

INDUCTEE PROFILE

No passing on the 'Buck'

Prior to injury, Bush was climbing Cardinals' ladder

By Neil Rudel

Altoona Mirror

The most accomplished baseball players ever to come out of Altoona and Blair County were Pat Malone and Bobby Ramazzotti.

Both enjoyed long major league careers. In the late 1920s-early 30s, Malone won 134 games with the New York Yankees and Chicago Cubs, was among the league leaders in strikeouts and victories and pitched in three World Series. Ramazzotti, a 1936 Altoona High School graduate, followed and spent eight years with the Cubs and Brooklyn Dodgers.

In between them, another local player was putting together an impressive resume.

Harold "Bucky" Bush spent four years in the St. Louis Cardinals' organization.

At 6-foot-1, he was a big man for his time. He played first base and batted cleanup. He conked 60 home runs in 336 games and batted .303 while being groomed as a potential replacement for Johnny Mize, whose bust resides in Cooperstown.

In those days, there were only eight teams in each league, and each one had far more farm clubs than the half-dozen steps required today. For example, the Cardinals had the most in the major leagues at the time — 25.

Players that progressed up to Class B, which is today's equivalent to Class AA, were valued prospects. In one game, Bush blasted three home runs.

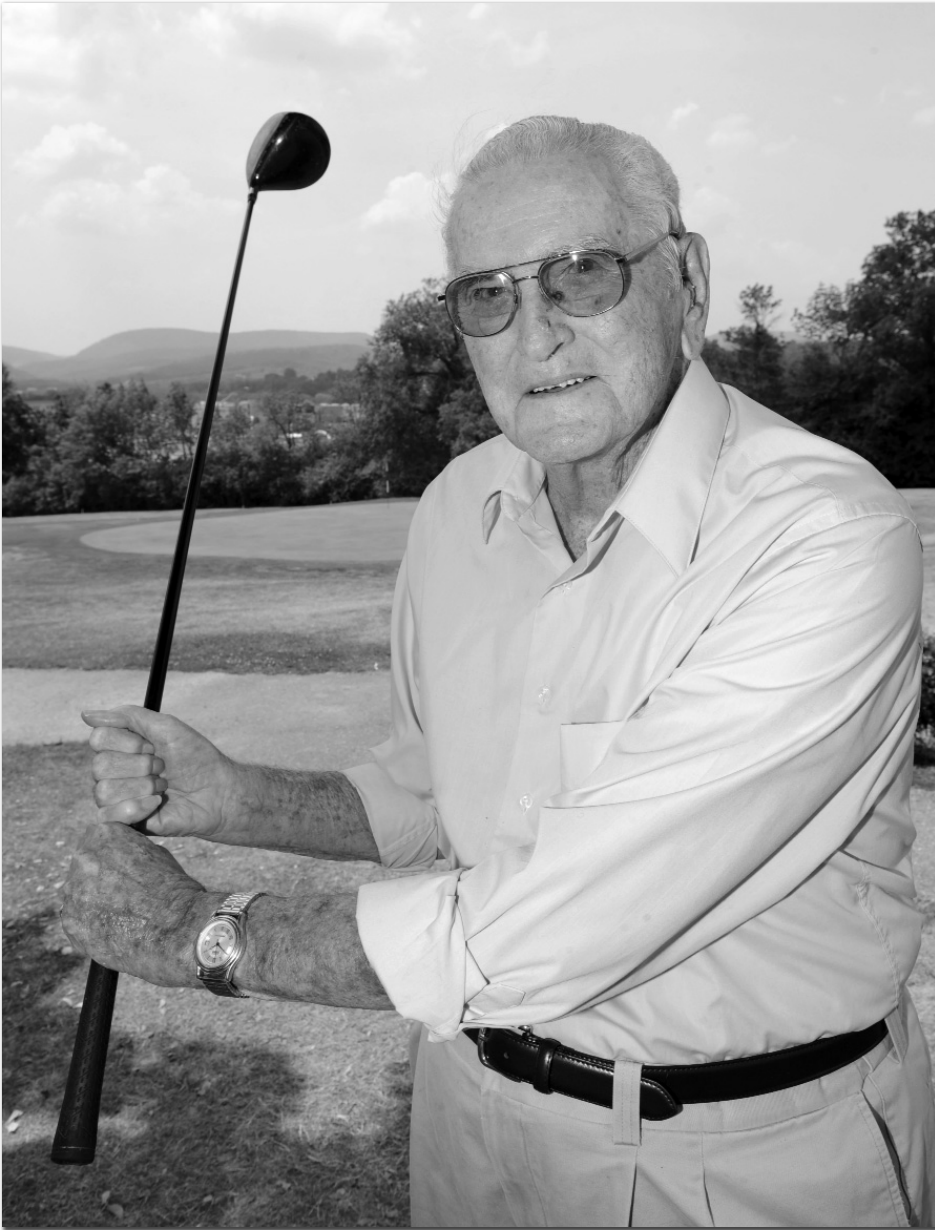
"Back in those days," Bush, now 97 years old and still in good health, said, "If you got a couple hits off a pitcher, you could expect to be knocked down."

Bush was, and the beaming curtailed a promising career in 1941.

But he didn't leave the game



Bucky Bush was a home-run hitter in the St. Louis organization from 1938-41.



Bucky was also an outstanding golfer, with six hole-in-ones.

before leaving an impression with the Cardinals. There was another young prospect on the way up at that time — a fellow named Stan Musial, one of baseball's all-time greats.

Bush and Musial were teammates in Class C Springfield, Mo., Musial hitting third and Bush fourth. There was one problem: Musial also played first base. St. Louis solved that by moving Musial to the outfield.

Bush, a man of few words, had a simple explanation.

"I wasn't fast enough," he said. "He (Musial) could cover a lot of ground so they put him out there and kept me at first."

Musial confirmed the same in a

couple of his autobiographies.

Former Penn State Altoona professor Jerry Wright extensively researched baseball in the 19th and 20th centuries up through the 1960s.

He said players of Bush's era had to overcome much more than they do today.

"Back then, the field conditions weren't all that good," he said. "It obviously wasn't Blair County Ballpark. It was very spartan.

You didn't have trainers and doctors right there in the clubhouse or the dugout — like they do today, at all levels of professional baseball.

"And I know a lot of the players, if they had an injury — even a serious injury — you played through it because you didn't want to lose your spot in the lineup. They didn't wear helmets and gloves weren't nearly as large or elaborate as they are today."

A World War II veteran, Bush spent five years in the U.S. Army Air Corps. After returning home, he worked for the railroad as a policeman and played in the Greater City Baseball League.

"We used to have a lot of good ballplayers here," he said. "Baseball and the railroad were a big thing."

Dick Drabic of Altoona was on City League teams with Bush and played against him, too. Many players from the Pennsylvania Railroad League were good enough for the minor leagues but were better off financially at the railroad.

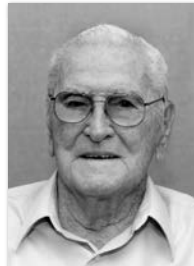
"After the war, the City League was loaded with ballplayers that used to play in the minor leagues, and a lot of them talked him into playing," Drabic said. "The league was very good, and we got huge crowds then. He was a heckuva a good hitter, I can tell you that."

Paul Krus was another teammate in the City League and Blair Twilight League, and he remembers Bush for his humility.

"He was just an awful nice man," Krus said. "He just sort of enjoyed what he was doing. He was very quiet, sort of a private person. Never said much."

Bush married Patricia Glore of Missouri but has been widowed since 1987. The couple had no children.

"I had a happy marriage," he



Bush bio

Sport: Baseball

High school: Altoona

Hall of Fame achievement: Spent four years in the St. Louis Cardinals' organization (1938-41), progressing up to Class B.

Current residence: Hollidaysburg

said. "I was very fortunate."

His niece, Nelliemae Parsons, looks after him.

"He had God-given talent in any sport he's ever done," she said.

"All his family was athletic," nephew David Parsons said.

Bush remains a regular at Park Hills Country Club, playing nine holes a couple of times a week. When he's not playing golf, he'll visit the club for lunch or play cards in the afternoon.

Bush watches lots of baseball on TV, but said, "I'm not a particular fan of any team. I like just like baseball. Every time there's a game on, I watch."

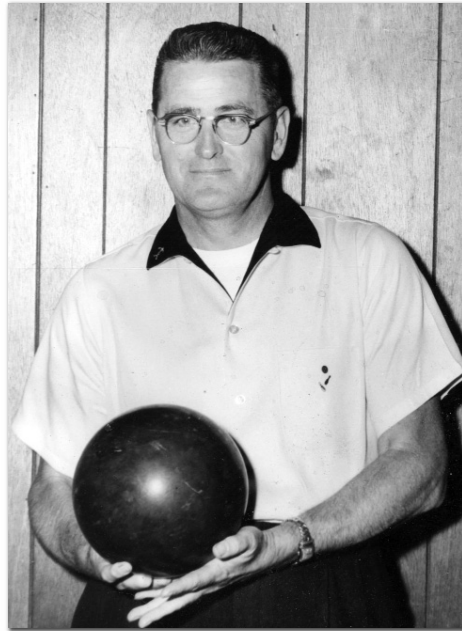
He's carded six hole-in-ones — several on No. 14 at Park Hills — and was a gifted bowler.

"He could get off the tee 300 yards — and that was with the old (pre-metal) woods," Drabic said.

Once Bush is comfortable, he'll open up about his minor-league days.

"I remember him telling stories about Musial," longtime friend Ken Fries said.

"Once you get to know him, he'll speak to you all the time. But he's very



Not long after playing baseball, Bucky took up bowling.

humble."

"To get anything out of him — what he did, where he was — was almost impossible," Drabic said. "I've never seen a guy who had a chance to brag — like 'I played with Musial' —

but never did."

Bob Housel, who is Bush's most regular golf partner, feels the same way.

"Buck never talks about 'I did this or I did that,'" Housel said. "The only time he talks about it is if somebody asks him. I've never heard anybody say a bad word about him. He's a likable gentleman — remarkable, I think. He's so sharp mentally and physically. He plays golf like somebody in their 60s, not somebody in their 90s."

Bush helped the McMahon family build the golf course that used to be off 17th Street.

"We used to have a regular four-some," Housel said. "But everybody else has passed away or can't play golf anymore so we just play nine holes and just take our time and enjoy ourselves. He still hits the ball. You can see he's a natural athlete. He was a top-notch bowler, and his golf swing is smooth."

With one exception, Bush said with a smile.

"The ball's getting closer to us," he said. "You think you hit one well, and it's only 150 yards away."

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