

“Chic” Gandil, the Man who Started the Famous “Seven- teen Straight”

Washington’s Great First
Baseman—His Odd Ex-
periences—Mexico and
the Outlaw League—A
Twelve Thousand Dol-
lar Beauty Who Made
Good as a Clean Up
Hitter



Specially posed for The Baseball Magazine

ARNOLD “CHIC” GANDIL

He wasn’t the only reason that the Washington Club won seventeen straight victories and rose almost overnight from a position at the bottom of the ladder to a place near the top. But if there is any truth in the saying that it is the last straw that breaks the camel’s back, there is much to be said in favor of Gandil’s batting and fielding skill as the finishing touch in the regeneration of a powerful club. Griffith paid the equivalent of twelve thousand dollars for his great first baseman and he was worth it.

THE Washington club was the sensation of 1912. When Griffith waved his magic wand over the dry bones of a chronic loser and roused them to a sudden life that thrilled and electrified the league he performed one of the miracles of baseball. To be sure, he had the mighty Johnson, but against the handicap of non-support that backed his efforts on the slab Johnson had long toiled in vain. Milan had been great before Griffith’s advent, and McBride’s superb fielding was already a fixture at shortstop. But, aside from a trio of stars and perhaps another bare trio of players whose ability was rather in prospect than realization, the little Old Fox of Baseball was compelled to depend upon a mass of untried material. The more Griffith patched that infield and assembled and reassembled its compo-

nent parts the more obvious it seemed that the passing of the comic pantomimist, Schaefer, had left a cavernous void at first. At any rate, the club still floundered in the doldrums of defeat a seething mixture of well-meant energy that barely lacked the needed punch.

And then Griffith, realizing the one weak spot in the lineup, the one detail that spelled failure, reached a somewhat reluctant hand into the lean treasury of the club, drew out the record sum (for Washington) of ten thousand hard round dollars, expressed them to Montreal and took from the Canadian metropolis her sensational young first baseman “Chic” Gandil. Gandil joined the Senators on the last day of May. On the second of June the club began that wonderful series of seventeen successive victories; was transformed in a fort-



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Well-developed shoulder and a muscular throwing arm

night from a perennial loser to a lofty station in the very shadow of the pennant. Had Washington crumbled then its grand performance might well have passed for one of those freaks of baseball which make the game a synonym for uncertainty. But there was no faltering in that defense or offense, no weakening of that powerful team play. The club had risen overnight from the bottom to the top of the ladder. Neither was the change temporary, but permanent and assured. The ten thousand dollars that bought Gandil had proved one of the most profitable investments of hard coin in all the business transactions of baseball.

"Chic" Gandil was born at St. Paul, Minn., on the nineteenth of January, 1889. His fond parents, for he was an only child, wrongly christened him Arnold, not knowing that his fellow teammates and an indulgent baseball public would later label him with the far more widely known and recognized appellation of "Chic." Arnold, Chic, or whatever you choose to call him, moved a year or so later, or rather his parents

did, to Berkeley, California, where they have resided ever since.

"Chic," during the small boy era of his life, pitched, caught, or played the outfield with equal zest, remaining away with studied care from the only position

on the diamond where he was ever to achieve any great notoriety, namely, first base. This continued until he had finished his second year in the Oakland High School, when, having completed his education to his own, if not to his parents', satisfaction, he severed his connection with the dull routine of the schoolroom and started to work.

His first games for money were at Los Angeles with a semi-pro club, where he cheerfully bartered his services for such stray dollars as the attendance warranted on a Sunday game. By this time he was fully determined to be a ball player, and the very next year secured a job with Humbolt, Ariz. In the eyes of the denizens of this benighted community Gandil appeared as a catcher. He was pretty good, though rather slow. The affairs of the league, however, were still slower and, after a checkered month's service, Chic decided there were fallower fields to harvest than the rugged mountains and parched sands of Arizona. Perhaps his choice of localities would not have been so much commended in the light of subsequent events as he chose Mexico. To be sure, that was in the days before Villa changed over night from a bandit to a patriot and the Carranzists had turned the course of the Rio Grande. But Mexico has never been a country which those who looked for quiet and seclusion would choose as their vacation site.

Gandil played at Cananea, some forty miles from the border, where he strove to wean the descendants of the Aztecs and the Spanish conquerors from their favorite bull fights to the less blood-thirsty game of the Gringo. "The Mexicans take to baseball pretty well," says Gandil, commenting on this chapter in his early career. "They are naturally

fond of sport and hum things up a bit on a good, live two-bagger just as they do in the states. I got along all right with them and had a good time while I was there. I was supposed to be a pitcher in those days for I had graduated



from catching and I did pitch most of the time. Just before I left our first baseman took sick. Someone had to fill his shoes or try to, and, as my feet were of good liberal size, they turned the job over to me. Somehow I have never seemed able to break away from the first corner for any great length of time since. That little experience down in Mexico glued me to the bag for keeps.”

Gandil finished the season at Cananea; but one brief outing in Mexico was sufficient. Thereafter he was content to remain on the near side of the Rio Grande.

Nineteen hundred and eight found him at Shreveport where he continued to play first base. He was rising on the ladder, but not enough in his opinion to warrant satisfaction with conditions. And so, finding further progress somewhat obstructed in the strict confines of organized baseball, he listened to the siren voice of the outlaw league and its fabulous salary list. The jingle of promised and substanceless shekels still in his ear, he signed with the nomad club at Fresno, Cal. But he didn't stay long. He describes his own experience thus:

“They (referring to the powers that be in baseball councils) decided that all players who returned to organized baseball on or before May 12 would be reinstated in good standing. I was on time,” said Gandil with a grin, “I jumped to the outlaw league because I thought I could get more money there; I jumped back because the money looked safest in organized baseball.”

This season was a top-liner for Gandil. He took part in 206 games, 77 of them in the outfield and the rest at first base; fielded in sensational form; and batted for the substantial total of .282. The latter part of the season he was sold

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Gandil's ideal build for a first baseman

to the White Sox, but did not report until the following spring.

He kept himself in condition, however, by playing winter baseball with his subsequent famous comrade in arms, Walter Johnson.

“This winter baseball was all right to keep in condition and pretty interesting work,” says Gandil, “and I expected to do pretty well at it financially. But I was disappointed. When we came to draw our dividends for our work there weren't any dividends. I got no money, neither did Johnson.”

Gandil's vicissitudes of fortune didn't end with Arizona, Mexico, the outlaw league, or even winter baseball. He had plenty of novel experience before him as a member of Comiskey's famous band of White Sox. Up to this time, while he had never knocked over any batting averages, Gandil had been a good, reliable clean-up hitter. With the White Sox he suffered, however, an immediate reversal of form, which is one of the most singular effects of the environment. It is not for nothing that the World's Champions of Fielder Jones won the title of “Hitless Wonders.”

Not only have the members of the team been uniformly indifferent or poor hitters, but let a player with a substantial batting average elsewhere don a White Sox uniform and away goes his batting eye. Commenting on this odd and inexplicable circumstance some time since Ed Walsh said: "Nobody can be a great batter and wear a White Sox uniform. I don't know why it is, but that's the truth. Put my sox on Ty Cobb and let him wear my uniform or some other club uniform that would fit him, and he wouldn't hit three hundred."

If the proof of this interesting theory rested on Gandil's experience it would be accepted as gospel truth without a dissenting vote. Seventy-seven games was the distressing total of Gandil's per-

formances with Chicago and during these harrowing contests he annexed 53 hits entitling him to the swollen batting average of .193. Comiskey had been used to weak hitters. The other infielders of the squad were not world-beaters with the willow. But the old Roman who himself taught the world how to play first base had visions of an initial sacker who could beat .193. So he allowed Gandil to slip away to Montreal, where in the clear northern air it was presumable his batting eye might regain something of its former clearness of vision.

It did.

The following season, 1911, Gandil reported to Montreal. He took part in 138 games and batted for .304. The end of the season found several drafts for his services, but the blind luck of the lot exiled him still longer in the minors. According to baseball law but one player could be drafted from a single club and, though several major league owners wanted Gandil, several wanted someone else on the Montreal aggregation. When it came to a drawing of the lots Gandil's name was not the lucky one.

To show that his work for 1911 was far from a flash in the pan Gandil began his 1912 season by playing 29 games for Montreal and batting .309. This satisfied Clark Griffith. He started the machinery in motion, produced the cash, and Gandil was his. And straightway the



Photo by International News Service

Earning a .300 batting average

Montreal maunder proceeded to treat the American League pitchers with as little respect as he had shown those of the supposedly weaker American Association and finished his second instalment of games in the big show, 117 in all, to the substantial figure of .305. This was precisely 112 points better average than his first attempt while with the White Sox.

We have already seen how the Washington club began to win immediately Gandil joined them and that, dating almost from his advent in its new uniform, the lowly Senators startled the world by their celebrated series of seventeen straight. True, Gandil was only one of many factors in this amazing reversal of form, but it is equally true that he supplied two things which Griffith sorely needed, namely, a capable fielder at first base and, second, a clean-up batter to put the driving power behind his fleet-footed but rather weak-hitting club. Gandil did both and the club won. That is the entire story.

Oddly enough, Gandil claims that the best game of his career was the seventeenth of this famous series. During that contest he made three most timely hits and either scored himself or drove in with his trusty bat all the Washington runs.

Seldom has a player possessed a more ideal build for a first baseman than Gandil. Six feet two inches tall, with massive shoulders and a round 197 pounds of seasoned weight, his long reach and rangy build enable him to scoop in all kinds of throws from all kinds of angles and at all kinds of elevations. Since the decline of Chase Gandil is the one man coupled most frequently with McInnes of the Athletics as the greatest first baseman of the American League. There is no doubt that Gandil possesses



Photo by International News Service

Gandil throwing to the plate

"CHIC" GANDIL'S BATTING AVERAGE

Club	Year	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	SB	SH	Av.
Sacramento	1909	206	758	95	214	30	16	7	27	19	.282
Chicago	1910	77	275	21	53	7	3	2	12	7	.193
Montreal	1911	138	520	78	158	13	14	11	30	27	.304
Montreal	1912	29	110	20	34	9	3	2	9	2	.309
Washington		117	443	59	135	20	15	2	21	18	.305
Washington	1913	147	550	62	175	25	8	1	21	13	.318

much the best physique, though McInnes overcomes the handicap of lack of inches by his marvelous skill at one hand stops. Both are better than three hundred hitters. There are laurels enough for both. Let Griffith once realize his dearest ambition and win the pennant in the American League and Gandil's name will shine no less brightly for first honors than his present peerless rival on the Athletics' \$100,000 infield.

As a baserunner Gandil is not exceptionally good. There is a wealth of fast material on that club with no help from him. What is most needed is the timely wallop, and this important aid he has been most ready and able to give.

Last season was Gandil's best, a safe indication that his good work since he entered the major leagues is a steady gait, one that he can maintain and even better on occasion. His substantial average of .318 is one to command respect at any position on any club.

While he was at Montreal Gandil was a firm friend of Jean Dubuc, the Tiger pitching star. This friendship, however, has impaired not a whit the effectiveness of Jean's celebrated slow ball on his old comrade. And Gandil cheerfully admits that he finds Dubuc the most diffi-

cult pitcher in the entire circuit to connect with when a bingle is most needed.

"Chic" played football while on the high school team in California, finding quarterback most suited to his tastes. Since that time, however, his outdoor sports have been confined to hunting and fishing, both of which appeal to his innate love of the open air.

Of indoor sports bowling is chief in his estimation. In short, so favorably does he think of this pastime that he has invested in the business and finds an agreeable occupation in the winter months in running bowling alleys in his adopted home, Washington.

Gandil was married not long after his baseball career developed from the pipe-dream stage to that point where it meant an assured revenue in the pay envelope. He has one child, a daughter.

His ambition is to some day take part in a world series contest with Walter Johnson in the box. With an even break in luck he is ready to back the great speed king against the world. "If somebody would stop those Athletics," he says, "we might get our chance this year. Perhaps we will get it anyway. Who knows?"

"CHIC" GANDIL'S CAREER IN MINIATURE

His name is Arnold Gandil, universally known as "Chic."

He was born in St. Paul, Minn., Jan. 19, 1889, though most of his early life was spent in the neighborhood of Oakland, Cal.

In his younger days he pitched, caught, and played the outfield; almost everything except first base.

He left the Oakland High School at the end of his second year to play semi-pro ball in Los Angeles.

His first professional engagement was with Humbolt, Arizona, as a catcher.

His second engagement was at Cananea, Mex., where he pitched most of the season, filling in at first base the last few games as the regular incumbent was sick.

He became a regular first baseman in 1908 at Shreveport.

He jumped to the outlaw league the following year because he thought he could get more money. He jumped back again for the same reason.

He played over two hundred games with Sacramento in 1909, being purchased by the White Sox in the fall.

He played winter baseball with Walter Johnson but neither made any money.

His season's work with the White Sox was unsatisfactory as he batted but .193, so was sent to Montreal.

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WASHINGTON BASE BALL CLUB
OF THE
AMERICAN LEAGUE

CLARK C. GRIFFITH
MANAGER

OFFICES, 334-335 SOUTHERN BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D. C.

St. Louis, June 8th, 1914.

F. C. Lane, Esq.,
Editor Baseball Magazine,
70 Fifth Avenue,
New York City.

Dear Mr. Lane:-

I gave the equivalent of \$12,000 for "Chic" Gandil, taking the chance that he was the one addition necessary to my club's success. He proved to be "The Missing Link" needed to round out my infield. We won seventeen straight games after he joined the club, which shows that we must have been strengthened a good bit somewhere.

I class Gandil ahead of McInnes as he has a greater range in scooping up throws to the bag and is just as good a batsman.

Sincerely yours,

He was purchased by Clark Griffith in 1911 for the equivalent of \$12,000 and immediately thereafter the club started on its great spurt of "seventeen straight victories."

He has an ideal build for a first baseman, standing six feet two and weighing near two hundred pounds.

He is married and has one daughter.

His winter home is in Washington where he owns some bowling alleys.

With the possible exception of McInnes he is the greatest first baseman in the American League.

