

ElRoy Face - Sand Lake's Baseball Claim to Fame

ElRoy Leon Face was born February 20, 1928 in Stephentown, NY to Bessie and Joseph Face. Rich Castle became closely acquainted with the Face family when he went to live with them after his mother died in 1943 and has been a life-long friend of ElRoy. Mr. and Mrs. Face ran the Faith Mills boarding house on Burden Lake Road (circa 1941 - 1947). Mrs. Face did most of the cooking but from time to time would have help from ElRoy with the baking. Rich adds, "When it came to down-home cooking from scratch, there was no one better than Bessie Face. I think there were 12 rooms in the boarding house and it was always full. She would feed everyone at the dining room table. She not only fed the boarders but all us kids too." ElRoy was quite a musician who played guitar and sang. His recorded single, "Cross Your Heart with Love" played on many local juke boxes and Rich Castle recalls "playing it over and over many times."

ElRoy attended Averill Park High School in 1945 and 1946. A highlight for Averill Park was in 1945. Peter Weaver, class of '46 shared the following in his memories of Prof Stahlman, "I remember him especially as coach, yes coach of the school's baseball team the year that they took it all. The pitcher was Elroy Face, who struck out almost all opposing batters throughout the season. The fielding was strong whenever it was needed. Mr. Stahlman guided the team skillfully as it played the scheduled games, and then defeated Castleton at Hawkins Stadium, home of the Class A Albany Senators."

ElRoy was in the Army from 1946 - 48. After his tour in the service he worked as a carpenter and auto mechanic. He played on several farm teams. His career took off after a talent scout stopped by a ball field in Lebanon and watched 21 year-old Face work out against an East Greenbush Semi-Pro team. When the scout read in the paper the next day that ElRoy had 18 strikeouts in one game and 19 in another, the scout was interested and a contract was signed that day.

ElRoy batted and threw right-handed. He always prided himself on his pickoff move. He recounts a game against the Cincinnati Reds when he was called in to pitch. There were two men on base, one at first and one at second, with no outs. He picked off the runner at second and then picked off the runner at first before he ever threw a pitch to the batter. Rich Castle comments, "Now that's what I call, getting out of a jam. Not done very often, if ever done at all."

On December 1, 1952 ElRoy was drafted from the Dodgers by the Pittsburgh Pirates. He was the shortest pitcher at 5'8" and 155 pounds to take the mound for the Pirates and wore number 26. In 1959 in a five - part Times Record series on Face, George Yamin writes, "ElRoy bubbles with confidence - not irritating ego but an easy-going assurance that he is doing his job well and has proved his claim to fame the hard way, by winning games under difficult circumstances. He further quotes Face, "Sure I like to win, to set a record, to go down as the pitcher who has won the most games in a row; but first I want the wins for the team, to see the final score read in favor of the Pirates. These fellows have made it possible for me to be on such a streak. A man's pitching streak like mine is as lucky as the ability of his fielders and hitters."

ElRoy was famous for his fork ball which he learned from Yankee reliever Joe Page. Reacting to an internet statement that he learned it from a monk in the Himalayas, Face responded at that time, "I was never even out of the country except for Hawaii". He appeared on the Ed Sullivan show to demonstrate his famous fork ball pitch which he used to confound opposing hitters saying, "It would come in hard and break away anyway it wanted to, sometimes in, sometimes out, mostly down. To throw the forkball, you place your fingers to the side of the seams, throw straight and snap the wrist. That causes the ball to create a forward spin and causes it to do a sudden drop just before the plate. To the batter it comes in like a fast ball but then does its thing." It is said that the fork ball is known to cause damage to the shoulder and elbow and is not recommended for young kids unless it is thrown more slowly.

Major Baseball League Records

17 consecutive wins in 1959

.947 single-season wining percentage in 1959

with 96 career relief wins

Career Highlights and Awards

The Sporting News - National League Reliever of Year Award in 1962

Four times led National League in games finished 1958, 1960, 1961, 1962

Three times All Star Selection 1959, 1960, 1961

World Series Champion against the Yankees in 1960

Seventeen consecutive wins 1959 earning .947 the highest single season winning percentage in Major League history.

Enshrined in 1999 on the Wall of Great Achievement in the Ted Williams Museum in St. Petersburg, FL

He was on the ballot several times for the Baseball Hall of Fame but never got in. In a 1959 fun story we hear that, ElRoy always parked his car near Forbes Field in a gas station where he paid \$1.00 a game. The owner told him he could park free until he lost a game. Needless to say he won 17 games and didn't have to pay to park until September.

When asked what his most embarrassing moment was, ElRoy replied it was the first time he ever played with false teeth. When a fly ball was hit and he called off one of the other players, his teeth fell out in his glove. "That was pretty embarrassing."

In 1961 Mr. & Mrs. Face moved to Pennsylvania to help run the ElRoy Face Motel that ElRoy had purchased and returned to Stephentown in 1968 after the motel was sold.

ElRoy played with the Detroit Tigers, and then with the Montreal Expos before finishing his final game with them on August 15, 1969.

After retiring he returned to carpentry and moved to North Versailles, PA He attends baseball camp for kids in the winter in Florida that is run by Bill Mazzeroski. Enjoying golf he regularly attends Pittsburgh area celebrity golf tournaments and graciously signs autographs. At the Yellow Creek Camp Grounds in Penn Run, PA there is a dam named the ElRoy Face Dam.

On July 25, 1992 at the Sand Lake Kiwanis Summerfest the ball field at Butler Park was named in honor of ElRoy Face. Town, State and Key Club resolutions and awards were presented to him and Rensselaer County declared it ElRoy Face Day. In his remarks during the ceremonies he commented that winning three games against the Yankees in the 1960 World Series was a true highlight but that "today's festivities" meant the most to him. Prof Stahlman's remarks recalled coaching the baseball team in 1945 and with ElRoy's pitching ability winning the Hudson Valley League championship. Back then Prof was impressed with his baseball ability, with him being highly competitive and with his determination to make good. He had a "strong young arm, and a good fast ball which he kept knee-high."

Rumors are that ElRoy may be invited next year to the Troy Valley Cats for a day in his honor. Watch your local papers for a date. Let's hope it does happen!!

Many thanks to Rich Castle, Billy Rivet, Ray Diamond and Mike Stahlman for their contributions to our feature article on ElRoy Face.