

Roy Sievers "A Hero may die, but his memory lives on"

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By BILL HASS

I had missed it in the sports section and on the internet.

A friend of my mentioned it to me and sent me a link to the story. On April 3 – ironically, right at the start of the 2017 baseball season – Roy Sievers died at age 90.

I felt a pang of deep sadness. After all, no matter how old you get, the little kid in you expects your heroes to live forever. As the years passed and I didn't see any kind of obituary on Sievers, I thought perhaps he might actually do that.

I knew better, of course. Sometimes reality has a way of intruding on your impossible dreams, and maybe it's just as well.

I have never been much for having heroes. Oh, there are plenty of people I have admired and some of them have done heroic things. But a hero is someone who stays constant, someone you root for no matter what, and people in sports lend themselves to that. Roy Sievers was a genuine hero for me, and, really, the only athlete I ever put in that category. Let me explain why.

In the early 1950s, when I first became aware of baseball, my family lived in the northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C. I rooted for the Washington Senators (known to their fans as the "Nats"), to whom the adjective "downtrodden" was constantly applied, if not invented.

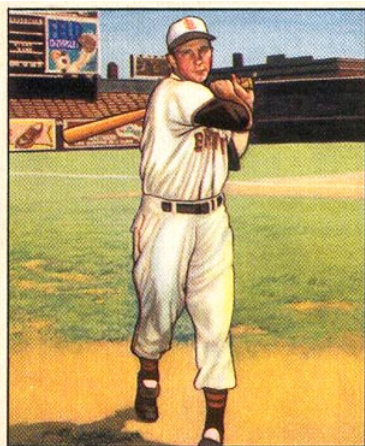
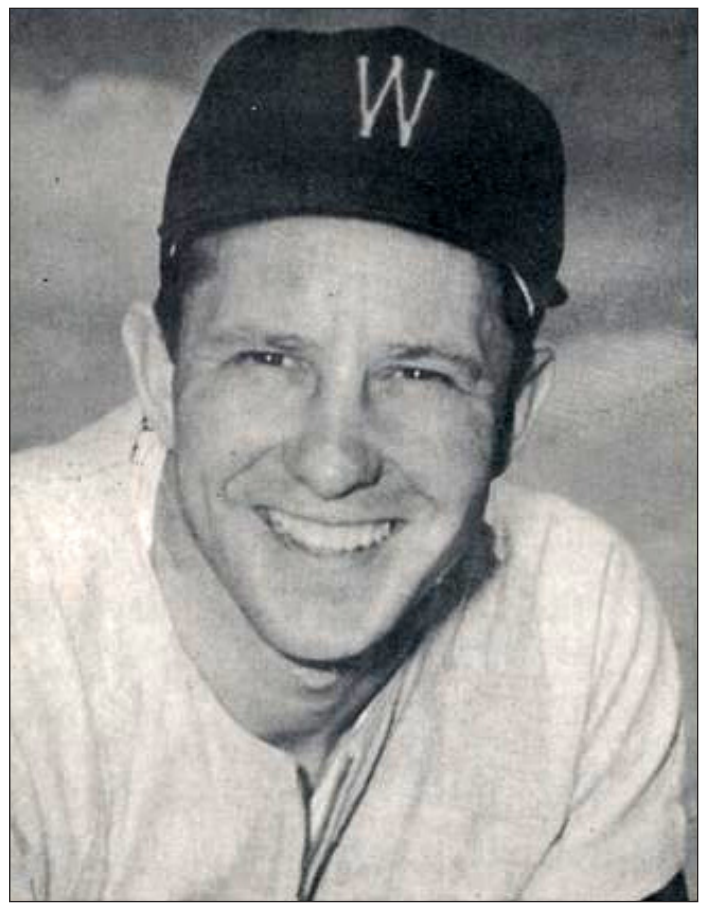
Prior to the 1954 season, the Nats obtained Sievers in a trade with the Baltimore Orioles, formerly the St. Louis Browns. Talk about going from downtrodden to downtrodden.

I had never heard of Sievers. Didn't know he signed with his hometown team for a pair of baseball shoes. Didn't know he had been the American League Rookie of the Year with the Browns in 1949, the first year of that award. (Pop quiz: While you're reading this, can you name the first NL Rookie of the Year without pausing to look it up?)

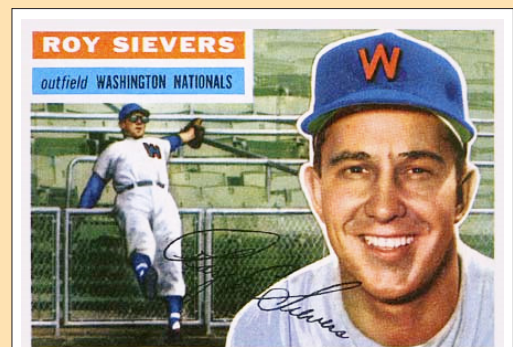
In 1950 Sievers suffered a broken collarbone that resulted in a severe shoulder injury and curtailed the number of games he played for the next several years. It's really no surprise that the Browns/Orioles thought Sievers was finished, so he was traded to the Nats for Gil Coan, an outfielder who had a couple of good years in Washington but was on the downside of his career.

And so began a six-year career for Sievers in the nation's capital. You cannot exaggerate how dreadful the Senators were in that span. They never won more than 66 games, never finished higher than fifth place. In fact, they finished eighth – dead last in those days – in four seasons and seventh in another.

There were only a few reasons to go out to see them play at old Griffith Stadium. One was to see stars from other teams – Mickey Mantle and Yogi Berra of the Yankees,



Roy Sievers
1950 Bowman (No. 16)



Roy Sievers
1956 Topps (No. 75)

Roy Sievers [2 of 4]:

Nellie Fox and Luis Aparicio of the Go-Go White Sox, Al Kaline of Detroit, Rocky Colavito of Cleveland and Teddy Ballgame of the Red Sox. The only draws the Nats had were Mickey Vernon, a really good hitter, and fan favorite Eddie Yost.

For me, Sievers changed that. He was who I wanted to see because he might pop a home run in that cavernous stadium. My parents would take me, and perhaps a friend or two from the neighborhood, maybe 10 times a year. A really big deal was going to see a doubleheader.

When I wasn't at the stadium, I would catch the games on radio, listening to an array of announcers that included Arch McDonald, Bob Wolff and Chuck Thompson. Sievers wore No. 2, and many times the announcers would note that "it's 2-and-2 on No. 2." On rare occasions, it would be "two on, two out, and 2-and-2 on No. 2."

If I couldn't listen to a game, the next morning I would pounce on the Washington Post, read the story and devour the box score to see what Sievers did. And usually I wasn't disappointed.

In 1954, his first year in Washington, he only batted .232 but belted 24 homers – then a club record – and drove in 102 runs on just 119 hits. In 1955 he increased his average to .271 with 25 homers and 106 RBIs. He added 29 homers and 95 RBIs in 1956.

Sievers was flourishing and had established himself as one of the finest right-handed power hitters in the American League. In 1957, he had one of those years that Ernie Banks used to have with the hapless Chicago Cubs. Although the Nats predictably came in last again, Sievers posted a .301 average and led the league with

Roy Sievers Year by Year:

Year	Team	League	Lev	G	AB	R	HT	2B	3B	HR	RBI	AVG	
1944	Beaumont Bluejackets	North County	HS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	
1945	Beaumont Bluejackets	North County	HS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	
1946	Beaumont Bluejackets	North County	HS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	
1947	Hannibal Pilots	Central Association	C	125	501	121	159	21	5	34	141	.317	
1948	2 Teams	2 Leagues	B-A	112	399	71	116	18	5	21	80	.291	
	Elmira Pioneers	Eastern	A	16	56	7	10	3	0	2	6	.179	
	Springfield Browns	Three-I	B	96	343	64	106	15	5	19	74	.309	
1949	St. Louis Browns	American	MLB	140	471	84	144	28	1	16	91	.306	
1950	St. Louis Browns	American	MLB	113	370	46	88	20	4	10	57	.238	
1951	St. Louis Browns	American	MLB	31	89	10	20	2	1	1	11	.225	
1951	San Antonio	Texas	AA	39	138	16	41	8	1	2	17	.297	
1952	St. Louis Browns	American	MLB	11	30	3	6	3	0	0	5	.200	
1953	St. Louis Browns	American	MLB	92	285	37	77	15	0	8	35	.270	
1954	Washington Senators	American	MLB	145	514	75	119	26	6	24	102	.232	
1955	Washington Senators	American	MLB	144	509	74	138	20	8	25	106	.271	
1956	Washington Senators	American	MLB	152	550	92	139	27	2	29	95	.253	
1957	Washington Senators	American	MLB	152	572	99	172	23	5	42	114	.301	
1958	Washington Senators	American	MLB	148	550	85	162	18	1	39	108	.295	
1959	Washington Senators	American	MLB	115	385	55	93	19	0	21	49	.242	
1960	Chicago White Sox	American	MLB	127	444	87	131	22	0	28	93	.295	
1961	Chicago White Sox	American	MLB	141	492	76	145	26	6	27	92	.295	
1962	Philadelphia Phillies	National	MLB	144	477	61	125	19	5	21	80	.262	
1963	Philadelphia Phillies	National	MLB	138	450	46	108	19	2	19	82	.240	
1964	2 Teams	2 Leagues	MLB	82	178	12	32	4	1	8	27	.180	
	Philadelphia Phillies	National	MLB	49	120	7	22	3	1	4	16	.183	
	Washington Senators	American	MLB	33	58	5	10	1	0	4	11	.172	
1965	Washington Senators	American	MLB	12	21	3	4	1	0	0	0	.190	
Major League Totals				17 Years	1887	6387	945	1703	292	42	318	1147	.267
Minor League Totals				3 Years	276	1038	208	316	47	11	57	238	.304

ML Debut: April 21, 1949 at Sportsman Park III, St. Louis: faced Steve Gromek as a pinch-hitter for P Ray Shore in the bottom of the 9th inning; struck out in an 8-2 loss to the Cleveland Indians.

ML Finale: May 9, 1965, at D.C. Stadium, Washington, D.C.: faced Whitey Ford as a pinch-hitter for P Phil Ortega in the bottom of the 7th inning; when Phil Mickelson replaced Ford, Jim King pinch-hit for Sievers in a 5-4 win over the New York Yankees.

Honors:

- 1947 Central Association All-Star (led league with 34 home runs, no other player had more than 19)
- 1949 American League Rookie of the Year; 15th in American League MVP voting
- 1954 26th in American League MVP voting
- 1955 17th in American League MVP voting
- 1956 American League All-Star; 31st in American League MVP voting
- 1957 American League All-Star; 3rd in American League MVP voting
- 1958 6th in American League MVP voting
- 1959 American League All-Star
- 1960 7th in American League MVP voting
- 1961 American League All-Star
- 1956 American League All-Star
- 1956 American League All-Star

Notes:

First Hit:	off of Billy Pierce, Chicago White Sox, pinch-hit 2B, two RBIs	April 30, 1949
Last Hit:	off of John O'Donoghue, Kansas City Athletics, 2B	May 4, 1965
First Home Run:	off of Fred Hutchinson, Detroit Tigers, 2 RBIs	May 14, 1949
Last Home Run:	off of Jay Ritchie, Boston Red Sox, pinch-hit HR, 3 RBIs	October 4, 1964

Sievers hit 229 of his home runs versus right-handed pitchers, 89 versus left-handers ... hit home runs off of 157 different pitchers, including a career-best 11 off of RHP Art Ditmar, eight of LHP Billy Hoelt and 7 off of LHP Billy Pierce ... 91 of his career home runs were hit in Griffith Stadium and 46 in Comiskey Park ... had nine walk-off home runs ... had one inside the park home run against Boston Red Sox left-hander Bill Henry on June 28, 1955, Griffith Stadium ... was 2-for-2 lifetime against LHP Johnny Antonelli with two home runs and seven RBIs.

Roy Sievers [3 of 4]:

42 homers and 114 RBIs, finishing third in the MVP voting.

The next time Sievers saw Ted Williams, he said, with a wry sense of humor, "Ted, you deprived me of my Triple Crown." Of course, Williams had hit .388, a mere 87 points higher.

Sievers followed that season with an almost identical one in 1958 – .295 with 39 homers and 108 RBIs. Injuries limited him to 115 games in 1959, and he slipped to 21 homers and 49 RBIs. That summer, rumors swirled that the Chicago White Sox wanted to trade for Sievers to add some punch to their lineup. They won the AL pennant in 1959, then lost to the Los Angeles Dodgers in six games in the World Series.

The rumors resurfaced in the off-season and during spring training. On April 4, 1960, just before the season started, the deal was made: Sievers to Chicago for catcher Earl Battey, first baseman Don Mincher and cash. There was another cost to the Senators – a whole lot fans with broken hearts, mine included.

Analytically, the deal made sense, even to a bitterly disappointed teen-ager. In Battey, who was stuck behind Sherman Lollar and John Romano in Chicago, the Nats got a young catcher who could hit, was superb defensively and knew how to handle a pitching staff. Mincher was a promising first baseman who went on to hit 200 career home runs.

December 1, 1949

Newcombe, Sievers Named Top Rookies By Baseball Writers

NEW YORK, Dec. 1. — (AP)— Pitcher Don Newcombe of Brooklyn Dodgers and outfielder Roy Sievers of St. Louis Browns yesterday were named the outstanding rookies of the 1949 baseball season by the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

Two 24-man committees took part in the voting. Each committee member was allowed to name only one man. The National League writers picked Newcombe almost unanimously, giving him 21 of the 24 votes. Del Crandall, 19-year-old catcher for Boston Braves, drew the other three votes.

Sievers received the support of 10 of the American League writers to double the total of Philadelphia Athletics' Alex Kellner, his nearest pursuer.

Battey's presence, plus the development of a young slugger named Harmon Killebrew, helped the Senators improve to 73-81, rise to the heady heights of fifth place and mold a promising future.

That future vanished abruptly, at least for long-suffering Washington fans. The Senators moved to Minnesota to become the Twins and were replaced with an expansion team that was as bad as the old Nats in the 1950s.

It took a little longer than expected, but Battey helped lead Minnesota to the 1965 World Series, which it lost in the seventh game when the Dodgers' Sandy Koufax stopped the Twins on a 3-hit shutout. Only Battey, Mincher, Killebrew, Bob Allison and Camilo Pascual remained from the old Senators roster. Still, I always felt that should have been Washington's World Series.

The White Sox got their power hitter in Sievers, who kept on doing his thing by hitting 295 with 28 homers and 93 RBIs in 1960. But they slipped from first to third place, in part because manager Al Lopez struggled with how to use Sievers, who could play first base or the outfield. He appeared in only 127 games, 27 short of a full season.

Lopez, who eventually made the Hall of Fame, figured things out in 1961, playing Sievers in 141 games. The slugger responded with another typical season – .295, 27 homers, 92 RBIs. The man was nothing if not steady.

But the White Sox slipped another notch to fourth place and they traded Sievers to the Phillies. They didn't get a lot in return – pitcher John Buzhardt, who compiled a lifetime record of 71-96 (49-52 with Chicago), and infielder Charley Smith, who did nothing with the Chisox but became a good player with the New York Mets.

Sievers was now 35 and his power began to fade. Still, facing new pitchers



Roy Sievers
1955 Topps Doubleheader (No. 79)

Roy Sievers [4 of 4]:

in a new league, he put up 21 homers and 80 RBIs for the Phillies in 1962. He cranked out 19 homers and drove in 82 runs in 1963, his last productive year. The old veteran returned for a handful of games with the expansion Nats in 1964 and '65, but it wasn't the same and he drew his release.

Sievers closed his career with some solid stats – a .267 average with 318 homers and 1,147 RBIs. More than half his homers (180) and almost exactly half of his RBIs (574) came in his six-year stretch in Washington.

I never got the chance to meet him, but in doing research for this piece I came across two stories that I think illustrate the character of the man.

One was by Thomas Boswell, the outstanding sports writer for the *Washington Post*, who recalled a special night for Sievers late in the 1957 season.

"In his prime," Boswell wrote, "before injuries and Harmon Killebrew pushed him out of the headlines, Sievers was given a 'night.' Not the kind that Ted Williams and Stan Musial got, with fancy cars, but a night with plenty of speeches and a station wagon. Vice President Richard Nixon did the talking, and Sievers hung his head and cried when Nixon shook his hand."

That was the humble nature of Sievers that appealed to fans. Years later, Boswell wrote, Sievers explained he was a sentimental person who was overwhelmed by Nixon's effusive praise and the response of the fans.

Writer Willie Drye, in a piece done in 2015, recalled going to see the Senators play an exhibition game in Charlotte in 1959. He and some friends arrived well ahead of time to collect autographs.

Drye leaned over the railing and shouted into the Nats' dugout, asking

Sievers for an autograph. Sievers invited the youngster to come on down, promising to not let him get kicked out. He not only signed the autograph book but got everyone else in the dugout to sign it, too.

If that's not a sports hero, I don't know what is. Both Boswell and Drye said that Roy Sievers was their favorite player. And that's something I have in common with them.

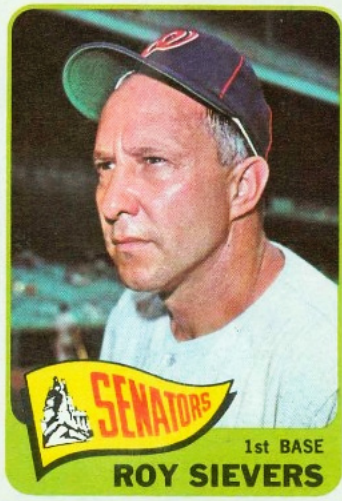
Heroes die, but their memories live on.

Stockham American Legion Team
July 30, 1943

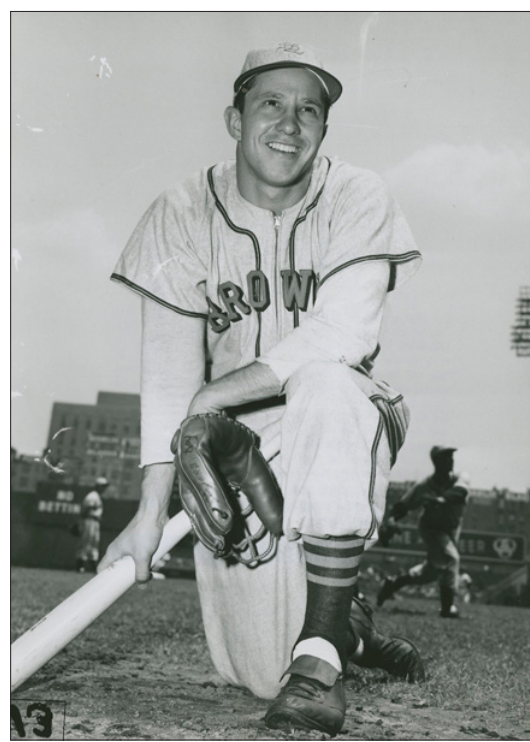
On Another Quest for a Title



The Stockham Post baseball team, which again this year is a candidate for the national American Legion championship. The Stockhams have already won the district championship and will compete at Jefferson City tomorrow for the State title. The regional and national championship competitions will follow: Back row, left to right: COMDR. E. A. DECKER, RAY HENDERSON, MEL JOHNSTON, RICK STEGER, JACK MOORE, ROY SIEVERS, RAY REICHERT, TRAINER HAMP HOHMAN, ATHLETIC OFFICER LEO BROWNE. Front row, left to right: NORMAN NEWMAN, BRUCE SMITH, JIM GOODWIN, ROGER WENZEL, RAY KLEINE, JIM ENRIGHT, MICHAEL KICKHAM, JACK BRISCOE, LARRY SWEDERSKE. Mascot in center, BILL "RED" WILSON.



Roy Sievers
1965 Topps (No. 574)



Roy Sievers
St. Louis Browns