

KNOWN AS 'SUBMARINE TWIRLER', Elden Auker record showed a total of 131 games won. The Elden Auker over the Chicago Cubs. A native of Norcatur, his pitching home town by the Norcatur community.

pitched for the Detroit Tigers in the 1935 World Series winning Park was constructed in his honor on the main street of his

## Norcatur man pitched in the World Series games

By MARY LOU OLSON

ml.olson@nwkansas.com As baseball fans cheer on their favorite teams, hoping they will make the World Series, it brings back memories of the excitement during the "Dirty 30s" in Norcatur when townspeople gathered around their radios to cheer on one of their own, Elden Auker.

His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Auker, left in early October 1935 for Detroit, where they expected to arrive in time to see the opening game of the World Series and watch their son play with the Detroit Tigers, the 1935 pennant winners in the American League, according to a story in the Norcatur Centennial Edition.

Elden ranked first among pitchers in the American League, the story records, and everyone from his home town hoped the record would be such in the series that he would come through triumphant, with his team, to become world champions.

When it was time for the first game, business in Norcatur was sidetracked. Who cared, when a World Series was on — when a young man they had watched grow up was on the mound for a team that worked all summer to win the pennant, then a world championship? Craig Electrical Radio donated use of its loudspeaker system, and a crowd parked their cars nearby to

listen to the games. "It was a blue bunch that first day when the Cubs were clawing at the vitals of the Tigers," the story says.

"However, the next day, and the next, my, what a change in the facial ald Reagan landed an interview with expression of the local people what a different feeling prevailed. Sheer hope and confidence came back. Every nook and corner held its gathering Friday, when Elden Auker was holding forth as the central figure in the big contest at Chicago."

They gathered again on Saturday, just as they did everywhere in America. Again intense moments were enjoyed, or endured, as the play-byplay came over the distance. Detroit won by a close margin.

"On Sunday, the weather was chilly — the local listeners were the same .... The Cubs were hot and the local fans disheartened.

"Monday, the crowd increased and from the Detroit field again, interest was more intense. It was a critical period. Hope ran high, nerves were taut — Auker's teammates must win! They must gain the World Championship.'

"Everyone was happy when the final score was tallied for that Monday, ending the series and giving the Tigers their first World Championship in a long time. Fans were also pleased to hear Elden's voice over the air after the victory.'

A story taken recently from the Norcatur Newsheet, written by Reach Beccy Tanner, said, "It was back in the 1930s, when the nation was in the depths of the Great Depression, that a struggling young radio announcer got his first chance at the big time in the 1935 World

Kansan Elden Auker, formerly of Norcatur, who was already a baseball legend as a pitcher." Two years earlier, Auker made

his major-league debut at Yankee Stadium. He first faced Babe Ruth, striking out the famous slugger on four pitches.

Asked years later if he had enjoyed his rookie triumph, Auker replied, "I didn't have time. Lou Gehrig was up next."

Auker, who had grown up playing on the sandlots in northwest Kansas, wrote in his autobiography, "Sleeper Cars and Flannel Uniforms," that he tried not to think about the big names in front of him. He just concentrated on the 60 feet, 6 inches between him and the batter.

Auker was known for his submarine pitching style, which he began using after he injured his right shoulder playing college football.

Hall of Fame pitcher Bob Feller, who hit his first major league home run off Auker, later described Auker's style: "He threw it from about as low as you could go without untying your shoes. Any lower, and you'd scrape your knuckles on the pitching rubber."

Auker was born Sept. 21, 1910, in Norcatur. He attended the Kansas Agricultural and Mechanical College, now Kansas State University, in Manhattan.

In college, Auker earned nine varsity letters playing football, Beach, Fla.

basketball and baseball. In his first football game as a

"Chicago Cubs announcer Ron-sophomore, Auker injured his right shoulder so that he couldn't throw a ball overhand. He started throwing

> from the side, then under. He signed with the Tigers for

> \$450 a month. In the 1934 World Series, Auker lost Game 7 of the series to Dizzy

> Dean after winning Game 4 10-4. His first endorsement as a baseball player was for Camel cigarettes. For lending his name, he received \$500 a year and was given 12 free cartons of cigarettes.

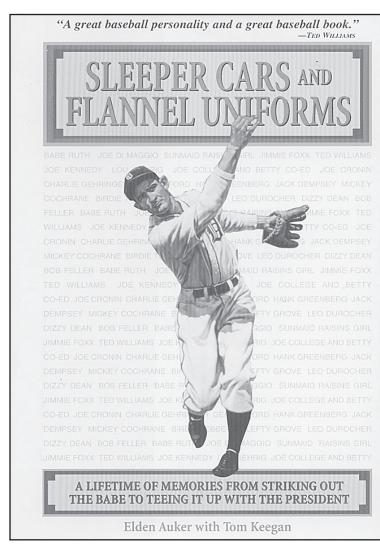
> In his book, Auker wrote that the cigarettes were so strong, he went to the local grocery and traded them for the brand he really preferred — Lucky Strikes.

Auker played 10 years in the majors for the Tigers, Boston Red Sox and the St. Louis Browns. His pitching record shows a total of 131 games won, including the World Series win for Detroit in 1935 against the Chicago Cubs.

He retired from baseball after the 1942 season to work for a company that made anti-aircraft guns for the war effort.

In 1969, he returned to Kansas to be inducted into the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame. A banquet was held for him and his wife on Jan. 17, 1969, in Norcatur. A city park in downtown Norcatur was dedicated to him on Memorial weekend of 2000, which was his last visit to his

He died in 2006, at age 95 at Vero



IN HIS BOOK, "Sleeper Cars and Flannel Uniforms" Elden Auker tells of his lifetime of memories from striking out Babe Ruth to Teeing Up with the President, along with fascinating stories from a baseball era that never grows old.