

#A - Jacob Fields Wade, Jr. – Jake “Whistling Jake” Wade

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References:

SABR MILB Database

Baseball Reference

The Sporting News

Detroit News

Joe (Boy) Willis, Carteret County, North Carolina, Baseball Historian

“Nuggets on the Diamond”, Dick Dobbins - author

In the sandy soil of Carteret County, North Carolina, young boys were schooled in a tough brand of baseball. They emulated their fathers, uncles, and community leaders who held regular jobs during the week in the whaling and fishing community of Morehead City and played baseball in leagues on the weekend. The spirited local nine was tough, smart, scrappy, hard working and on occasion settled slights and disagreements with the area competition with their fists. These men played the game because they loved it. Baseball was not their occupation. It was their avocation. They shared this love with their sons.

Jacob Fields Wade, Jr. was born on April 1, 1912 in Morehead City, North Carolina. His father, Jacobs Fields Wade, Sr. had moved to Carteret County in the late 1800's from Massachusetts. He was a whaler and ship builder and moved to this Southern Coastal Community to build a life for his family. Earlier, he had married Love Styron and together they raised a family of eleven. The four boys were Rupert – who died in an accident, Charles Winfield “Wink”, Jake, and the youngest brother Ben. The daughters were Carita, Maidie, Eudora, Duella, Eleanor, Hazel, and Josephine.

Jake Wade attended school at the Charles S Wallace School in Morehead City from 1918-1929. Jake played high school baseball for Wallace, where he started out as a First Baseman because of his height, the coach quickly moved him to the pitching staff as he developed into a dominant pitcher who was difficult to beat. His competitors hated to bat against him, yet they often spoke of his wicked curve and sinker, and how he would enhance his pitches with a special foreign substance often used by pitchers of his day.

Baseball was to become a family business for the Wade Boys. Older brother Winfield “Wink” Wade was the first to graduate from Wallace School. “Wink”, also known locally as “Croaker”, was an excellent player in his own right and went to North Carolina State College to play baseball. Jake would follow his brother to State College to play ball. Jake attended the college from 1929-1931. Again, Jake started out at First Base, but was quickly moved to pitcher and then to starting pitcher based on the strength of his arm and ability to get movement on his pitches.

“Wink” later played in the minor leagues in the Detroit Tiger System and had a short stint with the major league club as an outfielder. He moved to Beaumont, Texas to work as an engineer. It was there he met Tiger Scout Jack Zeller. “Wink” told Zeller of his little brother’s high hard fastball and sweeping curveball. It did not hurt that the strapping 6’ 2” Jake was a left-handed hurler for his college team at North Carolina State College. Zeller signed Jake Wade and placed him with Raleigh in the Piedmont League. Later, Jake would assist younger brother Ben Wade make the move from Wallace School baseball to professional baseball. Ben pitched in the National League during the 1950’s for Chicago, Brooklyn (he was 11-9 with the 1952 pennant winners), St. Louis, and Pittsburgh. Ben worked for the Dodger Organization after baseball as a scout.

Jake Wade's first professional baseball experience began in 1931 with Raleigh North Carolina in the Piedmont League. He pitched in nine games, with a 1-0 Win-Loss record, pitching in 27 innings, allowing 30 hits, while striking out 23 batters, giving up 20 walks, earning a 4.67 ERA. Later during the 1931 season he moved to Evansville of the Three I league appearing in 18 games for that ball club, with a 4-3 record, recording 97 innings pitched, allowing 97 hits, while striking out 57 batters, giving up 60 base on balls, while earning a 3.43 ERA.

In 1932, Jake began the season as the property of the Evansville ball club; he was released to Decatur prior to the season. In turn, Decatur released him to Moline of the Mississippi Valley league. He pitched in 33 games in 1932, with a 10-18 record, pitching in 221 innings, while allowing 212 hits, including 200 strikeouts, walking 135 batters, and finishing the year with a 3.87 ERA. His year included a one hit shutout performance over 7 innings winning 2-0 versus Davenport on June 27, 1932. Jake was voted Second Team Mississippi League All Star Pitcher in 1932. At the end of the season, Jake was optioned to Beaumont of the Texas League.

Jake began 1933 as property of the Beaumont Texas League ball club, and then was released to Shreveport in May of 1933. For Beaumont, Wade pitched in 10 games, earning a 1-5 Won-Loss record, pitching in 52 innings, allowing 58 hits and 40 walks, while recording 37 strikeouts, and finishing with a 6.23 ERA. For the Shreveport Louisiana Dixie League team, Jake pitched in 30 games, recording two shutouts, earning a 9-9 recording, pitching in 182 innings, allowing 206 hits and 84 base on balls, while recording 107 strikeouts, and finishing this stint with a 5.09 ERA. Jake's was recalled to the Beaumont ball club in September of 1933 for the 1934 season.

1934 would prove to be a pivotal year for Jake Wade, continuing to pitch in Beaumont in the Texas league, Jake would have his best year in his short minor league career. He would earn a 14-11 Win-Loss recording with an impressive ERA of 2.70. Jake pitched in 35 games, finish 13 complete games and recording 210 innings pitched. Over the year, Jake allowed 170 hits and 111 walks, while striking out 107 opposition batters. The Detroit Tigers were watching Jake from afar and he was optioned to Detroit in September.

In 1935, Detroit invited Jake to spring training at Lakeland, Florida in March of 1935. There he trained with the major league club and they moved him to Portland of the Pacific Coast League before camp broke. He pitched in 40 games for the Portland Team, working an impressive 263 innings for the team while recording a 17-15 record. Jake allowed 235 hits and 166 walks over this stretch, while striking out 153 batters. Jake hit 8 opposition hitters for the year and earned a 3.98 ERA. Dick Dobbins spins a delightful tale in his book, "Nuggets on the Diamond" of an episode from the 1935 season:

"During the 1935 season, the Mission Reds were playing a series in Portland's Vaughn Street Park. It was "Jake Wade Day," with Wade pitching the first game of a Sunday doubleheader. Reds center fielder Lou Almada was having a field day against Wade. Anything Wade tossed up to the plate, Almada hit out of reach of the Beavers' defenders. The two began jawing at each other. Wade became more angry with each Almada success, and by the end of the game, he was angry and embarrassed. "Between games, both teams retired to their respective clubhouses. After a few minutes, there was a knock on the Reds' clubhouse door. Outside stood John 'Moose' Clabaugh, the burly Portland outfielder. Clabaugh was there as Wade's second for a showdown with Almada. Manager Gabby Street told both players to take off their cleats and go out to settle their differences. Almada made quick work of Wade as Clabaugh passively stood by. "Beavers pitcher Sailor Bill Posedel later told the Missions' George McDermott that Clabaugh had urged Wade to challenge Almada. Clabaugh didn't care at all for Wade and was confident Almada could beat him. Ah, teammates."

Jake Wade was known by his nickname, "Whistling Jake", not for his fastball but for his fondness of imitating songbirds. A Detroit sportswriter once said of Jake, "he whistles like a mockingbird and he pitches like a

kangaroo.” The sportswriter was referring to the control of Jake Wade. He fought his control his entire pitching career.

Again, for the 1936 season Jake would make the trip to Lakeland with the major league ball club. He left camp on the major league roster for the Tigers. Jake “Whistling Jake” Wade made his major league debut on April 22, 1936. He was sent down to Montreal of the International league soon after the start of the major league season for additional work. With Montreal, he earned a record of 6-8 while pitching in 24 games including 11 starts, 4 complete games, and two shutouts. Jake pitched in 94 innings, allowing 97 hits, and 45 walks, while striking out 70 opposition hitters. Jake finished his stint with Montreal with a 4.88 ERA. In late July, he was brought back up to the major league ball club because of injuries to the Detroit Tiger pitching staff. For the year, Jake would pitch in 13 games of the Tigers, with 11 starts, four complete games, one shutout, and earning a 4-5 Win-Loss record in his first major league season. He pitched in 78.1 innings, allowing 93 hits and 52 walks, while striking out 30 and earning a lackluster 5.29 ERA.

In March of 1937, Jacobs Fields Wade, Jr. would marry the former Rosalie Watson.

1937 would additionally prove to be his best season in the major leagues, the whistling left hander earned a 7-10 record for the Tigers in 33 appearances, including 25 starts, 7 complete games, and one shutout. He recorded 165.1 innings pitched, while allowing 160 hits and 107 walks, he recorded 69 strikeouts while earning a 5.39 ERA. Mickey Cochrane was the player/manager for the Detroit Tigers this season.

Jake finished the year by hurling his best game on the last day of the season. Cleveland hurler John Thomas Allen was going for his 16th consecutive victory of the year. He had not been defeated all year. Allen needed one victory to tie, Joe Wood, Walter Johnson, Bob Grove, and Lynwood Rowe for 16 consecutive wins in one season. “Whistling Jake” matched Allen pitch for pitch. Detroit led the game 1-0. H. G. Salsinger, Sports Editor of the Detroit News would later write, “It was about time for Wade to crack. He had a well-earned reputation as a crumbling pitcher. He got nervous and excited and tightened up in the tough going and the going on this afternoon was tough, if it ever was.”

The Detroit press corps had been tough on Jake as throughout his career his control had been his weakness. He had a major league arm and major league stuff. His control was his great flaw and had limited his progression. At the end of the fifth inning, the score was still 1-0. Jake and John Allen were pitching a masterpiece. The end of sixth, seventh, and eighth innings found the score still 1-0. In the ninth, Detroit was still leading 1-0 with Cleveland at bat. “Whistling Jake” had just given up his 4th walk of the day by walking Indian Lynford Lary. Kroner of the Indian Squad sacrificed Lary to second base who was now in scoring position. Averill was the next batter and he hit a fly ball. Two Out.

Jake Wade had a one hitter going to this point of the game and Hal Trosky was the only Indian to get a hit – he was the next batter. Old Jake bore down and struck Trosky out and John Allen lost his chance at a record. Jake Wade, the whistling southpaw hurler, pitched one of the best games of the year, and may have delivered the best game of any American League left-hander of the year. Jake later told reporters, “That’s the way I should have been pitching in April. I do everything backwards.”

In 1938, the Detroit Tiger’s had lost faith in Jake and his control issues. He pitched in 27 games for the season, with 2 spot starts, earning a 3-2 record and a 6.56 ERA. Jake struck out 23 hitters in 70 innings pitched. He allowed 73 hits and walked 48 batters. On December 15, 1938, he was traded by the Detroit Tigers to the Boston Red Sox in a deal that included Elden Auker and Chet Morgan going to the Sox with Pinky Higgins and Archie McKain going to the Tigers.

Jake Wade started the 1939 season with the Boston Red Sox. The Sox pitched Jake in 20 games for the year including 6 spot starts, along with one complete game, while he earned a meager 1-4 record and a 6.23 ERA. He struck out 21 opposition hitters over 47.2 innings pitched. Jake allowed 68 hits and 37 walks. He was sold by the Red Sox to the St. Louis Browns on September 6, 1939. For the Browns, he had 4 appearances with 2

starts, earning a 0-2 record and a 11.02 ERA. He pitched in 16.1 innings for the Browns at the end of the year, while allowing 26 hits and 19 base on balls.

Jake Wade would go down to minors in the 1940 season to work on his control in an attempt to rehabilitate his career. He started the 1940 season with the Toledo Mud Hens of the American Association. Jake earned a 2-2 record with a 7.15 ERA for the Mud Hens, while pitching in 22 games and 34 innings under manager James Taylor. The Hens finished the season in 7th place with a final record of 59-90. On December 5, 1940, he was sold by the St. Louis Browns to the Cincinnati Reds.

Jake would start the 1941 season pitching for the Indianapolis Indians of the American Association. He recorded a 0-1 record and a 9.00 ERA with a brief stint in Indianapolis and went home to North Carolina to rehabilitate a sore arm. He signed with the New Bern Bears and the Goldsboro Goldbugs in the Coastal Plain league as a player manager and earned a 12-9 record and 2.44 ERA in this local independent league.

In 1942, Jake would get back to the major leagues by earning a roster spot with the Chicago White Sox. Wade pitched in 15 games, starting 10 games, finishing 3 complete games, while throwing in 85.2 innings. He earned a respectable 5-5 record and a 4.10 ERA. Jake struck out 32 batters, allowed 84 hits, and walked 56 batters during the season. This season was considered a success in light of he was in the minor leagues and out of Major league baseball over the previous two seasons.

His improvement continued over the 1943 season with the Chicago White Sox, he appeared in 21 games, with 9 starts, 3 complete games, and one shut out over the season. He earned a 3-7 record and a much improved 3.01 ERA. Jake pitched in 83.2 innings while allowing 66 hits and 54 walks. He struck out 41 batters for the year.

The White Sox continued to use Jake as a spot starter in 1944. He appeared in 19 games, including 5 starts, 1 complete game, while earning a 2-4 record, and a 4.82 ERA. Jake pitched in 74.2 innings, while allowing 75 hits and 41 walks. He struck out 35 hitters during the year. On December 15, 1944, he was traded by the White Sox to the New York Yankees for Johnny Johnson. In February of 1945, Jake Wade joined the Navy and served his country in World War II and he left the service in January of 1946.

Jake Wade returned to professional baseball and civilian life and joined the New York Yankees in 1946. He pitched in 13 games for the Yanks with one start. Jake earned a 2-1 record and a 2.29 ERA while pitching in 35.1 innings. He struck out 22 batters, while allowing 33 hits and 12 walks during his time with the Yankees. Jake Wade was placed on waivers during midseason by the Yankees and was claimed by the Washington Senators. He made 6 appearances for the Senators in 1946, while earning a 0-0 record, and a 4.76 ERA, while pitching in 11.1 innings. He allowed 12 hits and 12 walks over this stretch. He finished the year by striking out 9 opposition hitters. He appeared in his final major league game on September 12, 1946. The Washington Senators sold Jake Wade to the Jersey Giants of the International League on December 16, 1946.

In 1947, Jake Wade helped the Jersey City Giants in impressive fashion, by earning a record of 17-5 with an impressive 2.52 ERA. The Giant ball club, managed by Bruno Betzel, finished in first place in the league. Jake allowed 108 walks, striking out 78 in 197 innings for the Giant club. He pitched in 32 games, started 28, finished 18 complete games, and had 4 shutouts. The Giants finished the year with a record of 94-60. Jake Wade and his brothers were honored by their local community, Morehead City, North Carolina on August 14, 1947. The park behind the Charles Wallace School was named "Wade Brothers Memorial Park." He was traded by the Giants, with Jack Graham, Mike Budnick and \$65,000 to San Diego of the Pacific Coast League in exchange for Jack Harshman on December 4, 1947.

Jake Wade started the 1948 season pitching for San Diego in the Pacific Coast League. He earned a 0-4 record with a 7.09 ERA while pitching in 47.0 innings for this ball club. Jake allowed 51 hits and 33 walks as he

appeared in 12 games including 9 starts. He was dealt to Buffalo of the International league during midseason. There he pitched in 29 games, including 18 starts totaling 136 innings for the Bisons. Wade earned a record of 8-11 with a 5.10 ERA. He allowed 153 hits and 54 walks during this stretch.

In 1949, Jake Wade continued his association with the Buffalo Bisons. He pitched in 41 games, including 7 spot starts, totaling 82.0 innings. Jake earned a 3-4 record over this stretch and had a 6.70 ERA. He allowed 106 hits and 43 walks over the course of the season.

The 1950 season would prove to be his last professional baseball season as he returned to pitch for Buffalo. Jake Wade pitched in 26 games for the Bison ball club, starting in 13 contests, earned a 7-6 record for the season with a 4.96 ERA. He allowed 111 hits and 58 walks to opposition batters. Jake Wade retired from professional baseball at the age of 38 yrs old. He began his career in 1931 and it would stretch to 1950, with exception of the one year he spent in military service.

Jake "Whistling Jake" Wade had finished his major league career with a record of 27-40, including 71 starts, 20 complete games, 3 shutouts. He pitched in 668.1 innings over 8 major league seasons and made appearances in 171 games. Jake earned a career ERA of 5.00. Always fighting his control Jake, allowed 440 walks and 690 hits over his career with a career WHIP of 1.69. Jake recorded 291 career strikeouts.

In Carteret County, North Carolina, Jake Wade was a hero. He was a source of inspiration and encouragement to many local boys who played on the same sandlot as Jake. Jake carried himself not as a celebrity, but a man that was blessed to have talent to play a game that he loved.

After returning to North Carolina with his family, he was employed as an electronics repairs technician at Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station in Havelock, North Carolina. He retired in 1976. During 1999, he returned to Detroit for the last game in Old Tiger Stadium, where he was on the field with other former Tiger greats in era style uniforms. In 2005, Rosalie Watson Wade, Jake's long time partner died.

Jacob Fields Wade, Jr. died on February 1, 2006 at the age of 93 at his residence in the Newport Community of Wildwood, North Carolina. He had suffered a stroke about four years prior to his death. At time of death, he was the oldest living former player of the Chicago White Sox. He was a member of Wildwood Presbyterian Church. Jake Wade was interred at the Historic Bayview Cemetery. He was survived by two sons, Jacob Fields Wade III and William Albert Wade. He was survived by two daughters, Rebecca Wade Davis, and Sara Wade Wallace. At the time of his death, he had eight grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by a daughter, Jo Ann Wade Eaves.