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Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

Box 1192 - Jamestown, NY 14702

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From the CSHOF Archives

With the approach of the 2014 World Series, it is an appropriate time to share the circuitous story of one **Russell Eldon "Russ" Kerns** (November 10, 1920 – August 21, 2000) a member of the Jamestown Falcons baseball team in 1946 and 1947.

First, an August 29, 1949 story by the legendary *Post-Journal* sports editor Frank Hyde:

Kerns One of Few in History Who Got World Series Cut One Year and Caught for Class D Club the Next



When the Nazi's started thumbing their collective noses at the rest of the world, Russell Kerns, burly left-hand hitting catcher from the rolling farm lands near Tiffin, Ohio, wore out a dozen pair of trousers over a two-year period camping on the steps of every recruiting office in the state.

The big boy peeled his shirt off for eight examinations, but each time the answer was "no." When it was finally changed to a "yes" it came just in time to scramble his baseball career like an egg in a cement mixer.

Kerns has traveled the baseball marts for quite a spell and he's probably one of the few, if not the only player in the history of the organized game, who shared in World Series money one year and caught for a Class D team the next.

But that gives one an idea of how the fates have tossed the Ohio grabber around since the game in general was thrown into turmoil by the returning vets and changes in the draft laws. Kerns was on the bench in status of third string catcher when the Detroit Tigers defeated the Chicago Cubs for the 1945 World Series bunting. Come 1946 and he's with Jamestown in the PONY League. Quite a cross country record at that.

Owens Ohio Farm

"But that's the way it goes," Russ says optimistically. "Sometimes you do and sometimes you don't. Things broke in reverse for me after the shooting was over, so what? Maybe I can play a year or two in Class D ball, do a lot of youngsters starting out some good and when I get ready I can go "back to the farm."

By "back to the farm" Russ doesn't mean the baseball chains either, for he owns a fine 60-acre spread near his Ohio home that will provide plentifully for the missus, Helen, and six-year-old daughter, Pat, during the coming years.

In 1939 Kerns turned the chores over to his dad and decided to take a whirl at baseball. After a short hitch in the lower minors he found himself with Toledo in the American Association, the same club with which another Jamestown man – Walt Brown – is serving now.



Russ Kerns is pictured with the 1945 World Series champion Detroit Tigers. He is seated in the second row from the top, fourth from the left.

To Toledo

In 1941 he was behind the plate for the Birmingham Barons of the AA Southern Association. That year he also served with Appleton in the Wisconsin State League and Lima in the Ohio State League, but returned to the farm and found himself “frozen” to that essential industry as war clouds continued to hang over the land. In the interim blonde Russ had been haunting recruiting offices like a nightmare to no avail, but the coming of the new selective service examination rule in 1944 changed his world – and his baseball career.

Finally released from his essential industry rating, Kerns signed with the Chicago Cubs and went to spring training at French Lick Springs in 1944, after that season being shifted to the Nashville Vols back in the Southern Association and thence to the Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League, both Cub farms.

Re-examination Rule



During 1944 the rule calling for reexamination of all 4-F classifications was passed and major league clubs, especially the talent heavy Cubs, were reluctant to keep on surplus material. As a result Kerns signed with the Cincinnati Reds in the spring of 1945, undergoing spring training, was released and moved into the Detroit system to find himself called up by the Tigers when the pressure of the pennant drive started telling on Steve O’Neil’s outfit. The Tigers were pretty well fortified behind the plate with Paul Richards and Bob Swift, so Kerns spent his time warming up pitchers in the bullpen and catching batting practice.

“That was the biggest thrill of my life, though,” he points out. “Watching the World Series from the Detroit dugout and being around to aid even in a small way in winning the classic was something a fellow can never forget.”

Accepted By Army

His ninth examination found Kerns okehed by the army, so he gathered up his one-eighth share of the World Series money, discarded his monkey suit and donned Uncle Sam’s garb. He was inducted at Syracuse and sent to Fort Harrison, N.J. where he served as a physical instructor in the medical corps.

The rating didn’t exactly please the Ohioan and he made several requests for transfer to regular duty which would provide a chance to move around with the army and perhaps see foreign duty. The army records proved the big fellow was a ball player and that was enough. He stayed at Fort Harrison.

Discharge papers came through last January 10 and Kerns reported to the Tigers, went to spring training under the G.I. Bill of Rights' clause and was optioned to Williamsport, eventually moving to Jamestown in the deal that brought Johnny Pollock back into the Falcons' fold and also gave Owner John Jachym pitcher Tom Hurst.

Slowed by a back injury in Williamsport, Russ, who travels under the handle "Dick Tracy" since he tracked down and aided in arresting a carnival worker who pilfered his suitcase from his room in a local hotel, is just coming into his own as a hitter. His two successive three-for-four jobs Sunday and Monday, which included two doubles and a triple, isn't exactly bad news for Manger Marvin Olson with the playoffs drawing nigh and his other veteran backstop John Pollock, on the bench with a fractured thumb.



Catcher **Russ Kerns** spent fourteen seasons in professional baseball playing in the minor leagues from 1939 to 1953 and appeared in one game for the major league Detroit Tigers on August 18, 1945. Russ made one plate appearance with no hits after being brought up from the Syracuse Chiefs of the International League. His one game appearance was it for Kerns in the big leagues.

During his seasons in the minors, Russ had a good year with the Lima Pandas of the class D Ohio State League in 1941, when he appeared in 60 games and hit at a .310 clip with four home runs. He also had a decent year with the 1947 Jamestown Falcons of the class D Pony League, hitting .325 in 88 games.

Kerns was with the 1948 Hornell Maple Leafs of the class D Pony League, as player-manager (see photo at left), hitting a career high .351 with five round-trippers in 106 games. His Hornell club finished the season with a 29-96 record and an eighth-place finish. Kerns had one more good year in 1949 with the Omaha Cardinals of the class A

Western League, hitting .325 in 73 games.

Kerns served in the United States Army during World War II. He finished out his minor league run in 1953 at the age of 32, appearing in 723 games with an adjusted career batting average of .293. After baseball, Russ worked in the construction of grain storage bins until his retirement and died on August 21, 2000 in Placerville, CA. Russell Eldon Kerns was 79 years of age.