



Waite Hoyt: Hall of Fame Pitcher Play-by-play Announcer and Once a Mason ©

by Sir Knight **Dr. Ivan M. Tribe**, KYCH, KCT, 33

In recent years major league baseball players who go on to become pay-by-play announcers have become fairly common, but such was not always the case. In recent decades one can think of Jerry Coleman, Joe Nuxhall, Don Drysdale, Herb Score, and, perhaps most obviously, the late Dizzy Dean. Still, there were others who pioneered in the trade.

One of the best who also earned his niche in the Hall of Fame at Cooperstown was Waite Hoyt, who was the ace right hander of the New York Yankees at nearly the same time that Brother Herb Pennock was their southpaw, hurling star. After two decades in the majors, Hoyt went into sportscasting and spent even longer in that field, putting in nearly a quarter century broadcasting Cincinnati Reds' games.

Waite Charles Hoyt was born in Brooklyn, New York, on September 9, 1899. The Hoyts were in fact longtime residents of Brooklyn. Waite's father had been in the clothing business but

switched his employment to Swift and Company when it appeared that there was little opportunity for advancement with the firm of L. Heller and Sons.

Kids growing up in Brooklyn in those days developed an early interest in baseball, and Waite was no exception. At first he wanted to be a second baseman (an early idol was Larry Doyle of the Giants); he soon afterward became a pitcher because his original team lacked uniforms, but another unit that had them needed someone who could throw hard. On such immature judgment, great decisions are sometimes made.

Young Hoyt soon proved himself to be a hard thrower and soon attracted attention from professional scouts.

The Baltimore Federal League team showed an interest in 1915; however, the parents objected to him leaving at fifteen, and he did not sign although he did sign with the hometown New York Giants prior to his sixteenth birthday and ended the season pitching batting practice for John McGraw's National League team.

The next season as a sixteen-year-old boy, the youth divided his time between Mt. Carmel in the Penn State League and Hartford of the Eastern League compiling impressive won-lost records of 5-1 and 4-5, respectively. Apparently his control could have been better in Connecticut as he walked forty-four batters while striking out only half that number.

Two more years in the minors saw the still teenaged hurler dividing his time between the Southern League and the International. While his won-lost record appeared unfavorable, his earned run averages were quite good, being 3.23 during a stint at Memphis and a much stronger 2.51, 2.73, and 2.10 at the other locales.

In between longer service at Nashville and Newark in 1918, the eighteen-year-old Hoyt made his major league debut on July 24, 1918, pitching one inning for the Giants and giving up no hits and striking out two batters.

The Giants subsequently traded Hoyt to Rochester of the international League, but he refused to report and not being under contract to them, instead started 1919 pitching for the independent Baltimore Drydocks.

This made him a virtual "free agent," and in mid-season he signed with the Boston Red Sox with the stipulation that he be allowed to start a game within four days. Manager Ed Barrow thought this was a "fresh" demand for a teenager, but he honored it, and Hoyt soon started a game against Detroit and beat them 2-1 in twelve innings. Waite went 4-6 that year and 6--6 in 1920.

On December 15, 1920, the now twenty-one-year-old hurler was traded to the New York Yankees as part of an eight player deal, and his climb to baseball greatness really began.

Waite Hoyt spent nearly a full decade with the Bronx Bombers and made most of his major achievements with that club. Having the advantage of a strong team behind him, Hoyt, along with such noted figures as Herb Pennock and Carl Mays (both Masons), managed to be on six pennant-winning teams in that period and to compile an enviable World Series record of 6-3,

pitching 27 innings in the 1921 post season game without giving up an earned run. (He did give up two unearned runs in the final game, suffering a heartbreaking loss.) He also had several strong seasons in this period as well, winning an excess of twenty games in two seasons (1927 and 1928) and nineteen in two other seasons (1921 and 1922). Over his nine full seasons with the club, he averaged seventeen wins per season. Should anyone be surprised that he once quipped, "The secret of success is to play for the New York Yankees."

During the course of his 1927 season when the Yankees had perhaps the greatest team in the game's history, Waite Hoyt also became a Mason in Kings County Lodge No. 511 in his native Brooklyn. Taking his degrees over the course of the season, he was initiated an Entered Apprentice on April 19, 1927 (a day when Bob Shawkey took a 1-0 loss to the Red Sox); was passed a Fellowcraft on June 29, 1927 (George Pipgras pitched his team to an 8-2 victory over the Red Sox); and was raised a Master Mason on September 27, 1927 (the Yanks took Washington 15-5 behind the pitching of Urban Shocker).

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Other Masons on that team included center fielder, Earl Combs, and left-handed pitcher, Herb Pennock.

Brother Hoyt apparently became a member of the Tall Cedars of Lebanon as he was so pictured in a charity game they sponsored, and on October 18, 1929, Hoyt affiliated with Larchmont Lodge No. 1030 and demitted from Kings County eleven days later.

After going 22-7 in that fabulous year, Hoyt did as well in 1928 going 23-7. In three World Series appearances in those great seasons, he won three games. In 1929, however, he experienced an off-year going 10-9 while the Yankees lost the pennant to a resurging Philadelphia team. In addition, Miller Huggins died near the season's end, and on May 30, 1930, Waite Hoyt and shortstop Mark Koenig were traded to the Detroit Tigers.

In the Motor City he recovered some of his older skills, going 9-8 for the remainder of the season, but his ERA jumped to 4.73. After starting off even worse in 1931, the once superb hurler compiled a 3-8 record, and the Tigers placed him on waivers in June.

Connie Mack hoped that the onetime "Schoolboy" could help the Athletics, who were in the thick of another pennant race, and his hunch proved correct. Waite went 10-5 in the remainder of 1931, but he lost the fifth game of the World Series 5-1 for his final appearance in the Fall Classic.

Mack would have signed Hoyt again in 1932, but he agreed instead to give the veteran pitcher his release so he could sign with his hometown team, the Dodgers. That proved to be a mistake, and in mid-season he went to the Giants. Overall his 1932 record was 6-10, and his

ERA was 4.35. In many respects it was the low point of his career as he had posted at least ten victories in every season since first coming to the Yankees in December 1920.

In a retrospective interview in 1976, the Hall of Fame pitcher credited this weak performance to domestic difficulties. In the summer of 1931, Hoyt testified in a divorce case on behalf of his former Yankee teammate, "Jumping Joe" Dugan. Waite's wife, Dorothy Pyle Hoyt, testified for Mrs. Dugan and not long after went to Reno to establish a Nevada residence herself. On May 12, 1933, Waite, who had signed with the Pittsburgh Pirates a few months earlier, married again to Ellen Burbank.

It may have been a more stable home life that did it, but whatever, Hoyt found himself again in Pittsburgh. In four full seasons and part of another with the Bucs, Brother Hoyt recovered part of his old form and proved himself an effective spot-starter and reliever. His best year with the Pirates was 1934 when he went 15-6 with a 2.92 ERA. In all, his days in Pittsburgh show his win-loss totals at 35-31, hardly up to his old form, but respectable.

Released by the Pirates in June 1937, the Dodgers again signed him, and he went 7-7 in 38 appearances, posting a 3.23 ERA; however, after a half dozen ineffective appearances in 1938 with three losses and no victories, the now thirty-eight-year-old, aging "Schoolboy" hung up his glove for major league play, but pitched in several games for the semi-pro Brooklyn Bushwicks. In all, his major league pitching record was 237-182 with a 3.59 ERA. In addition, he went 6-4 in World Series' play with a 1.81 ERA.

Waite Hoyt had several experiences with show business having once toured with a vaudeville act in the off-season, but he had also hosted a short term radio program as early as 1937. He decided to opt for a future in radio.



He hosted a variety of pre- and post-game shows in New York until January 1942, when the Burger Brewing Company of Cincinnati hired him to be a play-by-play announcer for Reds' games. From 1948 through 1954, those Reds' games that were televised also had the advantage of Hoyt's announcing work.

He remained at this position for 24 years becoming a favorite with fans: in addition to his fine coverage of the games, he was virtually unparalleled in being able to draw on his years of experience and discuss them during rain delays.

In the winter months, Hoyt often had a television sports' program, The Waite Hoyt Hall of Fame, in which he interviewed various celebrity athletes including Rio Grande College basketball legend, Bevo Francis.

In the early sixties, a long-play album of his stories, titled *The Best of Waite Hoyt in the Rain*, was released and eagerly sold to his many fans. Hoyt was especially in prime form in discussing his many experiences with the legendary, Babe Ruth, his teammate on the great Yankee assemblages of the roaring twenties. In fact, he also proved a valuable oral source to both amateur and professional baseball historians. In fact, Frank Graham, who wrote *The New York Yankees*, In 1943 is supposed to have shared his royalties with Hoyt, who contributed most of the information on the 1921-1930 era. He also contributed to other works of baseball history as a source of information including the lengthy introduction to G. H. Fleming's

Murderer's Row: The 1927 New York Yankees (1985), which he completed only a few months before his own death in 1984.

Waite Hoyt retired after the 1965 season because Burger Brewing lost the radio broadcasting franchise. (In those days, the broadcasters were employed by the sponsors: today they are employed by the ball club.) However, in 1972 he came back as co-announcer on the telecasts and then retired for good. Nevertheless, he continued to be well known in the Cincinnati area.

According to Sir Knight Norman Lincoln of Eaton, Ohio, he never charged for his services when he spoke to Masonic groups, which is ironic because according to the records of the Grand Lodge of New York, he had been suspended for non-payment of dues on November 19, 1935. (Does anyone know if he held later lodge membership in another state?)

Elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1969, Hoyt later served on the Veteran's Committee for Hall of Fame selection. He remained an honored statesman of the game until his death in Cincinnati on August 25, 1984. The Brooklynite had been a resident of the Queen City for half of his life.

Note: The best source of information for Waite Hoyt is the interview in Eugene C. Murdock's *Baseball Between the Wars* (Meckler, 1992), pp. 23-62, as well as Frank Graham's *The New York Yankees* (Putnam, 1943) and G. H. Fleming's *Murderer's Row* (Morrow, 1985). Thanks also to the staff at the Grand Lodge of New York and to Sir Knight Norman Lincoln of Eaton, Ohio, and Sir Knight Peter Westbere of Guelph, Ontario, for pictures.

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[Top](#)