



Texas Baseball All-Stars

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

At high schools all across Texas, baseballs are flying, and have been for weeks. Professional baseball officially got under way a few days ago. It's a good time to remember just how much Texas has contributed to this national pastime.

There are 12 native Texans enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. I've seen various lists of the all-time best team in baseball history, but I've never seen a group from any state as skilled as the 12 from Texas. The Texas Hall of Fame team might not be a perfect nine, but they would be as perfect as it gets in baseball.

Nolan Ryan once said, "One of the beautiful things about baseball is that every once in a while you come into a situation where you want to, and where you have to, reach down and prove something."

These 12 Texans did exactly that. They overcame serious challenges and performed with honor – both on and off the field.

Few may remember that early in his career, Ryan was actually sent back to the minor leagues. But Ryan – born in Refugio and raised in Alvin – rode his 100-mph fastball into the Hall of Fame in 1999, his first year of eligibility, with just six dissenting votes.

(You have to wonder about those six voters. Were seven no-hitters and 12 one-hitters in one lifetime not enough?)

Rube Foster, born in 1879 in Calvert, Texas founded the Negro National League in 1920. He pitched for 24 years and was a manager for 19, primarily for the Chicago American Giants.

Frank Robinson, from Beaumont, twice won the Most Valuable Player award, in both major leagues. Robinson later became baseball's first African American manager, and last year was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President George W. Bush.

Another baseball legend, Tris Speaker, was born in Hubbard, Texas. An early football injury was so serious that a surgeon recommended his left arm be amputated. Speaker said no. He used that left arm mostly with the Cleveland Indians, playing in the 1912, 1915 and 1920 World Series. After retiring, Speaker founded the Cleveland Society for Crippled Children.

Willie Wells suffered a concussion when he was hit by a pitch in 1942. He responded by modifying a construction hard hat and inventing the batting helmet. Helmets are mandatory everywhere today. Wells returned to his hometown of Austin after his career with the Negro National League to take care of his mother. He is buried among state heroes at the Texas State Cemetery.

Kidney disease cut short the life of another Texan, Hall of Fame honoree Ross Youngs, of Shiner. Youngs

died at 30, but not before he helped the New York Giants win World Series in 1921 and 1922. Giants manager John McGraw called the versatile Youngs "the greatest outfielder I ever saw."

Shortstop Ernie Banks, "Mr. Chicago Cub," overcame a serious eye injury to become a 15-time All Star. The Dallas native said that playing at Wrigley Field was a life spent with his friends: the fans, and his brothers: the players.

Slugging infielder Eddie Mathews of Texarkana played for the Boston, Milwaukee and Atlanta Braves. A nine-time All Star, his 47 homers in 1953 set a single-season record for third baseman that lasted 27 years. Why was he so good at the plate? Mathews credited his mother. "My mother used to pitch to me and my father would shag balls. If I hit one up the middle close to my mother, I'd have some extra chores to do. My mother was instrumental in making me a pull hitter."

Rogers Hornsby of Winters was one of the best ever to play the game. Hornsby achieved so much as a St. Louis Cardinal – including seven batting titles and a 20th century National League record for the highest batting average in a single season.

A rookie pitcher once complained to the home plate umpire that he was calling too many balls. The umpire replied: "Son, when you pitch a strike, Mr. Hornsby will let you know it."

Smokey Joe Williams of Seguin was another Hall of Famer who was never allowed to play major league baseball. In a 1952 poll taken by the Pittsburgh Courier, Williams was named the greatest pitcher in the Negro League's history.

The career of Joe Morgan, of Bonham, was topped by one of the most exciting moments in baseball history. While with the San Francisco Giants, Morgan's memorable late-inning home run eliminated the archrival Los Angeles Dodgers from the 1982 pennant race.

Hilton Smith, born in Giddings, played primarily for the Negro League's Kansas City Monarchs, sometimes in the shadow of teammate Satchel Paige. The son of a teacher, Smith started his career at Prairie View A&M University, where he developed a fastball and curveball still remembered today. After retirement, Smith also became a school teacher.

That's Texas' Hall of Fame team. I doubt any other state could beat it.

Sen. Cornyn is a member of the following Senate Committees: Armed Services, Judiciary, Budget, Small Business and Entrepreneurship, and Joint Economic. He is also the chairman of the subcommittees on Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship and Emerging Threats and Capabilities.