

Hack Wilson

Early Superstar - Late Tragedy

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Gone AND forgotten might well describe Hall of Famer Lewis Robert "Hack" Wilson, one of the really early superstars of the national pastime. Born April 26, 1900 in Elwood City, PA, Wilson spent parts of three years in the minor leagues before being brought up to the New York Giants by John McGraw in 1924. In 1930 Wilson had his greatest year, hitting 56 home runs (still a National League record), 190 RBIs (still a major league record), a .356 batting average, 208 hits and 423 total bases. Wilson was the premier power hitter in the league, and the highest paid player in the game except for Babe Ruth.

But, despite his impressive statistics as a player, Wilson, when remembered at all, is remembered mostly for his off the field antics. Although a heavy drinker and a brawler even with his own teammates, Wilson was very popular with the fans. In fact he received the nickname "Hack" when a New York newspaper held a contest to give him a nickname and the winning entry was "Hackenschmidt" for the legendary wrestler of the day, George Hackenschmidt.

Wilson left the Cubs after the 1931 season and played for Brooklyn in 1932 and 1933 and divided his time between Brooklyn and Philadelphia in 1934. He ended his career in 1935 after playing in only 59 games for Albany in the International League.

Wilson came upon hard times after his retirement from baseball and although he had earned more than \$200,000 during his career, died penniless. Wilson died in 1948 at age 48 and only a small grant from the National League saved him from a pauper's grave. He is buried in Martinsburg, West Virginia.