Larry Jansen (1920-2009)

By Paul Senz

Larry Jansen was a two-time All Star and one of the top pitchers in Major League Baseball during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Born on July 16, 1920, in the rural Dutch community of Verboort, near Forest Grove, he began playing semi-professional baseball while he was a student at Verboort High School. He graduated in 1938 and married his sweetheart Eileen Vandehey in 1939. They had ten children.

Jansen spent much of the 1940s playing in the Pacific Coast League. In 1940, Jansen was discovered by a scout for the Salt Lake City Bees, where he played for a year. He then pitched for the San Francisco Seals until 1946, except for the 1942 and 1943 seasons, which were cancelled due to World War II. During those two seasons, Jansen returned to playing semi-pro baseball in Oregon and worked at the family's dairy farm in Verboort.

In 1947, Jansen began playing for the New York Giants. He won twenty-one games that year and finished in second place in Rookie of the Year voting, losing out to Jackie Robinson. He was the winning pitcher in one of the most famous games in the history of baseball, the final game of the pennant playoff between the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants on October 3, 1951. The Giants had overcome a 13-game deficit to force the playoff. Jansen held the Dodgers scoreless during the ninth inning, allowing Bobby Thomson's homerun, which became known as the "Shot Heard 'Round the World," to propel the Giants to victory and into the World Series.

Jansen pitched twice in the 1951 World Series, which the Giants lost to the New York Yankees. During that series, Jansen gave Mickey Mantle his first World Series hit and allowed Joe DiMaggio a double in his last career at-bat. An All Star in 1950 and 1951, Jansen earned votes in the National League Most Valuable Player standings four times, in 1947, 1948, 1950, and 1951.

Arm troubles kept Jansen inactive for part of the 1954 Giants championship season. After spending the 1955 season with the Seattle Rainiers, his Major League career ended after eight appearances with the Cincinnati Reds in 1956. He returned to the Rainiers as a player-coach for the 1957 season, before joining the Portland Beavers.

Jansen pitched for the Beavers for three seasons, from 1958 to 1960, and was all set to become the team's manager, but his friend and former teammate Alvin Dark, the new manager of the Giants, offered him a job as a pitching coach with that team. He remained with the Giants (now in San Francisco) for eleven seasons, followed by three seasons as a pitching coach with the Chicago Cubs.

After retiring from baseball in 1974, Jansen returned to Verboort, where he sold real estate. In 1977, he released *The Craft of Pitching*, which he had written with George Jansen (no relation). He was elected to the Oregon Sports Hall of Fame in 1980 as part of the charter class. In 2004, *Sports Illustrated* voted Jansen one of the fifty greatest athletes to ever come out of the State of Oregon.

Jansen had a love for Oregon and lived in the house he built in 1951 in Verboort until his death on October 10, 2009.

Sources

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