

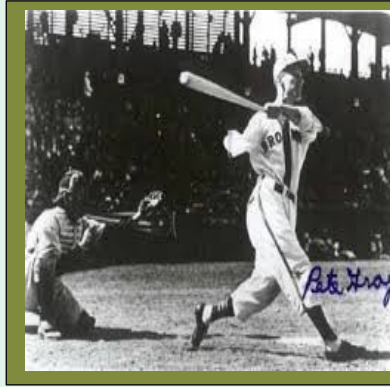
PETE GRAY ONE-ARMED WONDER

WHEN?

1915-2002

EVENT

Gray was a one-armed professional baseball player who played during the World War II years in the major leagues.



WHERE?

Nanticoke, Pennsylvania

VOCABULARY

immigrant
rookie
Lithuanian

Pete Gray loved baseball. Born to Lithuanian immigrants in 1915, Gray grew up in Nanticoke. An unfortunate truck accident cost him the little boy his right arm when he was 6. Pete taught himself to hit, catch, and throw with his left hand though he was naturally right-handed (Kashatus 24). According to an interview with William Kashatus in 1992, Gray stated “I’d spend hours just flipping up rocks and hitting ‘em with a stick, but I had some trouble fielding the ball because I couldn’t get rid of it after I made the catch.” It took a lot of persistence, but Gray did learn how to do the fielding and throwing with one motion.

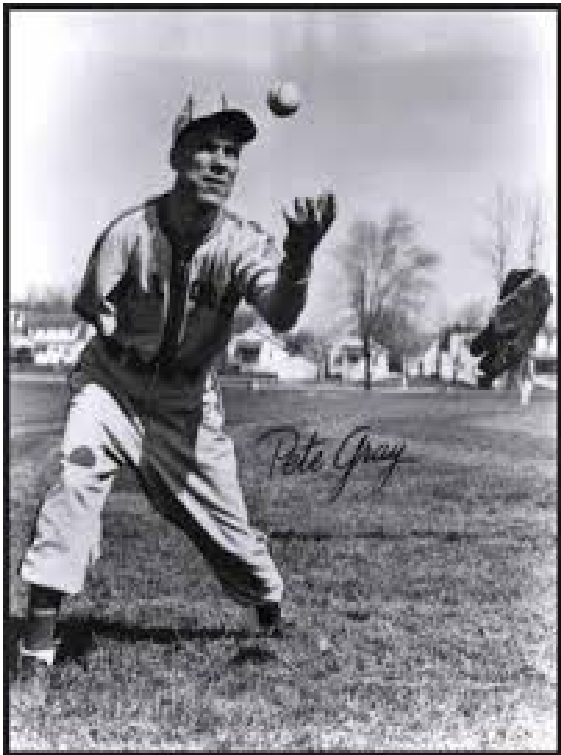
He learned how to do it so well that he was able to play semi-professional ball where he continued to hone his skills including base running. Kashatus writes that Gray played with the Hanover Lits in the Anthracite League leading them to two Luzerne County Leagues championships in 1936 and 1937. His play in the Canadian-American League garnered the attention of the Memphis Chicks after they learned he hit .381 in 42 games. The Chicks belonged to the Southern Association and signed him in 1943 dubbing him “One-Armed Wonder”. His 68 stolen bases, 60 RBIs, and .333 batting average earned him the Most Valuable Player Award that year (Kashatus 25). The St. Louis Browns signed him the following year.

Kashatus describes the highlight of Gray’s career: “On May 20, 1945, a crowd of thirty-six thousand spectators packed Yankee Stadium to

watch a double-header pitting New York’s finest against the defending American League champions, the St. Louis Browns. Game One got underway with the Browns’ rookie outfielder Pete Gray (1915-2002) leading off against former twenty-game winner “Spud” Chandler. After taking the first pitch, Gray lined a fastball into right field for the first hit of the game. During the rookie’s second trip to the plate, Chandler challenged Gray with another fastball on the first pitch. Once again, the Brownie outfielder hit a line drive single into right field. Chandler responded like a mad bull, kicking the mound in frustration. By afternoon’s end, Gray had reached base five times with four hits. He scored twice and knocked in two runs while fielding flawlessly in nine chances. The Browns swept the double-header, 10-1 and 5-2” (Kashatus 24).



Kashatus goes more deeply into the questions and struggles faced by Gray. Did he make the majors simply because he had one arm or were his skills up to the standards of MLB? Gray’s career came to an end when baseball’s stars returned from World War II. That did not end the limelight for Gray, however. A 1986 movie starring Keith Carradine in *A Winner Never Quits* and a biography written by Kashatus



shined a lasting light on his contributions to those who faced great odds but were not defined by them (Kashatus 25). He died in 2002.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Read more about Pete Gray in the book by William Kashatus. Imagine being a sports announcer and talk about Pete Gray and his exploits expressed above.
2. Pete Gray's real last name is Wyshner. Why do you think he changed it to Gray?

