaded me against accepting a position with a big steel company in Bristol, Conn. The four and a half seasons which I spent with the Big League before my father's death in 1923 were very happy ones for him. He never missed a game. He was always present at the ball field before I arrived there."

Born in New Haven, Conn., July 23, 1897, Ford attended school in New Haven before his family moved to Springfield and Somerville where he attended high school and where his baseball career started. At Springfield High he played shortstop in his freshman year. During the next three years at Somerville High he also played shortstop. At Tufts College, where he studied mechanical engineering (class of 1919), he continued playing in the shortstop position until 1918 when he turned professional by signing with Red Sox. "Due to the war conditions it looked as if baseball was out, so I took the chance offered to me. This disqualified me from playing on the Tufts nine during the season of 1919."

In the spring of 1919, he was signed with the Boston Braves as shortstop and second baseman and remained with them through the 1923 season. The following winter he was traded to the Philadelphia National League playing second base with them one season. In 1925 he went to Brooklyn. The next winter he was traded to Minneapolis, but the middle of the season found him back with Cincinnati Reds as shortstop, where he remained 6 years. A year before the interview he was sold to St. Louis Cardinals, but stayed only to first of May when he was given an unconditional release and signed again with the Boston Braves.

His career had its ups and downs. With Hughey Critz he established a record for double plays with a total of 194 in one season playing with the Cincinnati Reds in 1928. With Leo Durocher and Tony Cuccinello, playing with the Reds in 1931, he broke the previously established record with a count of 195 double plays in one season. On the other hand, "Disappointments occur in baseball just as they do in any activity throughout one's life. When I was traded to the Minor League, it

was a step backward. I had injured my leg and was not physically fit. However, this situation made me realize that I must bear down all the harder. Consequently I played the best ball I could with the result that three months later found my contract purchased by Cincinnati.”



“My experience in baseball has convinced me that there is not a cleaner game in the field of sports. It is on the level absolutely. The players and the umpires are after all only human. It is impossible to avoid mistakes. As a rule all the men pull together for the same goal. Our salaries depend upon the club having a good season financially. This means that the team must win consistently. As yet I have never been on a pennant winning team. When I was with the Cincinnati Reds in 1926 we had a chance to win a pennant, but we were beaten by the Cardinals by two games.”

During the past 10 years, he said, he was away 7 months of year. On returning to Winchester, he took up another sport. “My hobby is golf, and there’s nothing I like better than to play the 19 at the Winchester Country Club. It’s a wonderful course.”

In June 1930, Ford and his uncle Benjamin W. Hills opened an ice cream store on Thompson Street in Winchester. “Every baseball player knows that there will come a time when he cannot any longer be active in the game. Wisdom dictated my entrance into some form of business. My uncle and I hit upon this. Yes, I like it.”

After Ford gave up professional baseball, he continued the ice cream shop and restaurant (pictured at Winchester Terrace). After 28 years he changed careers again, moving into real estate.



## SPORTING LIFE

Though retired from professional ball, Ford’s name continued to appear in the local news as he played with town teams and at special events. That first summer after retiring, for example, he played for the Winchester Legion team (for which Robbie Robinson was pitcher). In 1939, he made local headlines in two sports. Participating in the Veterans of Foreign Wars benefit game at Fenway Park,” he “played the whole game at shortstop for the National League ‘old timers’ who defeated the American League ‘old timers.’” As reported by *The Winchester Star*, Ford “played a very smooth game afield, making one unassisted double play and contributing a sparkling catch of a low liner that resulted in another twin killing.”<sup>3</sup> Later that year he made the headlines again for winning the handicap medal play golf tournament at the Winchester Country Club.

Ford served for several years as a director of the Winchester Country Club, where he had been a member since the 1920s. For over 20 years, he was a director of the Winchester Trust Company. He remained in Winchester until his death in January 29, 1977.

"We both consider Winchester the ideal town in which to live," Ford said in 1933, speaking also for his wife Marjorie Aldrich. "I have been over the country many times in my baseball travels, but I have yet to see a town I could like as well as Winchester."

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<sup>1</sup> This article © 2018 is a revision of an earlier article by the author, Ellen Knight, published in the *Daily Times Chronicle* on Apr. 24, 2008. This revision supersedes all previous articles.

<sup>2</sup> Marion Perham Gale, *Horace Hills Ford*, No. 10 in a series of "Personality Portraits," *Winchester Star*, Mar 3, 1933.

<sup>3</sup> *The Winchester Star*, July 14, 1939.