

Ken Yoke says he did a little bit of everything

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articles in which the rising star was mentioned. He even got his picture in Life Magazine. Well, his backside anyway. The photographer was following teammate Dick Stuart, who later went on to play in the majors, and Yoke was coaching first base at the time.

"I did a little bit of everything," Yoke said. He helped coach the bases, warmed up pitchers in the bullpen, and even drove the team bus.

"We had a driver, but he liked to sleep," he recalled. "Half the time, I would drive the bus. He would go off to sleep in the back."

Yoke said he even did some pitch-hitting.

"I always thought better of my hitting than I did my pitching," he said.

He said teams would stage "screwball nights," special events for fans. One night the owner got a greased pig to run loose on the field, and players from both teams tried to chase it down.

"There were about 30 of us players chasing it, and I happened to be the one who caught it."

When he was playing for the El Dorado Gold Sox, his team lost a game to the Silver Anklets, a team comprised of Sox wives. Yoke was kicked out for arguing with a woman umpire.

"It was staged," he said. "They wanted me to get kicked out for the show. It was all for fun."

As he got older, he was recognized as a force in the leagues he played. One clipping described Yoke by writing, "He chews a wad of tobacco when pitching, and does both like the veteran ballplayer he is."

He was the first left-handed Gold Sox pitcher to win 20 games in a season. So then why was he always changing teams?

Yoke said it wasn't unusual for a minor league player to move around

during his career.

"It was different back then," he said. "We didn't have any five-year contracts."

He remembered how he once happened to walk into the clubhouse to get his mail, and the owner was talking to another owner on the phone:

"He saw me come in, and turned back to the phone, 'How'd you like to buy a good left-handed pitcher?' By the next day or two I was in Cherokee, Okla.

"I was all over the place. I even played in Monterrey."

"We didn't speak Spanish," Wilma Yoke said. "If you want to talk about somebody completely out of her realm, it was me."

"And me," said Yoke.

Although he once went to spring training with the Yankees, Yoke said he never really had a chance at making the cut.

"Those guys were just in a different class than I was."

Yoke and the guys he played with haven't gotten a lot of notice for their playing days. The scrapbooks Yoke has of his playing days serve as a reminder of his days on the mound, but otherwise, it is hard to find a record he even played.

"A lot of the guys I played with didn't get any recognition for all the years they spent playing ball. This is all we have to show for it," he said, pointing to the scrapbooks.

A group is working to recognize Yoke and all those who never made it to the majors. National Pastime, a minor league museum and library, will be located in Memphis, Tenn. Dave Chase, executive director of new museum, said it will be completely different than the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.J.

"The Hall of Fame is static," he said. "We plan to use the technology available today to create a dynamic museum."



Ken Yoke's teammates saluted him after he got married before a baseball game in 1955.

Photo courtesy of Ken and Wilma Yoke

The museum will dedicate itself to minor league players, going back to the 1800s, who haven't gotten much attention.

"There were guys who were good enough to play in the majors, but just never got the chance," he said. "They didn't have the franchise farm system we have now. A guy could play for years in a farm town league and never be noticed."

Chase and his crew are working to gather statistics for as many minor

league players and leagues as they can find. It isn't easy. Chase says players who have old box scores or newspaper articles can contact him at the museum.

"It's a lot harder than it seems, and harder than I thought it would be," Chase said. "Many records have vanished, and many never existed in the first place."

The museum, which is scheduled to open in about two years, won't honor individual players, Chase said. They might put together a Hall of Legends,

but it would be of those who played long ago.

Yoke said he found out about National Pastime when a baseball researcher contacted him and asked for copies from Yoke's scrapbooks.

The call came out of the blue, Yoke said. The researcher, Tony Szabelski of the Society of American Baseball Researchers, told Yoke he was helping gather records for the museum, and he was trying to get ahold of anybody he could find.

"Some guys, like Ken Yoke, are easy to find," Szabelski said. "Others, it's like the day they stopped playing ball they fell off the face of the earth."

Yoke said there aren't a whole lot of old players left. A lot of them just disappeared or have died. The Yokes said they lost contact years ago with the guys he played with.

"We used to get Christmas cards for a few years," said Wilma Yoke, "but that dried out."

Szabelski gave Yoke the phone number of an old teammate, and Yoke called him up.

"We had quite a visit," he said. "I hadn't talked to this guy in, well, it must have been about 43 years."

After Yoke finished with professional baseball in 1958, he couldn't stay away from the game.

"Semi-pro teams would call me and offer so much money to pitch a game," he said. "That kept up for years."

Yoke says he enjoyed his brief career.

"We had a blast," he said. "We really had a good time playing ball."

"We didn't make a whole lot of money, though."

He said he made \$250-\$350 a month, and his highest salary was \$750 a month when he played for AAA Indianapolis.

After baseball, he built golf courses, in Hoxie, Oakley, Sharon Springs and the first nine holes in Goodland in 1969.

"When we got to Goodland," he said, "we just stayed."

He drove a truck for Yellow Freight for years, running to Denver and back every day. He and his wife also owned and ran a pool hall, an all-night restaurant, and a beer joint. Yoke said he built the second nine holes at the Goodland golf course in 1992.

"We've just been bumming around here," he said.

Senator Roberts favors U.S. House farm bill provisions

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their country of origin.

Roberts said a bill he and another Senator sponsored didn't go anywhere.

Though he will not be on the conference committee that will iron out differences between the House and Senate bills, he said, he will have outside influence.

Roberts was a key figure in creating the previous 1996 "Freedom to Farm" farm bill.

The 1996 bill expires on Oct. 1, the

senator said, but Congress may not have decided on a new farm bill by then.

In that case, he said, the 1996 bill will be extended for another year and the new farm bill will become law in 2003.

"Don't worry," he said, "you're covered under the current act."

At this time, Roberts added, that's a good place to be.

"I think we're better off under the current bill," he said.

Responding to a question, Sen. Roberts said he's not sure he's in favor of

country of origin labeling, which would require a "Made in America" sticker on meat, vegetables and fruits produced here.

"They haven't done enough research as to what that means to the American consumer," he said, noting shoppers could opt for products from other countries.

The senator said a campaign spending reform bill passed by the House last week is an attack on free speech.

The bill would stop unions, corporations and individuals from making

"soft" money contributions to national political campaigns. It would also ban using soft money to pay for "issue ads," which are typically used to attack opponents.

"Why that's progress is beyond me," Roberts said, noting that congressmen feel pressure to pass campaign reforms because of the Enron debacle.

"I don't know how you legislate

against avarice," he said.

Curt Stern, field manager for a Northern Sun plant in North Dakota, said he attended the meeting because the manager of Goodland's plant couldn't come.

Stern asked Sen. Roberts if Congress would push the use of bio-fuels made from American crops so the U.S. wouldn't have to rely on foreign oil.

The senator said he's working on it.

"I think that's an essential," he said.

In the wake of the terrorist attacks,

Stern said after the meeting, Americans should be thinking about energy security, too.

"We should be looking at other energy sources," he said, noting he thinks Sen. Roberts understands the economics of the energy needs.

Committee endorses budget cuts

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them nor has any alternative plan gained much momentum among lawmakers.

On a voice vote Tuesday, the Senate Ways and Means Committee endorsed a budget for the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services almost identical to one that Graves proposed.

The SRS budget would rise \$19.6 million, to a total \$638.4 million—but many of the department's programs would be scaled back, including those for the mentally ill and disabled.

Meanwhile, the House Appropriations Committee approved Graves' plan to cut higher education spending by \$27 million, to a total \$680 million, for the next fiscal year, which begins July 1.

The House and Senate each plans to adopt a budget for fiscal 2003 in late March or early April, then negotiate over a single, final version.

Rep. Clark Shultz, R-Lindsborg, chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee on higher education, said the best course was to concur with Graves' recommendations.

Senate Ways and Means Chairman Steve Morris, R-Hugoton, said: "We can't add any money at this point."

State officials and university economists are to issue a revised revenue forecast on March 8.

Graves and legislative leaders expect the new estimate to be more pessimistic and the budget gap to grow to

perhaps \$600 million or more.

"Until then, the Legislature is basically going through the process of educating itself," Graves told the Kansas Livestock Association during a luncheon speech Tuesday.

In both committees, minority Democrats objected to the proposed reductions.

Kim Wilcox, president of the state Board of Regents, said its members remain optimistic legislators will raise new revenue.

The regents already have discussed increasing tuition.

During the Senate panel's meeting, Sen. Paul Feleciano, D-Wichita, criticized the SRS cuts and said the state

should protect its most vulnerable citizens.

When Senate President Dave Kerr, R-Hutchinson, a committee member, asked Feleciano where he would find the money, Feleciano said he had no answer.

In other action Tuesday: —The House Judiciary Committee grilled a federal immigration official as it reviewed legislation to make it easier for undocumented workers to get driver's licenses.

—A bill that would permit the consumption of alcohol on the Kansas State Fair grounds in Hutchinson won first-round approval in the Senate on a voice vote.

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