

Mickey Mantle

Nickname: The Commerce Comet
1931-1995

Mickey Charles Mantle was born on October 20, 1931 in Spavinaw, Oklahoma, to Elvin ("Mutt") and Lowell Mantle. A former semi-pro baseball player, Mutt Mantle was so fond of baseball he named his first child after Detroit Tigers catcher Mickey Cochrane. Mickey was barely out of diapers before he was practicing baseball with his father. Mutt believed that the only way to excel in the major leagues was as a switch-hitter, so he taught his son to swing from both sides of the plate. Mickey would use his natural right-handed swing against his left-handed father, then would turn around and bat left-handed against his right-handed grandfather.

Signed with the Yankees while in High School

Mantle played baseball and basketball at his high school in Commerce, Oklahoma and was also a star halfback on the football team.

Mickey Mantle was a star from the start, parlaying a talent for the game and boyish good looks into iconic status. In spite of a series of devastating injuries, Mantle accumulated a long list of impressive accomplishments, finishing his 18-year career with 536 home runs and a .298 batting average. The switch-hitting "Commerce Comet" won three MVP awards and a Triple Crown (1956). He contributed to 12 pennants and seven World Series titles in his first 14 seasons while establishing numerous World Series records, including most home runs (18). "The Mick," switch-hitting Mickey Mantle won four home-run championships, during his 18-year career with the New York Yankees.

Mantle was a multi-talented offensive threat. He drove in runs with enormous power from either side of the plate. He got on base by hitting well for average and drawing more than 100 walks in each of 10 seasons. He scored runs with his excellent speed, stealing as many as 21 bases in a season (1959). Overall, he scored more runs than he drove in (1,677 to 1,509), a rarity among power hitters.

Mantle, out of Commerce, Oklahoma, arrived in New York in a whirl of unbridled expectations. He made headlines with great play at an "instructional school" the Yankees conducted in 1951 and then in spring training, which included a highly publicized barnstorming tour of the West Coast. Only 19, Mantle was hot, but he fizzled in New York. The Yankees sent him to their top farm club at Kansas City, but he continued to struggle until his father, Mutt Mantle, came for a visit. After the brief family reunion, Mantle lifted his average to .361 and, in only 166 at-bats, hit 11 homers with 50 RBI. He returned to New York and played alongside the soon-to-retire Joe DiMaggio, and ended up with a respectable (.267, 13 HR, 65 RBI) rookie season.

When DiMaggio retired Mantle took over in centerfield, and he played the position from 1952 to 1966. To reduce his outfield running when his injuries - which were many - were severe, he would occasionally play in left or right field. In 1967-68, his final seasons, he played first base to ease the burden on his aching legs.

Mantle and Yogi Berra were the Yankees' twin engines in Mantle's early years (1951-55). The centerfielder and catcher each hit 25 homers per season and together produced

from 150 to 225 RBI. Then, in 1956, Mantle emerged as a superstar, the greatest switch-hitter in the history of baseball and one of its biggest drawing cards. He hit .353 that year with 52 home runs and 130 RBI to win the Triple Crown. It was the first of three straight years that he led the league in runs scored (132). He received numerous awards for his accomplishments, including the Hickock Belt as the top professional athlete of the year. Mantle capped the year with three homers in the World Series, one in Don Larsen's perfect game, in which he also made a saving defensive play.

Even though he was not quite 5'11", Mantle hit some tremendous home runs. He reached the gothic wrought-iron facade that hung from the old stadium's roof five times. In addition to his widely remembered shots of May 30, 1956, when only the top 18 inches of the right-field facade kept the ball in the park, and May 22 1963, when the ball was still rising when it hit the facade a few feet from the top, Mantle struck the same right-field facade on August 7, 1955, against Detroit; on May 5, 1956, against Kansas City; and on June 23, 1957, against the White Sox.

Born to be a ballplayer, Mantle was the first power-hitting switch-hitter. He also hit for average, peaking at .365 in 1957. He was always a better hitter from the right side, but was capable enough from the left to hit 373 of his 536 career homers. He also used a drag bunt from the left side that made it nearly impossible to throw him out, and he was once clocked at 3.1 seconds from home to first base. When slugging outfielder Roger Maris joined the Yankees, he and Mickey became known as the "M&M Boys." The two got into a friendly home run duel in 1961, which culminated in Maris breaking Babe Ruth's 60-homer record by one. Mantle had 54, but again, as happened frequently in his career, physical problems hampered him. In the final month of the 1961 campaign he pulled an arm muscle, contracted a virus infection and developed an abscess inside his hip. During the first years of his career, Mantle was treated harshly by the fans and press in New York, but in 1960, thanks in part to the press, a different perception of him emerged. He was suddenly seen as someone who played through pain and played to win. Already popular with his teammates, he became enormously popular with the fans. Mantle's drawing power was due to his hitting, but when he was healthy he was also an excellent defensive outfielder. He was lightning-fast, with a strong and accurate arm. Mantle played on 12 pennant winners and seven World Championship clubs. He holds World Series records for home runs (18), RBI (40), runs (42), walks (43), extra-base hits (26), and total bases (123). In his final World Series in 1964 he had three homers and eight RBI and batted .333. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1974 in his first year of eligibility.

March 26, 1951. In an exhibition game at USC, Mickey Mantle propels a homer estimated at 654 to 660 feet. The shot clears Bovard Field and then goes the width of a practice football field before landing. Mantle has two homers, a bases loaded triple, and drives in seven runs as the Yankees flunk the collegians. 15-1.

Mickey died in 1995 at Dallas, Texas.

"There is no doubt in my mind that alcohol hurt my career terribly. In the end, all you really have are the memories and the numbers on paper. The numbers are important because baseball is built on them, and this is the way you are measured. And the point is, I played in more than 2,400 games, more than any Yankee player in history, and I hit 536 home runs,

and I shouldn't be griping about my career. But I know it now. It never was
so much better, and the big reason it wasn't, is the lifestyle I chose: the
late nights and too many empty glasses." - Mickey Mantle as he was
quoted in 'Mickey Mantle: America's Prodigal Son'

