



ONE OF THE GREATEST? Future fans would never know it — if Ted had quit when he wanted to

The Fan Who Kept Ted Williams From Quitting

Here's one of baseball's best inside stories. When this great star decided to retire, managers, players, sportswriters couldn't stop him. But read how one fan did it!

By LESLIE LIEBER

Four years ago, in the spring of '54, Ted Williams publicly announced he was quitting baseball at the end of that season. There were good reasons. He was nearly 36. He had just come home from Korea. In fact, service in two wars, plus injuries, had already sliced five years of baseball out of his great career. Now the idea of struggling to keep his waistline down and his batting average up just didn't have the old appeal for the great Red Sox slugger.

His mood wasn't helped by the fact that 15 minutes after reporting for spring training at Sarasota, Fla., he fell and broke his collarbone. He missed the first 36 games of the season, didn't rack up enough official times-at-bat to qualify for the American League batting championship — even though his average led the league.

How It Happened

For a man who had already made up his mind to quit, this was certainly the last straw. It was the end. But then something happened that made it a beginning. Here for the first time is the story. It's one Ted had told no one until he revealed it to me after a recent Red Sox game.

The story began one morning late in the '54 season. Ted was standing in the busy rotunda of the Baltimore Union Station. The Red Sox had finished a series with the Orioles the day before. Williams had ambled over to the station to catch a train for Washington, intending to arrive there in time to indulge in his habit of an afternoon nap prior to a night game.

While waiting for the train to rumble in from Philadelphia he stood alone in a corner of the depot, his head, as usual, buried behind a newspaper. (Some people think he does this in an effort to hide from fans. But Ted claims he keeps his vision sharp by forcing himself to read a newspaper held only six inches away.)

A short, stocky man with a serious glint in his eyes broke out of the criss-crossing crowds. He carried a bulging briefcase and barged right up to Williams.

"Excuse me, Ted," he said. "But I've been bothered by all that talk about your quitting baseball. You were kidding, weren't you?"

Williams looked up. "Why should I kid about a thing like that?" He went back to his paper.

But the stranger didn't go away. "Look here, Ted," he said. "You're crazy if you think you're going to quit baseball now. You're not! You can't!"

Ted looked up in surprise. "What do you mean, I can't? That's my business," he snapped.

"It's a lot more than just your business," said the stranger. "You're not just an independent operator. You're public domain. You owe it to baseball, if not to yourself, to reach certain milestones before you quit. Do you know how close you are to having 2,000 hits, 400 homers, 1,500 runs-batted-in, 1,500 runs scored? None of the really great players stopped when they had any of those goals in sight. Do you realize you have 1,400 RBI's and only twelve men in history have gone over 1,500?"

"In my book you're one of the finest hitters the game has ever known. But if you quit now the record books will never show how great you were. Did you ever stop to consider how you're going to stack up in baseball history if you call it a day without trying for 4,000 total bases? Joe DiMaggio didn't make it. But you can."

This stranger was about a foot shorter than Ted, but he lectured the slugger as though Ted were a schoolboy. "Well now listen here, I . . . er," Williams spluttered. "What do you actually know about your lifetime records, Ted?" the stranger demanded.

Ted calmed down and told him he was pretty well

versed in the number of home runs he had hit and his batting average for each year.

The stranger shook his head impatiently. "Just as I thought. You really have no idea where you stand. Why, there are sixteen offensive departments in which you're approaching milestones — and all you've kept track of is home runs. Do you know how many hits you've racked up?"

"No," said Williams. "You've got 1,930 in all, including yesterday. It won't take much to reach 2,000. And in home runs you're not even among the first ten in lifetime totals. But if you stick around . . ."

Statistical Sermon

Ted began to wake up. Here were things he had never known about himself. Never had statistics sounded so much like a sermon.

"Who are you, anyway?" Williams finally asked. "I'm a helluva fan of yours," was all he could get in answer before the train roared in.

Ted jumped aboard and the stranger ran alongside, yelling something about breaking one of Jimmy Foxx's records.

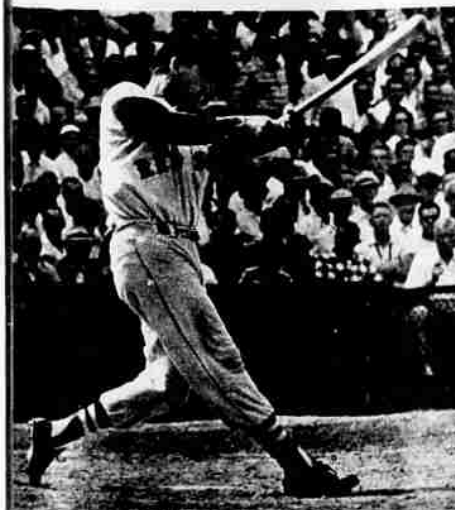
"Get in touch with me!" Williams yelled — and he meant it.

Some days later, in New York, there was a knock on his hotel-room door. "Who is it?" Ted shouted.



Ted chats with his one-man cheering section, Ed Mifflin

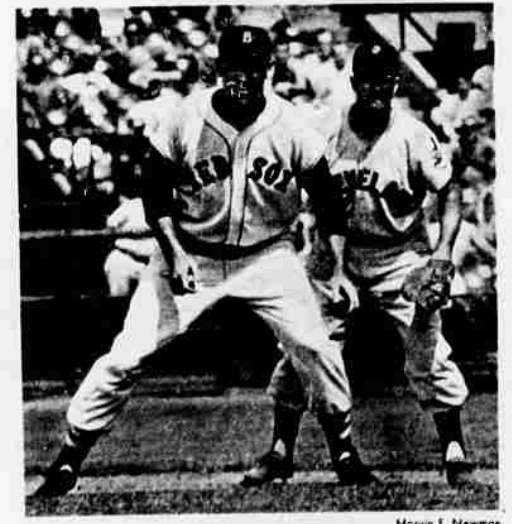
Noel Clark



TED HITS: Another pitch goes on a line . . .



to right field. Williams takes off for first base . . .



and grins. That single made Ed Mifflin smile, too!

Morvin E. Newman