

October 9, 1962

EDITOR TRIBUNE:

In a most colorful and impressive manner at the Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium last week, LaCrosse's native son and ex-major league baseball star, EDWARD JOHN KONETCHY, became the 37th member and the very first local athlete enshrined in the WISCONSIN ATHLETIC HALL OF FAME. (Wed Oct 3, 1962)

Banquet Chairman Ken Blanchard and the Oktoberfest committee are to be commended for the wonderful work of bringing together such an array of outstanding personnel and making the hall of fame dinner a thing of such delightful interest. To mention a few on the program, there were: Mayor Milo G. Knutson, Mrs. Ray Planadore at the organ, Legionnaires with the posting of the colors, Rev. Thomas Nimmeman with the Invocation, Ray Ping, Sr., as toastmaster, Blanchard with acknowledgements and introductions, Donald Rice with the Oktoberfest greeting, Oktoberfest Chairman Robert Abbott with the Call of the Roll, Heileman Brewery President Roy E. Kumm with the presentation of Edward Konetchy Plaque, George McBride and Merv Henley unveiling the Konetchy plaque, George Ruediger in response, Lou Boudreau with colorful remarks, Wisconsin Athletic Hall of Fame Chairman Joseph J. Krueger with comments and Rev Arthur M. Feroc with the benediction.

Much credit must be given Blanchard for the great amount of time and thought he gave in selecting his personnel.

Thoughtfully picked as one of the night's speakers was former Municipal Judge George Ruediger who was President of the 1940 LaCrosse Blackhawks which Konetchy led to the Wisconsin State League title. Ruediger, a baseball teammate at the University of Wisconsin of Rollie Williams, the 36th individual enshrined in the Wisconsin Hall of Fame, had been appointed captain of the university nine only to relinquish the honor to Williams upon the disclosure that he had played semi-pro baseball the previous summer.

Wisely selected to be present was an agile and alert 82-year old Milwaukeean, an ex-major league shortstop and also a member of the Wisconsin Hall of Fame, Frank McBride, who this summer shot his age out on the golf course. McBride played with the St Louis Cardinals of 1905-06. Konetchy came up with the same club the following year. Therefore, both played under the leadership of Honest John McCloskey, the man who signed Koney. McBride went down to Kansas City in 1907 and threw his fielded ground balls over to old Jake Beckley at first base --- the first sacker who performed for the Cardinals so ably for so many years before our Big Koney took away his job. Next McBride move was to Washington, D.C. -- 1908 -- the same year as Charles (Gabby) Street's arrival and a year later than pitching great Walter Johnson. During this McBride period, Street became the first man to catch a baseball tossed from the 542 foot Washington Monument. The second man to accomplish the feat was catcher Billy Sullivan who was enshrined in the Wisconsin Athletic Hall of Fame in 1953.

Also appropriately appearing on the program was Milwaukee Braves representative Fred Schulte. Konetchy played three years with the old Boston Braves, forerunners of the present Milwaukee team. Schulte rivaled Konetchy as a Wisconsin State League manager in the early '40's as skipper of Oshkosh.

Very significantly included among the honored guests was Henry Rooney, who came to LaCrosse in 1897 and has the distinction of being the only living member of the board of directors of the local team sending ~~him~~ Konetchy to the major leagues back in 1907. On that June day at old League Park, Konetchy was presented with a floral display and a diamond ring, and made a name for himself in brevity with his speech: "Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you!" His sale to the St Louis Cardinals, netting the LaCrosse club \$750.00, included a stipulation that Manager Emerson (Pink) Hawley receive a new vest and checkered necktie. Hawley was noted for his love of classy dress-wear.

Lou Boudreau, himself a former big league baseball luminary and a member of the Illinois Athletic Hall of Fame, perhaps summarized the evening's activities best with the statement that this would be Konetchy's greatest thrill were he here tonight for his enshrinement ceremonies held in his old hometown amongst his many friends.

Boudreau seemed to stress that there was no thrill greater than to be named to a Hall of Fame; that this was the ultimate in thrills. Thus, his installation into the Illinois Hall surpassed such thrills as his first major league game; becoming the youngest major league manager at the age of 24 to ever start a season; winning an American League pennant in a playoff game against the Red Sox in which he connected for four hits in four at bats, including a pair of homeruns; bringing his Cleveland Indians home with a world's championship; popularizing and masterminding the infield pickoff play; instigating the exaggerated shift on the great Ted Williams much to the chagrin and bewilderment of the Red Sox star.

Similarly, Konetchy's enshrinement thrill has to be super to out-thrill these Koney highlights: being one of the elite few to advance directly to the big leagues from Class D ball; spending 14 years in the big time; topping the NL in fielding for seven years; making ten hits in a row in 1919; performing in the longest game in major league history, the 26-inning, 1-1 tie in 1920; playing 58 innings of baseball in 3 consecutive days; playing in four of the 17 games played that have exceeded 20 innings; playing in a World Series and setting and still holding a series record for total chances (19) in a game; hitting 41 homeruns at the age of 40 in minor league ball as a member of Fort Worth to lead the Texas League in that department; returning to his hometown and leading it to the Wisconsin State League championship in 1940.

The banquet scene was further enriched by the presence of many of LaCrosse's finest athletes past and present, the Bodega crew who so ably prepared and served the food, and the general public supporting and attending the event, and radio

station WLCX who was on hand to tape record the entire proceedings to send to St Louis to the widow of Konetchy, who was unable to attend because of failing health.

Blending all these wonderful things together, it is little wonder that the 400 in attendance ~~unanimously~~ claimed it "the best banquet I ever attended."

A Lifetime La Crosse Citizen & Sports Fan