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Bill Lee

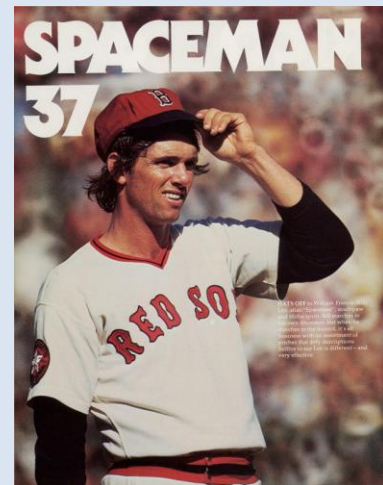


For 14 years as a left-handed pitcher (1969 – 1982) with the Boston Red Sox and the Montreal Expos, “Spaceman” was anything but a conventional major league ballplayer. His career record was a respectable 119-90, including three consecutive 17-win seasons with the Red Sox (1973 – 1975) and a 16-win season with the Expos in 1979. He was selected to the American League All-Star squad in 1973 and pitched in the World Series in 1975 against the Cincinnati Reds. But it was Lee’s rebellious spirit and opposition to the conservative baseball establishment that usually rated more attention than his performance on the field.

Lee was one of the game’s few counterculture symbols: he talked to animals, championed environmental causes, practiced yoga, ate health foods, sprinkled marijuana on his buttermilk pancakes (an indiscretion for which he was fined \$250 by Commissioner Bowie Kuhn), pondered Einstein and Vonnegut, quoted from Mao, and studied Eastern philosophers and mystics. It was in this context that former Red Sox teammate John Kennedy first dubbed him “Spaceman”, a nickname writers thereafter used as shorthand to describe his free spirit.

A folk hero to fans, Lee was a voice of reason and sanity in a game corrupted by “Planet-polluting owners” and the corporate mindset. Although he often crossed swords with management, matching wits with their authority, Lee, in hindsight, can be viewed not as a rebel but as a “purist” and “traditionalist”. In his freewheeling autobiography, “The Wrong Stuff” (1984), Lee argued his case: “I hated the Designated Hitter and all the other new wrinkles that had been introduced in an attempt to corrupt the game. I wanted to go back to natural grass, pitchers who hit, Sunday doubleheaders, day games, and the nickel beer.”

When Bill was given his walking papers by the Montreal Expos in 1982, only the chapter of his life dealing with major league baseball was closed. In 1988, Bill ran for President of the United States for the Rhinoceros Party. Spaceman, on what he would do if elected” “My policy would be no guns; no butter. They’ll both kill you.” He still plays baseball whenever and wherever he can; participating in fantasy camps and organized leagues or competing in whatever sandlot games he can get into. “I just don’t want to look fat when they bury me”, says Bill.



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