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AND YOSH KAWANO

KAWANO'S CLUBHOUSE

THIS SPRING, LEGENDARY FORMER CLUBHOUSE MANAGER YOSH KAWANO GETS THE CALL FROM THE CACTUS LEAGUE HALL OF FAME, BUT THAT'S FAR FROM THE FIRST RECOGNITION HE HAS RECEIVED

BY CHARLIE VASCELLARO

Since the Cubs organization was founded in the late 1800s, a number of personalities have transitioned from noteworthy to historic to iconic. Mordecai “Three Finger” Brown, Hack Wilson, Ernie Banks, Fergie Jenkins, Billy Williams, Greg Maddux and Ryne Sandberg, to name a few. And given the organization’s recent exploits, more seem likely to join their ranks in the near future.

But few people spent more time at Wrigley Field, saw more Cubs history firsthand or became more intertwined with the fabric of the organization than a man who never recorded one pitch or at-bat on a major-league diamond. For 65 years, former clubhouse manager Yosh Kawano—bedecked in his trademark floppy, white fishing cap, white T-shirt and khaki slacks—worked behind the scenes to take care of Cubs players fans came to know and love. He ordered equipment, kept uniforms clean, prepared pre- and postgame spreads, sorted fan mail, swept floors (his sweeping was often a not-so-subtle cue to media members that it was time to exit the clubhouse) and helped get the team ready for road trips.

While none of this shows up in box scores or can be accessed via Baseball Reference, Kawano is as ingrained in Chicago culture as the Bleacher Bums and the ivy on Wrigley’s outfield wall. In fact, his signature hat has been on display at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum since his retirement in 2008.

This spring, Kawano can add another plaudit to his résumé, as his lifelong commitment to the Cubs—as well as the time he spent as the team’s clubhouse manager during decades of spring training seasons in Arizona—is being recognized with enshrinement into the Cactus League Hall of Fame.

“He ran the clubhouse like it was his home, like it was his business,” said Hall of Fame pitcher Jenkins, who was with the Cubs from 1967-73 and again from 1982-83. “If you didn’t belong in the clubhouse, get your butt out of there. He was on top of things. He was the same way at the old clubhouse in Scottsdale. He was always there at 6 or 7 in the morning getting things ready.”

Created by the Arizona Spring Training Experience and Valley History Inc., the Cactus League Hall of Fame “honors those who played a key role in the growth and development of major-league spring training baseball in Arizona, as well as a select group of players who helped to solidify the league’s reputation as a premier showcase of major-league baseball talent and contribute to the league’s legend and culture.”

A first-generation Japanese-American, Kawano was born in Seattle on June 4, 1921, but spent most of his childhood in Los Angeles. Both Yosh and his younger brother, Nobe, who would become a longtime clubhouse manager for the Los Angeles Dodgers, were avid baseball fans at an early age. They spent many of their school-age days at Wrigley Field—the other Wrigley Field—in Los Angeles, home of the LA Angels, a minor-league affiliate of the Cubs from 1921-56.

The lengths Kawano would go to be a part of the Cubs organization were on stark display early. In 1933, at just 12 years old, he stowed away on a cruise ship carrying the team to spring training on Catalina Island, off the coast of Los Angeles. He was discovered on board by a pair of team executives, who aptly asked the future clubhouse manager to shine the team’s shoes as punishment. Clearly, this wasn’t much of a deterrent because the next year Kawano followed the White Sox to Pasadena, California, in the spring and was ultimately hired as the team’s batboy.

After that, he traveled to Chicago in hopes of securing a full-time position for the regular season, but



A BASEBALL TEAM AT THE POSTON INTERNMENT CAMP

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— RYNE SANDBERG



YOSH KAWANO

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COURTESY CHICAGO CUBS



THE CUBS WELCOME YOSH KAWANO TO THE WALK OF FAME

COURTESY CHICAGO CUBS

ultimately wound up back home. He continued to work for the White Sox and the Hollywood Stars of the Pacific Coast League during spring seasons in Arizona, thus embarking on the career that would come to define him.

But not all of his time in the Arizona desert was something he wanted to remember.

DREAMS DEFERRED

Kawano's amazing life story is directly tied to both the Japanese-American baseball and immigrant experiences.

The sport has been popular in Japan for almost as long as it has been considered the national pastime in the United States. Baseball was introduced to the Far East in 1872 by an American schoolteacher named Horace Wilson, who was teaching English to Japanese children at Kaisei Gakko Elementary School, now the site of Tokyo University.

Born in the U.S. of immigrant parents, Yosh and Nobe grew up obsessed with the game. They played whenever they got a chance and soon started dreaming of careers in or around the major leagues.

But those dreams were abruptly derailed in 1942, when the United States joined the Allied effort in World War II. While scores of young American men went into basic training or off to the battlefield, Kawano and his family were among 100,000 Americans of Japanese descent who were forcibly removed from their homes and detained in internment camps indefinitely.

Kawano's family was sent to the Poston War Relocation Center on the Colorado River Indian Reservation near Yuma in hot and dusty southwestern Arizona. Detained Japanese-Americans already familiar with the game played baseball as a means of passing the long hours each day and even organized internment camp leagues.

While there, Kawano wrote a letter about his hardships to White Sox manager Jimmy Dykes, whom he had befriended during his spring training stint as batboy. With the assistance of Dykes, who intervened on Kawano's behalf, the young man was released from the internment

camp and traveled to Chicago, where he was hired by the Cubs as a clubhouse assistant in 1943.

As the war progressed, many young Nisei, children of Japanese immigrants who were born with American citizenship, volunteered or were drafted into the military. In 1944, Kawano enlisted and served as an intelligence officer in the Philippines and New Guinea. He returned to the Cubs after the war and continued in his role as clubhouse assistant, until being appointed clubhouse manager in 1953 following the retirement of longtime

trainer Andy Lotshaw.

During his lengthy tenure with the club, Kawano saw it all, serving under 37 managers, 12 general managers

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— FERGIE JENKINS

and two ownership groups (the Wrigleys and the Tribune Co.), before retiring at the start of the 2008 season to much fanfare.

"Yosh Kawano has dedicated his life to the Chicago Cubs, and we salute his 65 years of devotion to this franchise," said Cubs General Manager Jim Hendry, upon Kawano's retirement. "While he will not be with us on a daily basis, he will always be a member of the Cubs family."

Cubs Hall of Fame second baseman Ryne Sandberg even referenced Kawano in his 2005 Hall of Fame acceptance speech and later suggested that if the Cubs were ever to rename Wrigley Field, it should be called Yosh Kawano Field.

CLUBHOUSE KING

Whether it was at Wrigley Field in Chicago or at all four of the Cubs' Cactus League spring training facilities during Kawano's tenure—he was

clubhouse manager at Rendezvous Park in Mesa, Scottsdale Stadium and two incarnations of Hohokam Stadium in Mesa—the clubhouse was Kawano's territory, and he lorded over it like the keeper of the castle.

"It was all pretty much his domain. Yosh was the first guy most of us met," Jenkins said. "You had to come into that clubhouse. My uniform number was 30 when I got traded from the Phillies, and I asked Yosh, 'Can I get 30?' And he said, 'No, no, no. Kenny Holtzman has 30.' That was our first conversation, so I took 31. I was born on the 13th. I just reversed it, and I wore 31 for the rest of my career."

Back then, the clubhouse culture was a bit less refined than it is today. Clubhouse managers dipped into their own pockets to provide food and other sundry items for players and then took up a collection to recoup their losses. Kawano also turned a tidy profit by using his own money to purchase bats, balls, gloves, hats and other equipment from official big-league suppliers. He then sold this equipment to the players and kept running tabs on notebook paper, which he folded into envelopes that often protruded from his back pockets.

"Other ballclubs ran the team differently," Jenkins said. "They just give you the uniform, give you the socks, give you the hat. He was in charge of all that, so it was a little bit different because of the fact that he ran it like he was running a business. When I first

joined the ballclub, you couldn't take your uniform. We only had two sets, gray and white. When the season was over, they sent those major-league uniforms to the minor leagues because, come spring training, we got new uniforms to open up the season. That was his business to make sure that he collected all the uniforms."

The litany of Kawano's responsibilities is almost too vast to list, from hiring batboys to buying equipment to transporting everything to ballparks across the country.

"He took care of all the trucks, the transportation leaving Chicago for spring training and then going back from Scottsdale to Chicago," Jenkins said. "He always traveled with the trucks. When we went on the road, he would be in that truck going to the airport, making sure everything in that truck got unloaded onto the plane. And he was the first guy off the plane to get everything in those trucks to go to Dodger Stadium, Shea Stadium, Crosley Field. He was a hell of a clubhouse guy."

Despite his incredible longevity, Kawano did not miss a single road trip with the team until 1997. Over the years, he developed strong relationships with some of the Cubs players, especially veterans like Banks, Jenkins and Ron Santo. He even helped them with personal issues outside of the game.

"A lot of people didn't know that Ronnie was a diabetic," Jenkins said. "He let the players know a couple of years after he'd been around, in the mid-60s. But Yosh Kawano always walked from the clubhouse to the bench around the sixth inning to bring a Coke or a chocolate bar to Ronnie to get his glucose back up. He and Yosh were kind of buddies."

Just how valuable was Kawano to the organization over the years? Legend has it that when the Wrigley family sold the Cubs in 1981, a stipulation in the contract specified that Kawano would always have a job with the team.

COMPANY MAN

The Cubs' home clubhouse was relocated from the left-field corner to behind home plate prior to the 1984 season and was dedicated in Kawano's honor the following year. A plaque hanging in the locker room read: "The Chicago



YOSH KAWANO

PRESIDENT OF BUSINESS
OPERATIONS CRANE KENNEY
AND YOSH KAWANO

Cubs dedicate their clubhouse to Yosh Kawano, a gentleman who has devoted over 40 years to serving the needs of the ownership, management and players of the Chicago Cubs.”

Kawano was inducted into the Cubs Walk of Fame in 1996 along with PA announcer Pat Pieper and left fielder Hank Sauer. He was recognized with a marker just below the iconic Wrigley Field marquee, but, in 2002, those markers were removed and replaced with banners hanging from the rafters inside the ballpark.

“Back in those days, everybody knew the clubhouse guy by his first name or nickname, and he took care of you,” Jenkins said. “He took a pretty personal interest with all of the players. If you wanted something, Yosh could get it for you.”

Yosh, 97, and Nobe, 95, now live in an assisted living retirement community in Los Angeles. Eternally etched in the annals of Cubs folklore, Kawano is deservedly a legend and a throwback to a different era, despite never having laced up a pair of spikes.

“He became an icon,” Sandberg said, in a 2016 article on the Kawano brothers in the *Los Angeles Times*. “I don’t know how many clubbies can say that.”

THE KINGDOM OF BASEBALL

“There are many routes to the kingdom of baseball,” said late major-league commissioner A. Bartlett Giamatti.

For more than 70 years, the kingdom of baseball has flourished in the Arizona desert, as major-league spring training has made a booming contribution to the state’s tourism-driven economy. This year’s Cactus League Hall of Fame induction celebrates the variety of lives lived in and around the game. In addition to former Cubs clubhouse manager Yosh Kawano, this year’s class includes:

Frank Robinson: A consummate baseball man, Robinson was among the first generation of African-Americans to play in the major leagues. He made his debut with the Reds in 1956, capturing the NL Rookie of the Year Award. He is the first and only player to win MVP in both the National and American leagues. Even before his playing days were over, Robinson served as Major League Baseball’s first black manager. He was presented with the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President George W. Bush in 2005 and received MLB’s Beacon of Life Award at the 2008 Civil Rights Game.

Gaylord Perry: Perry played for eight teams during his 22-year big-league career, breaking in with the Giants in 1962. He spent his first 10 springs with the club in Phoenix before being traded to the Indians in 1972. The Indians and Giants were the first two teams to officially conduct spring training in Arizona, with the Indians holding camp at Hi Corbett Field in Tucson.

Bob Uecker: Mr. Baseball parlayed his dubious six-year major-league stint into a highly decorated career as a broadcaster, actor and author. He is just as well known for his fictional role as Indians play-by-play man Harry Doyle in the movies *Major League* and *Major League II* as he is for his 47 years in the broadcast booth with his hometown Brewers. In 2003, Uecker received the National Baseball Hall of Fame’s Ford C. Frick Award for excellence in broadcasting.

Derrick Moore: Perhaps the best-known spring training vendor anywhere, the affable Moore has been a familiar and friendly presence on Arizona’s sporting scene since the mid-1980s, when he began selling soda at Scottsdale Stadium. His signature “Lemonade, lemonade like grandma made” call has become an iconic part of the state’s sports culture. In 2015, he was named Top MLB Vendor in an online poll of major-league fans.