

## NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

*Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions*

*By Ned Hémard*

### **Golden Brown**

Of the more than 18,000 players who have played Major League baseball, one player's multi-faceted career has no parallel. Often referred to as "Golden Boy" during his baseball career, Robert William "Bobby" Brown (born October 25, 1924) played 548 regular-season games for the New York Yankees alongside some of the game's greatest legends: Joe DiMaggio, Yogi Berra and Mickey Mantle. He did all this while also pursuing his medical degree at Tulane University in New Orleans. The 91-year-old former star third baseman and cardiologist (with a lifetime batting average of .279 with 22 home runs) served as interim president of the Texas Rangers and president of Professional Baseball's American League from 1984 to 1994. During his eight-year career with the Yankees (1946-1952, 1954), he appeared in four World Series (1947, 1949, 1950 and 1951) for New York, batting .439 in 17 games (a record for batters with more than 20 at-bats).



*Baseball card images of "Golden Boy" Bobby Brown*

Brown, who threw right-handed and batted left-handed, gained a reputation for being a "clutch hitter." In baseball parlance, that's a player with a knack for coming up with the "big" hit. For those readers unversed in baseball statistics, a player's batting average is the batter's performance expressed as a ratio of his safe hits per official times at bat (or, more simply expressed, the number of hits divided by the number of times at bat). As a comparison, Ty Cobb holds the Major League record for highest career batting average with .366.

Up until Yogi Berra died on September 22, 2015, at the age of 90, Bobby Brown and Yogi were the only players still alive who played for the Yankees in the 1947 World Series, the first Series for both. Yogi, besides being a great ball player, was famous for his malapropisms and often "out of left field" witticisms known as *Yogi-isms*, such as:

"You can observe a lot just by watching."

"When you come to a fork in the road, take it."

"A nickel ain't worth a dime anymore."

"Nobody goes there anymore. It's too crowded."

"I really didn't say everything I said."

If Brown had not missed the 1952 and 1953 Series to serve in Korea, he would have played through the Yankees' five consecutive World Series wins, from 1949 to 1953, a record still standing today. How did this *wunderkind* get his start?

Bobby Brown was born in Seattle, Washington, the son of William and Myrtle Berg Brown. His father had played as a semi-pro baseball player in Newark, New Jersey. At age ten, young Bobby drop-kicked twenty-four field goals in a contest for young athletes staged by a Seattle newspaper. At age twelve, he was playing American Legion Junior Baseball. He attended Joe DiMaggio's high school, Galileo Academy of Science and Technology in San Francisco, where he was a straight-A student and president of the student body. Even then, the Major League baseball scouts were paying attention.

After high school, he entered Stanford University, planning on a major in chemical engineering. During his time at Stanford, on May 9, 1943, he and another student were involved in the rescue of Coast Guard Radioman Henry Kind from the rough surf after a plane crash. "I had done a lot of ocean swimming off the Atlantic coast so swimming in the ocean didn't bother me," remembered Brown. "But the water was very cold and I didn't want to swim out by myself." For his heroism, Brown received a Coast Guard Silver Lifesaving Medal.



*U.S. Coast Guard Silver Lifesaving Medal*

Two months later, Brown enlisted in the U.S. Navy. The future Yankee was assigned to a naval unit at UCLA and given five semesters to complete his pre-med courses. At the end of 1944, Brown was assigned to Tulane Medical School and given a midshipman's uniform.

While at Tulane Med School, Brown found time to play shortstop for the Green Wave during the 1945 season under Claude "Little Monk" Simons, Jr. Given the nicknames "Tulane Tornado" and "Belting Bobby," Brown hit for a .444 average in 1945, and the Tulane Nine won 21 out of 27 games.

In January 1946, after the Navy, the scouts came calling. The dean of Tulane's Med School became convinced that Brown could play ball and still complete his medical training through a special arrangement that allowed him to attend school during the offseason. On February 18, 1946, Brown signed with the Yankees after being offered a \$50,000 signing bonus. Brown's highest per-season salary while playing ball was \$19,500 (the 1952 and 1954 seasons), which was more than Tulane's Med School dean earned at the time.

A 1947 newspaper article reported, "To see the blond, clean-cut 22-year-old Tulane University student as he bends over his books, you wouldn't think he was the lad who gave the Yankees a badly needed tie in the final and crucial game of the World Series, paving the way for their ultimate victory."

# Series Hero Back At Work Studying Medicine at Tulane

New Orleans, Oct. 27 (AP) It's bacteriology instead of basehits for Bobby Brown these days.

*1947 Headline in the Biloxi Daily Herald*

In Game 4 of the 1949 World Series, "Golden Boy" Brown had a bases-loaded triple followed by a a two-run triple in the championship-clinching Game 5. He tripled again in the final game of the 1950 Series. Teammates joked about his medical studies and called him "Quack," but he found a way to study and play ball. Yogi Berra was his road roommate, and an apocryphal story around for some time concerns the two men. Yogi, who had little formal education, and Brown were both reading in their hotel room: Yogi, a comic book, and Brown his copy of *Boyd's Pathology*. Berra, as he came to the end of his reading material, asked Brown, "So, how is yours turning out?"

As each season ended, often the day after a World Series win, Brown would drive his four-door Chevy back to New Orleans and stayed focused on his studies. "You just had to," Brown said. One Christmas break, he worked at Charity Hospital in New Orleans, delivering three to four babies a day. In an interview in Berra's biography, *Yogi: It Ain't Over*, Brown said he offered to deliver Berra's first child, but for some reason it didn't happen.

After driving back to Tulane after the successful 1949 Series, Bobby met the love of his life, Sara Kathryn French. A Newcomb College psychology major and Tulane's 1950 homecoming queen, Sara was a member of Pi Beta Phi sorority and Bobby was a Deke. According to Bobby, this Dallas beauty "was perfect; she was wonderful." After successfully proposing to Sara, he coached her on closing the deal with her parents:

"Tell your father I'm a third baseman for the Yankees," he said.

"Tell your mother I'm in medical school."

## AFTER SERIES.

# Yank Ace To Marry Dallas Girl

Bobby graduated from Tulane Medical School in 1950, and he and Sara were to be married October 12, 1951. Their wedding was to be shortly after the scheduled end of the World Series between the Yankees and the New York Giants (Mickey Mantle's debut Series and the final one for Joltin' Joe). But after Game Three, a heavy rain looked like it would continue for a few days. Since it was not to be a huge wedding, Bobby called Sara and changed the date to the 16th, a marriage Brown liked to tell folks, like so many ball games, was one "postponed by rain."

When the Korean War broke out, Dr. Brown was eligible for what was known as the "Doctor's Draft," since he had not actually served overseas during World War II. As a result, he was sent to Korea to serve as a U.S. Army surgeon. After missing a year and a half of baseball due to military service in Korea and at the Tokyo Army Hospital, Brown returned to the Yankees in May 1954. The Yankees had lost nine of their first sixteen games, leading Yankees manager Casey Stengel to announce, "Boy, do we need a doctor!"

Brown once told *The Sporting News* in an interview about his future in both medicine and baseball, "Just as long as baseball wants me, I will want baseball. Inevitably, there will be a day when I will have to say to myself, 'The time has come. Hang up your spikes and your uniform, put away the bats, and get down to working out the Oath of Hippocrates.'"

At the age of twenty-nine, he did trade his bat for a stethoscope, serving his internal medicine residency in San Francisco from 1954 through 1957 (he was chief resident the last year). In 1957, Dr. Brown returned to his *alma mater*, Tulane, where he worked under Dr. George Burch on a Fellowship in Cardiology. He entered private practice in Fort Worth, Texas, on August 1, 1958, and practiced cardiology there until 1984. He and his partner were two of the first cardiologists in Fort Worth. The Albert M. Goggans, M.D. and Robert W. Brown, M.D. Regional Heart Center at Baylor Fort Worth is named in their honor.

In 1974, Brown took a leave of absence from his practice to serve as interim president of the Texas Rangers, and ten years later he returned to baseball full-time when he was elected president of the American League. Since that time, he has been a vital member of baseball's management structure, serving on the executive council and the player relations committee.

Brown was was proud of having very few controversies during his tenure as American League President (1984-1994), but there were two key suspensions: Roger Clemens in 1990 for an argument concerning balls and strikes and Albert Belle, who was discovered using an illegal corked bat. Brown was AL President for ten years, before Gene Budig replaced him on August 1, 1994. Nine days later, when Bobby got on a plane to fly home to Texas, the players went on strike, a strike that would end the season and cancel the World Series.

Brown has been an important and active Tulane alumnus, having served as chairman of the Fort Worth Associates committee, as board member and officer of the Alumni Association, as well as a member of the Alumni Admissions Committee and the Green Wave Club. He joined the Tulane University Medical Center Board of Governors in the 1970s and served for 15 years. He was then appointed to the Advisory Board of Governors for the Medical School and to the Tulane Medical Alumni Association.



*Dr. Robert W. "Bobby" Brown*

This decorated veteran of two wars, in addition to his induction into the Tulane Athletics Hall of Fame in 1979, was also named

Outstanding Alumnus in Medicine in 1985. Dr. Brown is also a member of the Athletic Halls of Fame at Stanford University and UCLA, as well as those of Galileo High School, San Francisco Prep and the Greater New Orleans Athletic Hall of Fame. In 1990, he received the Presidential Citation from the American Academy of Otolaryngology, the Branch Rickey Award for Uncommon Service to Baseball in 1992, and has been awarded three honorary university doctorates.

Brown and his wife Sara, who died in 2012, have three children (Dr. Peter S. Brown, Beverly Brown Dale and Kathryn Brown Bailey) and ten grandchildren.



*Yankee Old Timer, Bobby Brown*

Dr. Brown has been a regular at the Yankees' annual Old Timers' Day celebrations, and he's still going strong. Like his old roommate Yogi Berra used to say, "It ain't over till it's over."

## **NED HÉMARD**

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