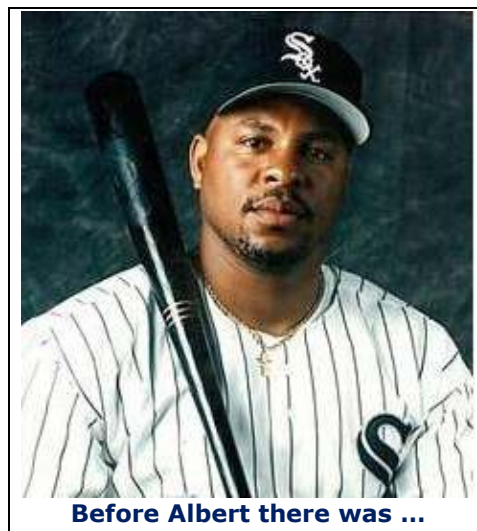




The First Ten Million Ballplayer

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.

He never played a day in the majors, but he was a good college player for the University of Washington before starting a minor league career in 1911 at age 21. After just one season in the minors the young outfielder showed enough promise that the Cleveland Indians purchased his contract.



Before Albert there was ...



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

A knee injury kept this Ten Million player from making the team. He returned to the Pacific Northwest where he continued his minor league career which included 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 E.C. Million, and his eccentric mother convinced E.C. and his wife to name her grandson, "Ten."

Million retired from baseball in 1915 and 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.



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. The same eccentric grandmother who was behind the naming of Ten Million gave \$50 to Ten and his wife Christine to let her name her great-granddaughter. The girl was known to her friends as "Dixie," but her real name was Decillion Million!

Research Notes

- ⊖ There are unconfirmed stories that have Ten Million associated with the early St. Louis Cardinals. One story claims he actually played briefly for the Cardinals but that never happened unless under an assumed name. Another story has him in spring training with the 1908 Cardinals but that his chance to make the team ended with a broken leg. That seems very unlikely. Ten was born in Mt. Vernon, Washington, graduated from high school in 1908 and then attended the University of Washington. It would have been highly unusual for a high school boy from the Northwest to be in camp with the Cardinals. However, back in 1908 the teams were not above trying out players with little experience, and the Cardinals of that era were a crummy, perhaps desperate, last place team. Ten could have been in St. Louis on some sort of vacation, talked his way into a tryout, made the spring squad, then broke his leg, returned to the Northwest, completed high school, and gone on to college. Again, it is extremely unlikely but not completely impossible.
- ⊖ 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). The fact that Ten Million had his own card in his first year in the minors suggests he was considered a pretty good player.
- ⊖ 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.

