

WHAT IS A CANADIAN?

David Matchett – November 18, 2017

SABR Hanlan's Point (Toronto) Chapter



What is a Canadian? This is a seemingly simple question, but it isn't, and it keeps popping up while researching the history of baseball in Canada. Some players who were born in Canada emigrated soon thereafter, and others born abroad moved to Canada before they could walk. Ongoing research can uncover an old census record or baptismal certificate that suddenly converts an American or removes someone else from the list of Canadians. And various research resources can differ, especially those in print that can go out of date but still cause ongoing confusion.

The Canadian Baseball History Symposium is in a unique position to set the definition, then maintain and update a list of Canadian major leaguers. Future research projects will be able to clearly state "Canadian players, as defined by the St. Marys agreement..." and we would all know exactly what that means, and who is included, or excluded, and why.

What follows is a proposal for some ground rules that I hope will start a debate and lead to a comprehensive list of Canadians that we can all agree upon.

Categories of Canadians

This paper divides players into four categories, each of which will be reviewed below:

1. Players born in Canada,
2. Players born elsewhere but raised in Canada,
3. Players with other Canadian ties, and
4. Retroactive Canadians.

Canadian-born or Canadian raised?

Is a Canadian only someone who was born in Canada? That definition excludes everyone who grew up here after their families arrived from somewhere else; given that we are a society of immigrants, it is probably overly restrictive.

BORN VS. RAISED IN CANADA



Canada's first two Prime Ministers were not born in Canada. John A. Macdonald was born in Scotland and his family moved to Canada when he was 5. Alexander Mackenzie

was also Scottish-born, and moved to Canada as a 20-year-old. Recent Governors General Adrienne Clarkson (born in Hong Kong, moved to Canada at age 2) and Michaëlle Jean (born in Haiti, moved to Canada at age 11) are also immigrants.

BORN VS. RAISED IN CANADA



Can an argument be made that these two prime ministers and two vice regal representatives are not Canadian simply because they were born abroad?

Similarly, in the world of sports, most Canadians consider two-time NBA MVP Steve Nash as one of our own even though Nash was born in South Africa. His family moved to Canada before his second birthday. Current tennis stars Denis Shapovalov (born in Israel, moved to Canada before his first birthday) and Milos Raonic (born in Yugoslavia, moved to Canada at age 3) would fall into the same category.

BORN VS. RAISED IN CANADA



Nash represented Canada internationally and lit the torch at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. Raonic and Shapovalov have both represented Canada in Davis Cup competition, and Raonic wore the

maple leaf in the 2012 Olympics. Despite all of this, are we to consider them not Canadians because they weren't born here?

The flip side of this is people who were born in Canada but left at a young age. US politician Ted Cruz was born in Calgary to a Cuban father and an American mother, then moved to the US when he was three. He didn't realize that he held dual citizenship until 2013 and he renounced the Canadian part in 2014 in the lead-up to his run at the US presidency. Is Ted Cruz still Canadian just because he was born here?

BORN VS. RAISED IN CANADA



Vladimir Guerrero Jr. was born in Montreal while his father played for the Expos, but he was raised in the Dominican Republic. Should we add him to the list of Canadians when he make his big league debut?

BORN VS. RAISED IN CANADA



BORN VS. RAISED IN CANADA



Pitcher Kirk McCaskill offers the other view of this issue. He was born in Kapuskasing, Ontario because his American-born father was playing professional hockey there, but the family moved to the US while he was still

a young child. As quoted by Jim Shearon in Canada's Baseball Legends (page 210) McCaskill said,

BORN VS. RAISED IN CANADA



I'm equally proud of that."

"...I only lived in Canada for two years. I'm very proud of the fact that I was born in Canada...but I am an American citizen. The United States has afforded me all of my opportunity, all of my education and

McCaskill is Canadian-born, but is he Canadian?

Two catchers from the early twentieth century are a further illustration of this dilemma. Larry McLean was born in Fredericton, New Brunswick, but his family moved to the United States when he was young, and he lived the rest of his life south of the border. McLean didn't consider himself to be Canadian, and until the 1990s most baseball resources listed his birthplace as Cambridge, Massachusetts. On the other

BORN VS. RAISED IN CANADA



side of this argument is Jimmy Archer, who was born in Ireland. His family moved to Montreal when he was an infant and eventually settled in Toronto, where Archer lived until his baseball career took him to the US.

Are Larry McLean and Kirk McCaskill more Canadian because they were born in Canada, or are Steve Nash and Jimmy Archer more Canadian because they spent more time here? Arguments can be made in favour of each position.

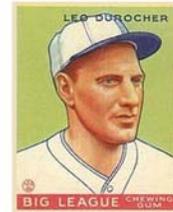
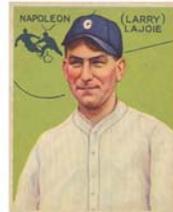
Perhaps there is room for both: Canadian-born and Canadian-raised.

Do Canadian parents count?

Does one's parentage have an impact? Perhaps, but that may be only part of the argument.

Hall of Famer Napoleon Lajoie was born in Rhode Island to a Canadian-born father. Fellow Hall of Famer Leo Durocher was born in Massachusetts to French Canadian parents and he even grew up speaking French at home. There is no record that either of these gentlemen considered themselves to be anything but American, but could we claim them as Canadians due to their parents' place of birth?

OTHER CANADIAN TIES



More recently, Freddie Freeman represented Canada in the 2017 World Baseball Classic. Freeman's parents are both from Ontario, but he was born and raised in California. As early as 2015 he was campaigning for a spot on team Canada:

OTHER CANADIAN TIES



"I know my mom would be proud for me to wear the Canadian jersey, to represent her country, and it's something I always wanted," he said. "It would be special to me and my family if I could represent Canada."

[Freeman embraces Canadian roots while in Toronto](#), Jamie Ross, MLB.com, April 19, 2015

Similarly, Mark Teahen was born in California but his father is from St. Marys, Ontario, and Teahen later became a naturalized Canadian citizen and represented Canada in the 2007 World Baseball Classic.

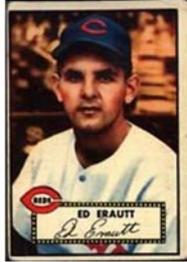
OTHER CANADIAN TIES



Brothers Joe and Eddie Erault present an interesting quandary in this area. Older brother Joe, also known as Stubby, was born in Vibank, Saskatchewan; he appeared in 32 games for the White Sox in 1950 and 1951, primarily as a catcher. Younger brother Joe was born three years later in Portland, Oregon, and pitched in 164 games between 1947 and 1953. Joe was born in

Canada but the family moved to the US before Eddie was born, and they lived there the rest of their lives. Is only Joe Canadian by virtue of their places of birth? Are they both Canadian because of their Canadian parents? Or are

OTHER CANADIAN TIES



neither of them Canadian because they were both raised in the US?

Do the parents factor in? Yes, but other issues need to be accounted for as well.

Retroactive Canadians

This is a rather esoteric category. It refers to people with no ties to Canada until they became Canadian after their playing careers were over. Gregg Zaun is an example of this. He last played in 2010 then became a permanent resident of Canada in 2013. Zaun's wife is Canadian and his daughter was born in Canada. Since all of this took place after the end of his playing career, should we retroactively include his

RETROACTIVE CANADIANS



16 years in the majors in the annals of Canadian players? If so, he would rank behind only Russell Martin and Moon Gibson for most games caught by a Canadian. I'm inclined to exclude people who were not Canadian at the time they were players but there is room for debate.

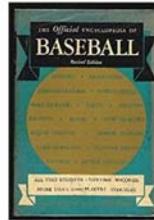
A mid-career change of citizenship, such as Mark Teahen's, adds an extra level of confusion in this area.

Historical records

Ideally, whenever there is doubt, we should ask the person if he considers himself to be a Canadian, like Jim Shearon did of Kirk McCaskill. However, since we can't always do that, we'll have to turn to other sources and base the decision on the facts that are available. The problem with this is that the facts can change over time.

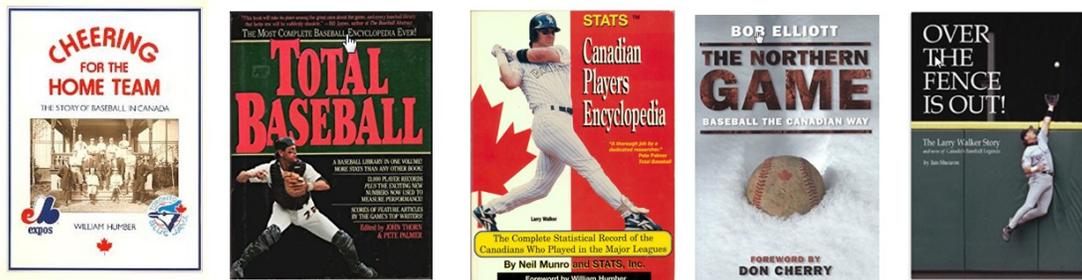
According to Baseball-Reference.com a total of 92 Canadian-born players made their debuts in the first fifty seasons of major league baseball (1871 to 1920). However, the 1956 edition of the Official Encyclopedia of Baseball included only 53 of them. Of the rest, some listings showed American birthplaces, some didn't show any birthplace at all, and a few players didn't even make it into the book, their records erroneously combined into contemporary players' totals.

HISTORICAL RECORDS



By the time the 1977 edition of the Encyclopedia came out, seven players' records had been updated to count them as Canadian-born. Bill Humber's 1983 Cheering For The Home Team listed 62 Canadian-born players who debuted up to 1920; Thorn & Palmer's Total Baseball from 1989 had 72 Canadians; Neil Munro's Canadian Players Encyclopedia from 1997 had 83; and Bob Elliott's 2005 The Northern Game had 87, as did Jim Shearon's Over The Fence is Out from 2009.

HISTORICAL RECORDS



None of this is meant to imply any inaccuracy in these books. The authors based their work on the best information available at the time. But ongoing research is always updating players' personal information so that print resources go out of date. The best sources for current information about birthplaces and nationalities are therefore online databases that are updated on a regular basis.

If we're going to agree on criteria for including players in the Canadian roll call, some agreement is also required on the source of the information that determines their status. Two sites that I have found to be very helpful and comprehensive are Baseball-Reference.com and Retrosheet.org.

Some Proposed Ground Rules

Here are some proposed ground rules for deciding who is a Canadian:

1. Anyone born in Canada is a Canadian, even if they left the country soon thereafter.
2. Foreign-born players who are noted as Canadians in Canadian baseball resources are also included. Four books that I refer to are:

- A. Diamonds of the North, Bill Humber (1995), updating his 1983 work presented in Cheering For The Home Team,
- B. Canadian Players Encyclopedia, Neil Munro (1997)
- C. The Northern Game, Bob Elliott (2005)

D. Over The Fence Is Out, Jim Shearon (2009)

As of October 8, 2017 Baseball-Reference.com lists 248 players with Canadian birthplaces. In addition, one or more of the books noted here consider the following players to be Canadian:

CANADIANS



- Jimmy Archer, born in Ireland, raised in Toronto (A, B, C, D)
- Chris Barnwell, born in the US to Canadian parents (D)
- Reno Bertoia, born in Italy, raised in Windsor, Ontario (A, B, C, D)
- Hank Biasetti, born in Italy, raised in Windsor, Ontario (A, B, C, D)

CANADIANS



- Mike Brannock, born in the US, raised in Guelph, Ontario (A, C, D)
- Sheldon Burnside, born in the US, raised in Toronto (A, B, C, D)
- Luke Carlin, born in the US, moved to Canada at age two (D)
- Emil Frisk, from Ignace, Ontario but Baseball-Reference.com lists him as being from Kalkaska, Michigan (A, B)

CANADIANS



- Jim Gillespie, born in the US (A, B, C)
- Billy Hulen, born in the US (A)
- William Hogg, Baseball-Reference.com shows him as being from Port Huron, Michigan (A, B)
- Harley Payne, listed as being from Windsor, Ontario but other sources show him as being from Windsor, Ohio (A, B, C)

CANADIANS



- Kevin Reimer, born in the US to Canadian parents and raised in Enderby, BC (A, B, C, D)
- Chris Reitsma, born in the US and raised in Calgary (D)
- Mark Teahen, born in the US to Canadian parents and later became a naturalized citizen (D)
- Gus Yost, listed as Canadian but Baseball-Reference.com shows his place of birth as unknown (A, B)

Since the last of the noted books was published a few other foreign-born Canadians have debuted in the big leagues and should be included

in the discussion. The Canadian Baseball Network, curated by Bob Elliott, includes the following:

CANADIANS



- Freddie Freeman, born in the US to Canadian parents
- Jameson Taillon, born in the US to Canadian parents
- Matt Hague, born in the US, father was born in Canada

So that's 248 Canadian-born players and another 19 who were not born here but who could also be considered to be Canadian.

Conclusion

This issue first came to my attention a few years ago when I was compiling a list of the Canadian-born players who had appeared in the most games at each position. Jack

Graney had the top total in left field, followed closely by Jeff Heath, but as I was wrapping up my research they were passed by George Wood. This didn't happen because "Dandy" Wood played in a

WRAP UP



lot of games during the time I was doing my research. In fact, he hadn't appeared in a game since 1892. What happened was that a diligent

researcher found that Wood was born in Pownal, PEI, and not Boston; toward the end of 2011 Baseball-Reference.com changed his place of birth in their records.

I haven't found a single, comprehensive list of Canadians so let's figure this out for ourselves. Here are some points to consider:

1. Do we include only Canadian-born players in the list?
2. What resources do we use to determine a player's place of birth?
3. How do we resolve conflicting birthplace information between resources?
4. Do we also include players who may be Canadian for a reason other than their place of birth?
5. What resources do we use to identify these foreign-born Canadians?

I look forward to reading your comments.