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## Life and Sports Activity of William Louis Veeck

William Louis Veeck also known as "Sport Shirt", was an American Major League Baseball franchise owner and promoter. Veeck was at various times the owner of the Cleveland Indians, St. Louis Browns and Chicago White Sox. As the owner and team president of the Indians in 1947, Veeck signed Larry Doby, which marked the beginning the integration of the American League. Veeck was the last owner to purchase a baseball franchise without an independent fortune, and is responsible for many innovations and contributions to the game of baseball.

In 1942, Veeck left Chicago and, in partnership with former Cubs star and manager Charlie Grimm, purchased the American Association Triple-A Milwaukee Brewers. After he won winning three pennants in five years Veeck sold his Milwaukee franchise in 1945 for a \$275,000 profit. Veeck claimed to have installed a screen to make the right field target a little more difficult for left-handed hitters of the opposite team. The screen was put on wheels, so any given day it might be in place or not, depending on the batting strength of the opposing team.

There was no rule against such an activity but Veeck then took it to an extreme, rolling it out when the opponents batted, and pulling it back when the Brewers batted. Veeck had reported that the league passed a rule against it the very next day. However, extensive research by two of the members of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) suggests that this story was made up by Veeck. The two researchers could not find any references to a moveable fence or any reference to the gear required for a moveable fence to work.

While he was a half-owner of the Brewers, Veeck served for a whole three years in the United States Marine Corps during World War II in an artillery unit. During this time a recoiling artillery piece crushed his leg, requiring amputation of first the foot, and then shortly after of the leg above the knee. Over the course of his life he had 36 operations on the leg. He as a result had a series of wooden legs and, as an inveterate smoker, cut holes in the legs to use as an ashtray.

In 1946, Veeck became the owner of a major league team, the Cleveland Indians. He immediately put the team's games on radio. He also moved the team to Cleveland Municipal Stadium permanently in 1947. The team had split their games between the much larger Municipal Stadium and the smaller League Park since the 1930s, but Veeck had concluded that League Park was far too small to be viable.

In July of that year Veeck signed Larry Doby, the first black player to play in the American League. Doby's first game was on July 5. Before the game, Doby was introduced to his

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teammates by player-manager Lou Boudreau. "One by one, Lou introduced me to each player. 'This is Joe Gordon,' and Gordon put his hand out. 'This is Bob Lemon,' and Lemon put his hand out. 'This is Jim Hegan,' and Hegan put his hand out. All the guys put their hand out, all but three. As soon as he could, Bill Veeck got rid of those three", Doby said. The following year later Veeck signed Satchel Paige to a contract, making him the oldest rookie in major league history. Finding himself no longer able to financially compete in the free agent era, Veeck sold the White Sox in January 1981 and retired to his home in Chicago.

Veeck had been a heavy smoker and drinker until 1980. In 1984 Veeck underwent two operations for lung cancer. Two years later, in 1986, he died at the age of 71 from cancer. He was elected five years later to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

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