

# RUSS DERRY

Judy Derry Mahoney

Alva Russell Derry was born Oct. 7, 1916, near Princeton, Mercer County, Missouri, the seventh son for Abraham Russell and Margaret Jane (McHargue) Derry. Two months before Russ was born, his father was killed in an automobile accident when his Model T was run off the road by a local businessman.

Russ grew up in a family that played all sports together, especially baseball and football. Their mother was very "sports minded" and often played with them. Most of the seven brothers played baseball with the Princeton Town Team and the American Legion Team for decades, particularly Olin ("Farmer") and Dewey Derry.

Russ lettered in football and basketball all four years of high school. When he graduated from Princeton High School in 1935, he was awarded a basketball scholarship to Northwest Missouri State College. The award would not pay all expenses, a part-time job would be necessary. This was during the Great Depression when there were very few jobs anywhere. Russell went to Maryville and tried unsuccessfully for several days to find some kind of a job. Realizing he would be unable to attend college, Russ returned to Princeton and worked on several jobs, including some of President Franklin Roosevelt's WPA assignments such as the construction of the old Princeton High School football field.

In the winter of 1937, Russ rode the train to Los Angeles, California and joined his brother, Dewey. They stayed with their cousin, Jessie Derry Pleasant. Jessie's husband, a sporting goods salesman, introduced Russ and Dewey to Bill Essick, the Yankees' baseball scout who the previous year had signed Joe DiMaggio to a contract. Bill asked both boys to join his winter baseball team of hopefuls. At the end of a month, Bill signed Russ to a contract for Joplin, Missouri and Dewey to Rogers, Arkansas, for the upcoming 1937 baseball season.

Russ began his professional career playing first base. He batted left and threw right-handed. He was soon moved to the outfield where he played most of his career. He played the 1937 and 1938 seasons with Joplin, Missouri (Class C). For the 1939 season, with Norfolk, Virginia (Class B) he hit 40 home runs, setting a league record. In 1940, he was called up to the Kansas City, Missouri, Blues (AA). Thus, begun his 18-year baseball career.

~~A personal note: In early July 1940, the Yankee organization transferred Russ from Kansas City to Binghamton, New York, allowing him a few travel days. He and Elna Craig (daughter of Hugh and Inez Craig) had planned an Oct. wedding. The transfer motivated them to move their wedding to July 4<sup>th</sup>.~~

He continued to play baseball during World War II. He tried to enlist, but was rejected because of back injuries. Plus, Russ owned a farm in partnership with his father-in-law. Throughout the war, the county draft board would not allow him to attend the team spring trainings or playoffs during planting or harvesting times, something he always frowned about.

Throughout his career, Russ achieved several honors. One highlight was hitting two home runs, one a grand slam, for the Yankees on Opening Day 1945. Thus, becoming the first American League player to hit a grand slam on opening day. At the end of the game, Babe Ruth called him over to his box seat for congratulations and said, "Nice hittin', kid. That grand slam you hit was like the way ole' Babe used to hit 'em!"

Other career highlights involved the Rochester Red Wings (New York) of the International League. In 1949, Russ hit 42 home runs, a record that remains unbroken. At the end of the season, during a special “Russ Derry Day” the fans presented him with an International Harvester tractor. In 1989, Russ was selected as a charter inductee of the Red Wings Hall of Fame. In 1999, he was selected by fan votes as a member of the Red Wings All Century Team. In 2000, the Red Wings honored him with another “Russ Derry Day”. The first 5,000 fans were given a replica of his jersey with his name and number 3 on the back. Hundreds of fans brought 50-year-old scorecards, programs, and balls for him to autograph. Many asked, “Russ, do you still have the tractor?” He replied he did and still used it.

His last professional baseball game was played in Modesto, California, in 1954. After the game went into extra innings, Russ said, “Boys, let’s end this game. I have a plane to catch back to Missouri.” Then for his final professional at bat, he hit a home run to win the game, the playoffs, and the league title.

In 2008, Russ was inducted posthumously into the International League Hall of Fame. Induction ceremonies were held at Silver Stadium, Rochester, New York, home of the Red Wings. The International League, observing its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, revived the IL Hall of Fame which had been inactive since 1964. Twenty seven men were selected as the Class of 2008.

In 2015, The *Rochester, NY, Democrat and Chronicle* newspaper chose Russ as one of the Red Wings’ Fantastic Four. He was described as “an outfielder who was a slugger extraordinaire”. He led the IL in home runs in two seasons, hitting 42 in 1949 and 30 in 1950. In six seasons, he set the Red Wings home run record of 134. He also ranks third in career RBIs (413), fourth in games (683), and fifth in runs (410),

Russ has been the only Mercer County native to play major league professional baseball. His baseball skills took him to places such as New York City; Havana, Cuba; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Rochester, New York; Kansas City, Missouri; Columbus, Ohio; Norfolk, Virginia; Binghamton, New York, and Houston, Texas. He always came home to Mercer County, his farms, Hereford cattle, and quail hunting.

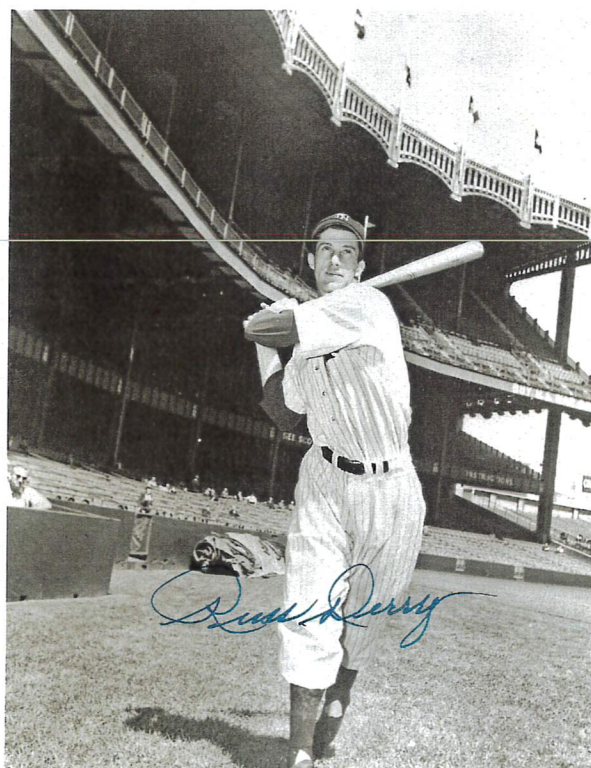
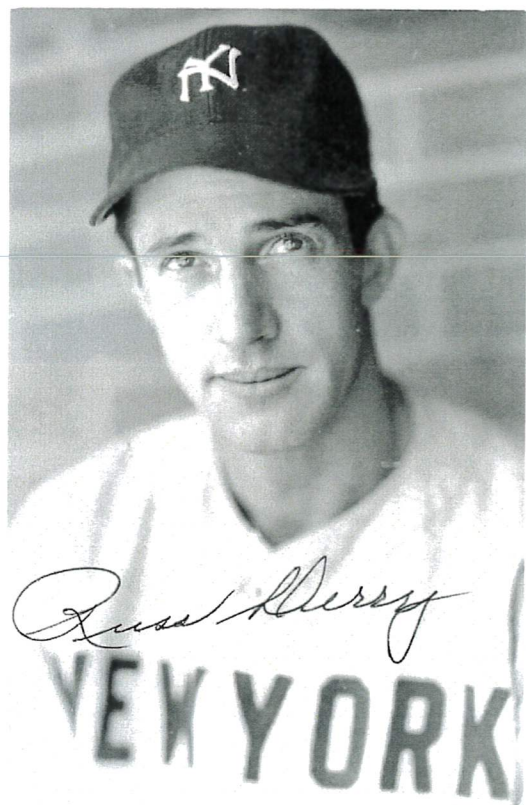


Photo Album Flood Damage for Existing Ball Fields in Princeton Missouri

2019



Drone Photo of Spring of 2019 Flood Waters at Princeton, MO Ball Fields. Annual Flooding continues to reduce and or eliminate opportunities for the community. Extensive damage results in numerous weeks of cleanup and reconstruction. (2019)



Damage shown of flood waters destroying fencing and infields. Erosion of playing surface along with major fencing damage makes fields unplayable for extensive periods of time. (2019)

Photo Album Flood Damage for Existing Ball Fields in Princeton Missouri

**2019**



Floodwater level shown at the restrooms located at the existing ball fields. Flood waters cause major damage to the septic tanks and cause pollution to the river waters. (2019)



Debris from the river current destroys fences and results in loss of opportunities for the community. (2019)

Photo Album Flood Damage for Existing Ball Fields in Princeton Missouri

2016 Clean Up

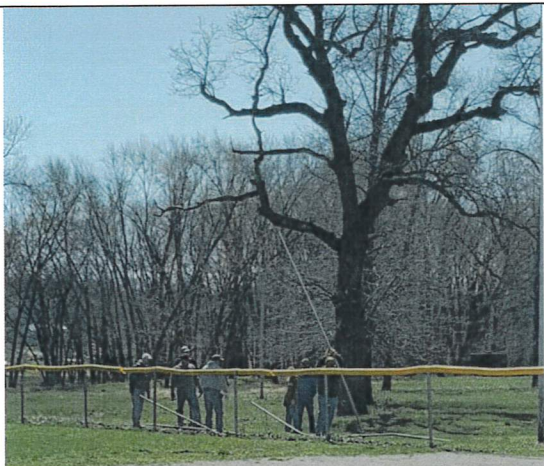


Photo Album Flood Damage for Existing Ball Fields in Princeton Missouri

2013



Volunteers work to fix fence after river currents cause damage to the ball fields. (2013)

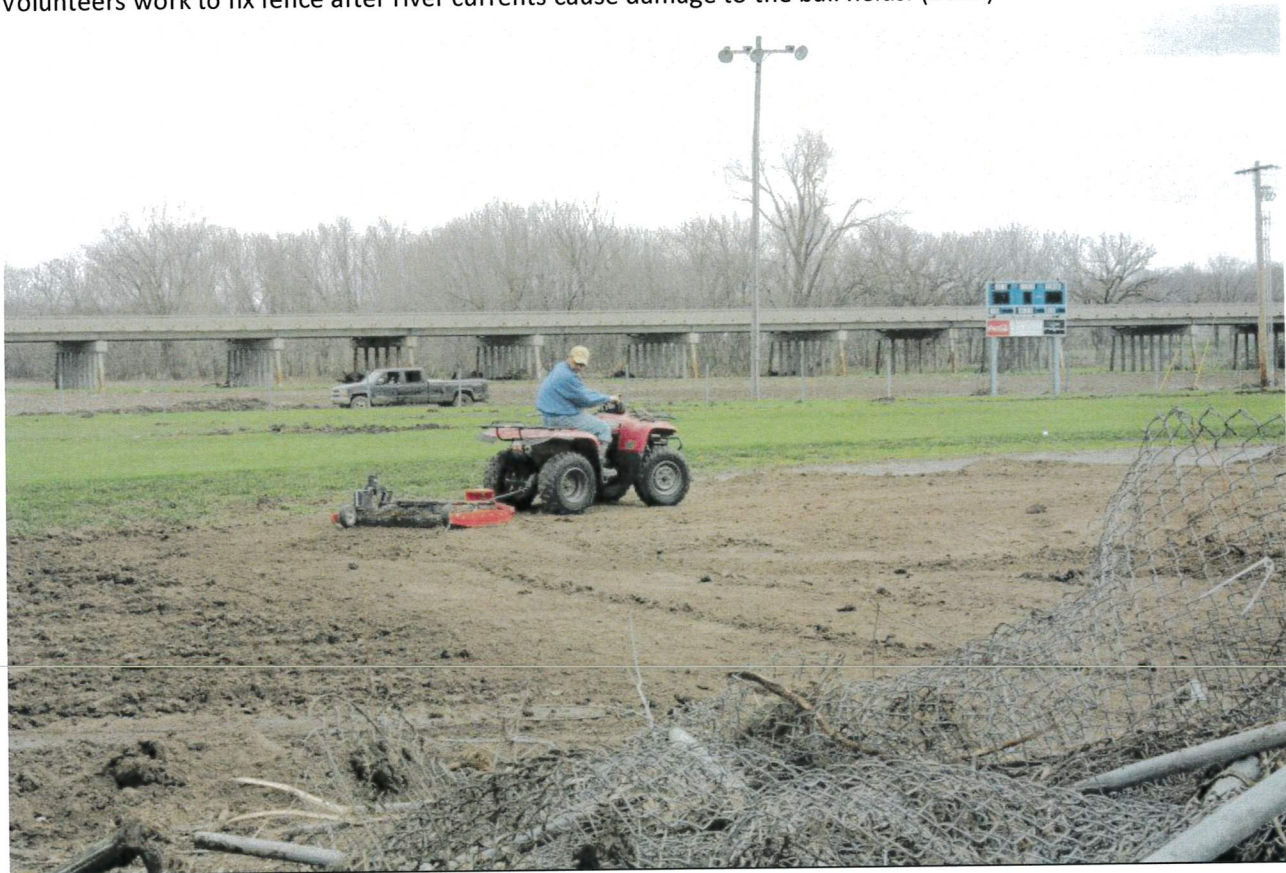


Photo Album Flood Damage for Existing Ball Fields in Princeton Missouri

2013



Volunteers work to fix fence after river currents cause damage to the ball fields. (2013)



Photo Album Flood Damage for Existing Ball Fields in Princeton Missouri

2013



Volunteer work to replace damaged fence after flooding. (2013)



Volunteers work to fix fence after river currents cause damage to the ball fields. (2013)

Photo Album Flood Damage for Existing Ball Fields in Princeton Missouri

2013



Volunteers work with heavy machinery to remove silt and debris from the ball field complex (2013)



Volunteers work to rebuild fence that was destroyed by the river current. Much of the field is destroyed each year with debris and dumpsters, trash cans, and septic tanks being spilled into the Weldon/Grand River. (2013)