

Billy Martin

May 16, 1928-December 25, 1989

Goodland (KS) Tigers 1954

When fellow NBC Hall of Famer Whitey Herzog was fired from his first major league managerial by Texas Rangers owner Bob Short in 1973 after Billy Martin became available, Short said of his reasoning for letting Herzog go, "If my mother was managing the Rangers and I had an opportunity to hire Billy Martin, I'd fire my mother." With just under 4 seasons of managing experience under his belt at that time, Martin already had a reputation as one of the best in baseball. Alfred Manuel Pesano, Jr. was born in Berkeley, California, on May 16, 1928. His father left his family before he was a year old, and his Italian grandmother nicknamed him "Belli", which meant pretty, and eventually that name became Billy. He grew up playing multiple sports, including basketball and boxing, and was a County All-Star at Berkeley High School in baseball in his senior season. While property of the Pacific Coast League's Oakland Oaks, Martin made a few stops in the minor leagues out of high school which included leading the Arizona-Texas League in hits (230), doubles (48), and RBIs (174), and finishing second in batting average (.392), just one point behind the top spot, for the Phoenix Senators in 1947. He then played two full seasons for the parent club Oaks, before the New York Yankees purchased his contract from them in the fall of 1949.



Martin entered the record books in his major league debut on Opening Day in 1950, becoming the first and still the only player to record 2 hits and 3 RBIs in the same inning, with those being his only plate appearances in that game. He wasn't a full-time player until early in 1952, and became nationally known for his performance in the 1953 World Series. He hit .500 in the 6 game series, going 12-24, which is still tied for the best average in a single World Series with at least 25 PAs. He still holds the record for most total bases (23) and hits in a series of 6 games or less. He had spent some time in the Army in the 1950-51 offseason and had received an honorable discharge in order to support his family, but was reclassified in early 1954 and, upon denial of his appeal, was redrafted and eventually wound up in Fort Carson, Colorado.

He joined the Outlaws baseball team as soon as he arrived and looked to play as much as he could, and found his way onto the Goodland (KS) Tigers during the NBC state

tournament. On a lend-lease deal with them, he helped lead them into Wichita as the champions of the Utah-Colorado region. Martin was front-page news throughout the team's run into the semifinals at NBC, regularly drawing crowds of 5,000 plus for the games he played in. In his first game, he went 2-3 but also committed 3 errors and was thrown out trying to steal home. He recorded multiple hits in 4 of the 6 games he appeared in, with his pinnacle performance being a 5-hit game against the Tennessee Maulers. The Tigers won that game 17-3 with Martin hitting 3 singles, a double, and a home run in the rout. Just like Herzog, though, Martin was participating with his Army unit in the 5th Army tournament in Colorado and was forced to miss the Tigers' semifinal game due to that commitment, resulting in Goodland being eliminated in a 15-0 loss. Martin's Fort Carson team lost that same day to Herzog's unit and then was eliminated from that tournament the following day in a rain-shortened affair. In what he thought was likely his last game at the NBC, Martin was named to the All-Tournament team as the best second baseman, and accepting the honors, he said he would try to return in 1955, "if I'm not with the Yankees then." Martin finished the National going 14-25 (.560), which was second best in the tournament and tenth best ever at the time.

The following year saw Martin get some managerial experience with Fort Carson, leading the team to a 15-2 record while hitting over .500, and he returned to Wichita for the NBC state tournament with Goodland. Goodland faced the 1954 NBC World Series champion Boeing Bombers in the finals, whom they had split two previous meetings, and not only was the state championship on the line but the batting title for the tournament was as well. Over 14,000 fans attended the three matchups between these two teams, and as Martin's team fell behind in the championship game early, he begged his manager to let him pitch and ended up taking the mound for the final 6 innings, allowing only one run to score. Martin was second in batting average when the game began, and he struck out the leading hitter, former New York Giant and future NBC Hall of Famer, Daryl Spencer twice, including in his final at bat when he still had a 2 percentage point lead on Martin, to secure the batting crown. Martin was named Kansas state tournament MVP, hitting .452, and Goodland earned a berth in the NBC as the Wichita representative, even though they finished 2nd in the state tournament. However, Martin had sustained an arm injury prior to his pitching outing, and the Yankees told him not to play in the National as they were working with the Army to get him released to rejoin the team for the final month of the season. Martin had wanted to compete in the NBC, telling Hap Dumont at the conclusion of the state tournament, "I'm



GOODLAND TIGERS

1955 Kansas Runners-up

Team members include: Billy Martin (2b), Ken Stonecipher (c), Dick McGill (cf), Dick Dickinson (ss), Bert Helgersen (1b), Bill Connolly (3b), John Skorurski (lf), Ed Velten (rf), Lee House (u), E. Berens (of), Gene Carlson (p), Jacques Jeanneau (p), Bill Johnson (p), Fred Kipp (p), Al Weis (p), and Glen Brickey (p).

coming back to this city for the National. I want to beat that Boeing team. Not many places do the crowds become as enthusiastic as they do here." His desire for a rematch never came to pass, though, as Martin was given a furlough by the Army and returned to New York in September. He batted over .300 with the Yankees in the last month of the season and the World Series.

Martin never returned to Wichita, as he stayed in the majors. He was an All-Star in 1956 and won 4 World Series while playing in 5 overall, hitting .333 for his career in the Fall Classic. He retired in 1961 and scouted for the Minnesota Twins and managed for their AAA affiliate in 1968 before becoming the Twins manager in 1969. He won the American League West Division in his only season with them before getting fired due to a in-season fight at a bar with one of his pitchers. Off-field issues, whether it be scuffles with players or fans or disagreements with owners, would be a recurring theme the rest of his managerial career.

He would ultimately win 5 division titles, 2 American League Pennants, and a World Series in 1977 while amassing a 1253-1013 (.553) record with 5 different ballclubs, including 5 separate stints with the Yankees. It was even rumored that he would be returning for his sixth time with them when Martin was killed in a car accident on Christmas Day 1989.