

The First Ten Million Ballplayer

Over 80 years before outfielder Albert Belle signed a free agent contract with the Chicago White Sox to become the first player to earn over ten million a year, baseball already had had a "Ten Million" ballplayer.



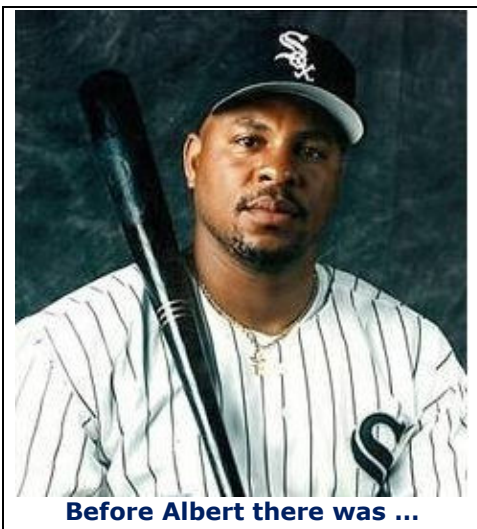
Ten Million

He never played a day in the majors, but he captained the University of Washington's baseball team before starting a career as a minor league outfielder in 1911 at age 21. He did so well that in late August his contract was purchased by Cleveland, who praised his speed, fielding, and throwing, but noted he was only a "fair hitter." When the team needed to clear a roster spot that winter, he was put on waivers and claimed by the St. Louis Cardinals. He made the team in spring training (1912) but hurt a leg and never got into a game before his contract was sold to a minor league team.

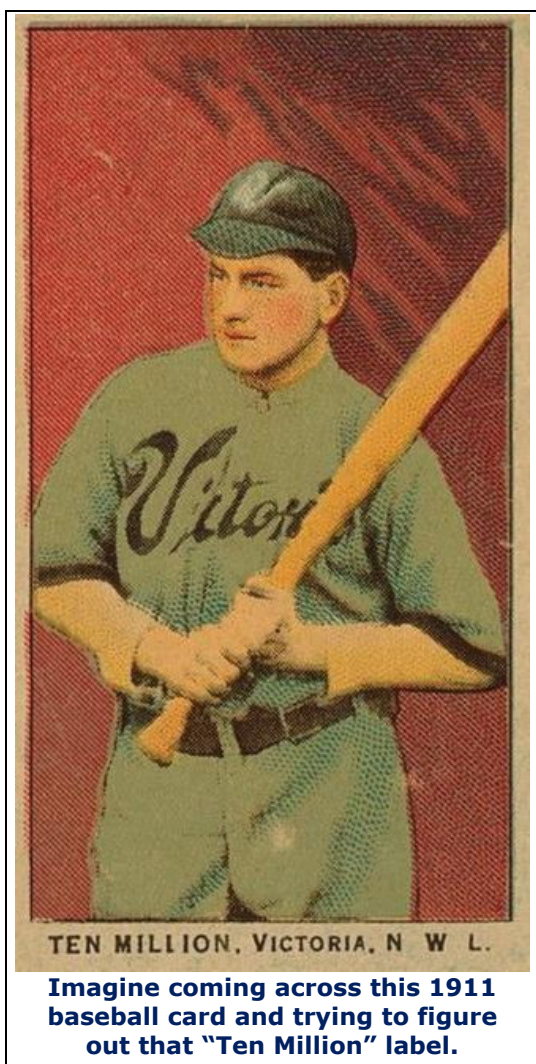
This Ten Million player continued his minor league career for a few years, including stops in Spokane, Tacoma, Sioux City, and Moose Jaw. He played his last game a couple of months shy of his 25th birthday, and left behind career average of .257, playing mostly at the Class B level.

That's hardly the resume one would expect from a Ten Million ballplayer, but you see, Ten Million wasn't his salary ... it was his legal name! His Father was Judge Elmer C. Million, who was known as E.C. Million — get it? "Easy" Million? His wife Ella wanted their son to also have a name that played off the family's distinctive last name and the baby was christened, "Ten."

Million retired from baseball in 1915, did a tour of duty in the army, and then moved to Seattle where he remained involved in sports. He was a salesman for Spalding Sporting Goods, and he umpired high school baseball games and refereed in football and basketball. He later became a salesman for the Ford Auto Company. In the 1920s, Ford produced its 10 millionth car and it was shipped to Seattle so Ten Million could be the one to sell it. A Seattle newspaper ran an article and photo about the ten millionth Ford being sold by the Ford salesman named Ten Million.



Before Albert there was ...



Imagine coming across this 1911 baseball card and trying to figure out that "Ten Million" label.

If Ten Million's name was an omen of where baseball salaries were headed, we can be thankful that his daughter never went into baseball. Ten and his wife accepted a \$50 gift from his eccentric mother in return for letting her choose the name for his first child, her granddaughter. The girl was known to her friends as "Dixie," but her real name was Decillian — pronounced "Decillion" — Million!

Research Notes

⊖ "Decillion" — sometimes spelled "Decillian" — was not a completely uncommon name in that era, particularly for a girl. According to census records there here are about a dozen other girls from around that period who were named "Decillion" or "Decillian."

⊖ Family members credited Ten's mother with giving him his unusual name, but when his father E. C. Million was campaigning in 1912 to be governor, he took the credit, telling one reporter that he said when the boy was born: "He looks like ten million to me, and that shall be his name."

⊖ The papers enjoyed playing with Million's unusual name. When Ten was trying to make the Cardinals in 1912, the *Sporting Life* wrote: "If the Cardinals don't make good with Ten Million in the outfield, Roger Bresnahan [manager] will toss away ten million as easily as a sailor chucks away a dime."

⊖ The big league teams may have first become aware of Ten Million as a potential ballplayer in the summer of 1907. Local Seattle businessmen had sent Million's high school baseball team on a nationwide tour that summer. They traveled 8600 miles and played in ten states and Washington D.C. in exhibitions against various teams, including some professional teams.

⊖ The baseball card of Ten Million with Victoria in the 1911 North Western League is known as an OBAK "cigarette card."

The American Tobacco Company had a brand of cigarettes called OBAK that was popular on the Pacific coast, and they did a series of cards from 1909-1911 featuring players from the Pacific Coast League (6 teams) and the North Western League (4 teams).

⊖ Perhaps the most talented player named Million was Doug Million who was High School *Player of the Year* in 1994 and the first round pick of the Colorado Rockies (seventh overall pick in the draft). The Rockies passed on the PR opportunity to sign him for a cool million and gave him a \$905,000 signing bonus. Sadly, Million died very young at age 21, the victim of a severe asthma attack in 1997. Doug never got higher than AA ball, and we are still waiting for the first major leaguer named Million.

⊖ A fan named Doug Charles lives about ten minutes from Ten Million's hometown of Mt. Vernon. In a local second-hand shop he came across a pre-World War I Spalding bat that is an engraved "Ten Million" model. He was kind enough to send pictures with permission to use them.

