



Lee Handley

Lives in Decatur, Illinois.

## **Column: Coach Handley recalls early days with Santo**

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Lee Handley once had the distinction of batting between Hall of Fame outfielder Billy Williams and the late Ron Santo. It happened in 1959 when the Decatur man was an outfielder for San Antonio in the Texas League.

"Williams hit No. 3, I hit No. 4 and Santo hit No. 5," Handley recalled in a 1980s Herald & Review article. "I knew those guys would make it to the big leagues," Handley said.

"Toward the end of the season, Billy got mad and went home to Alabama. It had to do with the kind of housing he was getting in Texas. The Chicago Cubs didn't want to lose him, so they promoted him to the majors to finish the season. He was on his way.

"After that season in San Antonio, Santo went to the Cubs, too. I believe he will be in the Hall of Fame some day."

Santo played third base 15 years with the Cubs, putting up Hall of Fame numbers. Afterwards, he was a beloved Cubs broadcaster for 21 years. He died at age 70 in Arizona Dec. 3, denied Hall of Fame recognition.

Terry Howley, the former Decatur mayor, remembers a Decatur event many years ago involving Santo and Handley: "St. Teresa High School baseball sponsored the Cubs Caravan in Decatur for almost 10 years. We did this as a service to the city and to raise funds for the baseball program. Each year a different personality would act as master of ceremonies.

"This particular year Ron Santo was to be the MC in the Knights of Columbus Hall. I took the liberty of contacting a friend in the Cubs front office to tell Santo that a former teammate, Lee Handley, would attend the luncheon. "When Ron began his remarks to the estimated 600 in attendance, he asked Lee to stand and be recognized. Ron then proceeded to tell a story about when he and Lee played together with the Cubs organization in San Antonio and in Tacoma. "(It was) quite a compliment for Lee, who missed a call up to the major leagues in 1960."

That winter, Handley was traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers in a deal in which the Cubs obtained Don Zimmer. "Ernie Banks was in my way," Handley said.

Handley played for three teams in 1961 - Omaha and Dallas of the American Association and Spokane of the Pacific Coast League - and then retired after he was traded to the New York Mets.

"I gave myself five years to reach the major leagues. When I didn't make it, I knew it was time to quit. The Mets were stumbling and I didn't want any part of that."

His overall batting average in six seasons was .311. He broke into baseball with Paris of the Midwest League, hitting .360.

An Illinois State University athlete from Chicago Amundsen High School, Handley coached baseball at St. Teresa for two years, coached 10 years at Stephen Decatur High School and coached at Lakeview High School. He also was manager of the Decatur American Legion Post 105 baseball team His 1978 Legion team advanced to the state tournament.

At age 75, Handley is battling knee problems.