

The Sacramento Solons, 1949

After a year working in the station down town, Bill was given his own gas station to manage. I think it was like a franchise...he sort of owned it, perhaps got a percentage of the revenue. It is the only time I can remember that he seemed to like what he was doing. He was a kind of big shot. He had a partner (I'll call him Jim) who was tall and blonde and pretty quiet. Together they ran the business. The gas station was not very different from others of its kind except for one very important feature: it was right across from Solon Field, the baseball stadium of the Sacramento Solons.

The Solons were a triple A team, one step removed from the major leagues. Walt Dropo played for the Solons before he was promoted to the Boston Red Sox and he won the batting championship of the Pacific Coast League in 1949. Years later, visiting the Cooperstown Baseball Museum with Valerie and Tracie, I came upon Walt Dropo signing autographs. He wasn't charging anything either, unlike some of the baseball clowns that sat around looking bored. When I reminded him that he had won the Pacific Coast League batting championship, I thought he was going to kiss me.

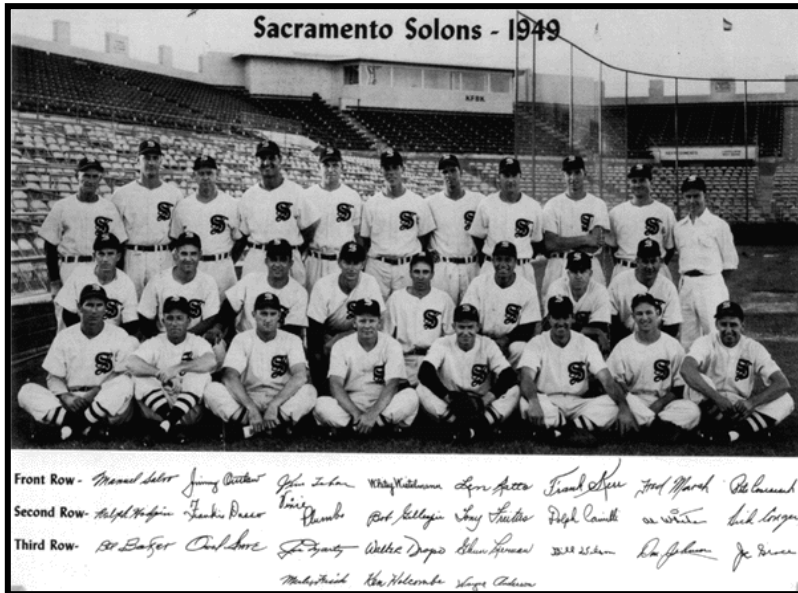
I was given the task of cleaning the bathrooms in the summer and weekends when I went to school. You can probably understand that this was a dubious honor at best. I found out all kinds of things people do when they don't have to clean up after themselves. One day, while cleaning the ladies room, I saw a bloody bandage in the garbage can. I thought to myself, "holy shit! Some lady has a really bad cut." At that time, I caddied at the local golf course to make some extra money. While looking for a ball in the rough, I came upon a similar bandage with blood all over it. All day, I kept looking for a woman who had a bandage on her arm or leg or somewhere so I could tell her to be more careful in my father's bathroom. I never found her. "How could I miss a lady on the golf course with a huge cut?" I thought. Learning stuff comes in peculiar packages.

I wasn't fond of "cleaning the heads" as Bill would describe the job. "Latrine duty" was another expression often used. One day, I just didn't ride my bike down to the station (only around 10 blocks away). Eventually, Bill called my mother, furious probably. There was a long talk. Eventually, repentant, I went to the station and cleaned out the fucking heads. He was still angry. His partner, Jim, came over and rubbed my head later as if to say, don't worry, Don, he still loves you.

Also, Bill made me the “official bike fixer” of the gas station. I could fix anything having to do with bikes, even the brakes which were pretty complicated assortment of disks inside the back wheel hub. I was able to exercise that important title once and once only. A kid came into the station with a bike that had loose handle bars. With a crescent wrench, I tightened it. Pretty sharp bike kid, with little to do except empty used Kotex pads in the bathroom.

At close of business, Bill and his partner would toss some stuff on the garage floor...a combination of sand and cinders, I think, which would absorb the oil and grease from cars that were up on the hydraulic lift during the day...and sweep up for the next day. I helped with that from time to time also.

But the best thing about the gas station was, IT WAS JUST ACROSS THE STREET FROM EDMUNDS FIELD!!!! Isn't it a cool looking stadium?



I met a lot of baseball players, some that were on the way out of professional sports because of their age, some coming up through the minors to play major league baseball. I mentioned Walt Dropo. Red Mann threw a no-hitter once. Jo Jo White, a former star Yankee outfielder, was the manager. Bill knew

Bruce Edwards who became the Cincinnati Red's starting catcher before the Johnny Bench years. This picture was the roster in 1949 when Walt won the batting title.

Full Stop: The Sacramento Solons



This is a description of the ball field in Sacramento when I was a boy.

“For 50 years, there was a ball park at Riverside and Broadway in

Sacramento, although it did not always have the same structure or the same name.

Buffalo Park, named after the Buffalo Brewing Company owned by the team's major stockholder Edward Kripp, was built in 1910. It became the new home of the Sacramento Senators of the Pacific Coast League. The wooden grandstand and bleachers seated 5,000 fans.

After Lew Moreing purchased the club in 1920, a new park named **Moreing Field** was built at the same location in 1922. Its concrete and wooden grandstand accommodated 10,000 fans in addition to those in the bleachers. The first night game in the Pacific Coast League was played there between the Sacramento Senators and the Oakland Oaks on June 10, 1930.

Branch Rickey, then of the St. Louis Cardinals, purchased the franchise in 1935, and renamed the park **Cardinal Field** and the team the Sacramento Solons. In the winter of 1938, a storm damaged the entrance and roof of the grandstand and it had to be rebuilt for the 1939 season.

A newspaper contest in 1944 resulted in renaming the park **Doubleday Park**, after Abner Doubleday, but on September 9, 1945, between games of a doubleheader, it was renamed **Edmonds Field**, after former Sacramento Union sports editor Dick Edmonds.

A fire almost totally destroyed the park on July 11, 1948, and the Solons were forced to play the rest of the season on the road. The park was reconstructed almost entirely of concrete, and reopened for the 1949 season.

On January 4, 1961, the Solons were sold and moved to Hawaii, and Edmonds Field was demolished in May of 1964.”



Solon (Edmonds) Park 1949

Bill's service station was kitty corner to this main entrance. I used to go over to the ticket booths with a long board and scrape the sand out from under the

kiosks. Often there were coins that had been dropped by people paying for tickets that rolled under the booth. Easy money and pretty clever of me.

The sportscaster for the Solons was Tony Koester. He was wonderful...in the same mold as Red Barber and other sports announcers of the time. Since there was no television or e-mail, the only information an announcer had was an abbreviated tickertape. At the county fair each year, they would set up Koester in a plastic booth while he would call the Solon game.



For example, if the pitcher was “Redd Man,” and the opposing batter was Fred Monk, the ticker tape would read: “3&2 17 FO 8.” That translated to “3 balls, two strikes, Number 17, Fred Monk, flies out to center field (the 8th position on the defense).” Here’s what Tony Koester would say:

“Red’ Mann steps to the mound and picks up the rosin bag. Looks to first base and ambles to the rubber. Fred Monk is at the plate, a wagging, menacing bat in his hand. Monk doesn’t have a batting average to show it...he’s only hitting 246..., but he is a very dangerous batter with men on base. Of his 47 RBIs this year, all but 6 have come with a man on first, leading the league in that category.



Gomez takes a lead off first, trying to distract Mann, but Red isn’t buying it. He winds up and hesitates before throwing to Monk. Gomez is taking a huge lead off first. Man looks to first base again and throws indifferently to Walt Dropo just to hold him closer to the bag. Gomez slides back easily beating the throw. 2 to 1, Solons, in the bottom of the 8th. Dropo tosses the ball back to Mann and Red gets ready again to pitch.

He’s back on the rubber again, staring straight at MonkIt’s the windup.....the pitch....(now Koester would knock his little wooden mallet on the desk)...craaaack....It’s a long fly ball to deep left center field (now he would crank up the crowd noise on his tape, the only other prop Koester had in the booth), OH NO...it looks like it’s out of here. Jo Jo White, playing center today in place of the injured Cap Williams, is racing towards the wall. It’s going, going, going....HE

CAUGHT IT!!!! (really cranks up the crowd noise) What a catch! White climbed the wall and robbed Monk of a certain home run. Frisco would have gone ahead 3 to 2. Oh, mann...what a catch.”

Here’s the point. This was completely made up except for the count, the inning and the out. Every game Koester called was way better than the real game. Tony Koester never made it to the announcing big leagues but he was as good as anyone at this fantasy, virtual ballgame announcing.

So the Solons were competitive, came in 3rd in the league in 1949, had a new ballpark, and my stepfather was on a first name basis with all of them. I got to visit the dugout sometimes before the games. The ballplayers would sometimes park their cars at his gas station. Did Bill have a great job or what?