



Charlie Hollocher— The Greatest Shortstop You Never Heard Of

Charlie Hollocher was considered by many to be the best shortstop that Portland Beavers manager Walter McCredie ever sent to the major leagues—which is saying something when you consider that among those sent to big leagues by McCredie were Dave Bancroft, Roger Peckinpaugh and Ernie Johnson. Hollocher originally failed in a trial with Portland in 1916, but returned after a season with Rock Island in the Three I League to play in two hundred games for the Beavers in 1917, hitting a solid .276. He was sold to the Chicago Cubs in 1918 when the Beavers disbanded because of World War I.

Walter McCredie told the Chicago press that Hollocher was the greatest shortstop he had ever seen: “He not only is the most wonderful fielder in the business, but he has baseball sense and baseball instinct.” McCredie added, “He’s doing things on the field right now that men like Wagner and Tinker were doing years after being in the big show. The boy is only twenty years old and he is a finished ballplayer.”

The left-handed hitting Hollocher batted .316 as a rookie for the Cubs, leading the National League in base hits and total bases as the Cubs won the pennant. He missed some games in 1919 with a broken thumb and then had to have an operation before the 1920 season to remove a growth on a tendon in his hand. He then suffered from ptomaine poisoning. Hollocher was in and out of the lineup during July and then admitted to a hospital and missed August and September.

He was back at full strength in 1921, batting .289 and striking out only thirteen times in 629 plate appearances. He had the best season of his career in 1922, hitting .340 and striking out only five times in 592 at bats. In 1923, Hollocher came down with the flu at the end of spring training and said it would be a “long time” before he would be strong enough to play. He returned to the lineup on May 9, but three months later left the team without a word, leaving

behind a note to manager Bill Killefer that he was “feeling pretty rotten” and had decided to go home for the remainder of the season on the advice of a doctor that had been treating him for stomach problems. Hollocher was hitting .342 at the time, but said he had been unable to give his best on the field because of his ailments.

Hollocher tried playing again in 1924, but was in and out of the lineup. He left the team again in September, a few weeks after saying he again needed to go home for the rest of the season. He returned to Chicago in October and briefly participated in the City Series against the Chicago White Sox, playing in the third game and scoring a run. He batted twice, drawing a walk and grounding out.

Hollocher then visited his brother Milton, who was playing for Terre Haute in the Three I League. In the spring of 1925, Hollocher again declared that he was too ill to play, puzzling those who thought the twenty-eight-year-old shortstop looked healthier than ever. The Cubs acquired Rabbit Maranville, the “Miracle Braves” shortstop, from Pittsburgh to take his place, but Maranville broke a bone in his ankle during an exhibition game in Los Angeles and the Cubs filled shortstop by committee until Maranville returned in mid-season.

Hollocher visited his teammates at the end of April 1925 and looked to everyone to be in the best of health, but, passing up his twelve thousand dollar salary, he never played baseball again. In January 1930 he appeared at the Cubs offices, on his way back home to St. Louis from a visit to the Mayo Clinic, where the doctors again could not find anything wrong with him. Outside of a season scouting for the Cubs in 1931, Hollocher was never again connected to baseball.

During the 1930s, he worked as an investigator for the St. Louis prosecutor’s office and as a night watchman at a theatre. He divorced his first wife in 1939 and remarried a few weeks later; it would prove to be a short marriage. On August 14, 1940, Hollocher was found beside his automobile in a wooded area outside of St. Louis. He had fatally shot himself in the neck with a shotgun he had recently purchased. The former shortstop left behind a note that read, “Call Mrs. Ruth Hollocher.” When contacted, Ruth Hollocher said her husband had been complaining of stomach pains. (*Chicago Tribune*, January 22, 1918, April 3, May 10, August 5 and August 8, 1923, September 5, September 6 and October 4, 1924, January 18, March 17, March 19, April 7 and May 1, 1925, January 4, 1930 and August 15, 1940; *Baseball Magazine*, October 1917; *The Sporting News*, August 22, 1940.)

--Dennis Snelling