

## **Redemption: Baseball's Mexican Jumpers, Quebec, and the Reserve Clause**

In 1946, 22 major leaguers bolted to Mexico in search of greener baseball fields. The year 1946 was unique in a variety of respects. The war was over; peace and freedom carried the day. Military personnel, young men and women who had sacrificed so much, were returning home, including rafts of ballplayers itching to get back onto the diamond. According to one estimate, nearly a thousand big leaguers and 3,000 minor leaguers were expected to be demobilized by early 1946. Suddenly baseball was about to be fun again – except for those major or minor leaguers who were soon to become expendable as their roles were either turned over to more accomplished players, or were minimized due to some local grievance, usually related to money or matters of respect.

For several of them, Mexico was the answer. It was certainly a tantalizing alternative. The Mexican League of the day was offering wealth and opportunity unheard of in major league circles, an opportunity too good to turn down. And as things turned out, it was everything but.

The *agent provocateur* behind this Latin explosion was Jorge Pasquel, a wealthy Mexican businessman. He was in search of major league players to help raise the profile of the Mexican League to major league level. Although his offers had been rejected by the likes of Ted Williams and Stan Musial, others more vulnerable were willing to take a chance.

In the spring of 1946, then, twenty-two ball players, attached to different major league clubs, jumped their contracts and headed for Mexico in anticipation of greener pastures. Actually, there were only twenty-one: the twenty-second player was Danny Gardella. He had been ditched by the Giants for arguing over his contract, and was actually without one. He was what we would consider today a free-agent.

Here is a list of the players and their team affiliation:

### **Major League-Affiliated Jumpers and the Teams They Abandoned**

Brooklyn Dodgers	Luis Olmo, Mickey Owen, Roland Gladu
Chicago Cubs	Chico Hernandez
Detroit Tigers	Moe Franklin
New York Giants	Ace Adams, Harry Feldman, Danny Gardella,

	George Hausmann, Sal Maglie, Nap Reyes, Adrian Zabala, Roy Zimmerman
Philadelphia Athletics	Bobby Estalella
Philadelphia Phillies	Rene Monteagudo
St. Louis Browns	Red Hayworth
St. Louis Cardinals	Lou Klein, Max Lanier, Fred Martin
Washington Senators	Alex Carrasquel, Chile Gomez, Roberto Ortiz

All 22 players made it to Mexico. They played in cities of varying sizes, from Mexico City (pop. 1.5 million, the largest city in the league), to much smaller venues: Monterrey, Nuevo Laredo (the smallest, population less than 30,000), Puebla, San Luis Potosi, Tampico, Torreon and Veracruz.

Latin players, already familiar with the style and terrain of the Mexican League, were generally comfortable in their new surroundings, and managed well. Not so the American players: they found the going tough, even if one factored in the large salaries they received. For example, Danny Gardella was paid \$8,000 instead of the \$5,000 he had been offered by the Giants. Plus lodging.

Whether the players were comfortable or not, however, mattered little as far as Major League Baseball was concerned. MLB considered the 22 (or 21) players still under contract to their major league teams. Baseball was not pleased.

A.B. "Happy" Chandler – a former Senator and Governor of Kentucky – had been appointed baseball's new Commissioner following the death of Judge Landis late in 1944. Barely a year into his term, he suddenly was faced with this unheard of uprising, and he reacted swiftly. He decreed that all players who had jumped their contracts were to be banished from Organized Baseball for five years, allowing that this ruling would not apply to players who returned to their teams by a date he had established.

His rationale for such harsh treatment was clearly stated. "The question was having the penalty severe enough so that it would deter fellas who might want to do the same thing for quick money...I just made it five years and stopped the whole lot of them."

There was no going back. Ace Adams did move home at the end of the year, hanging up his spikes as a player in the process. Mickey Owen, who had moved his entire family to Mexico, moved back home in August. And that was the moment the jumpers discovered there was no second chance. In spite of the pleas of many, the Commissioner held his ground. The five-year suspension held.

Playing baseball in Mexico was tough. Although the money was there, as promised, the non-Latin players found conditions surprisingly difficult. Travel was by buses over poor roads and over and through dangerous mountain passes, ball parks were less than expected, the food was different, language issues were a constant barrier, and they (more especially their families) had few if any friends.

Max Lanier summed it up, "Conditions down there weren't too good. Half the time you were so sick you couldn't play, you know the problems with the water, the whole thing didn't last very long. I stayed in Mexico about a year and a half... [then] Pasquel started cutting everybody...he cut me from \$20,000 to \$10,000. That's when we started jumping back to the United States."

One exception was Sal Maglie. It was in Mexico that he learned to become a pitcher and not just a thrower. That resulted because he had been assigned to Puebla where a former Giants pitching coach, Adolfo (Dolf) Luque, was manager. And he gave Maglie his full attention.

In 1956 Maglie said the following about Luque: "Whatever I am as a pitcher, I owe to a great extent to Adolfo Luque, the most accomplished teacher of mound techniques the game has seen." Under Luque's tutelage, Maglie developed an outstanding slider by throwing his curve like a fastball, and went on to win twenty games in each of his two seasons in Mexico.

By 1948, all of the non-Latin jumpers were back in the United States, confused and confounded. Quite literally, when the jumpers returned to the United States, all doors were closed to them. Not only was the five-year ban still in effect, the commissioner decreed that if anyone attempted to play for some low-level or minor league team, he would be suspended for life.

Max Lanier formed the Max Lanier All-Stars, rented a Trailways bus, and hit the road with many of the exiles on board. They managed to get 80 games in, but the tour was hardly successful. According to Lanier, "We couldn't get a ball

game...We knew we couldn't play in professional ball parks but [Chandler] shouldn't have tried to stop us from playing against colleges and semi-pro clubs. But he did."

The situation got so bad that Maglie, among others now out of baseball, went back home to Niagara Falls, N.Y. and got a job pumping gas.

Except...Change was just around the corner. Roland Gladu, the only Canadian in the mix, went back to his native Sherbrooke, Quebec, and quietly put a new set of wheels in motion. He began importing different Mexican jumpers to Quebec, to play in the Quebec Provincial League, a non-affiliated league where any and all players were welcome to try out. No one cared much, if at all, about their troubles or background – as long as they could play ball.

In 1948, four of the group came on board. Gladu served as manager/first baseman for Sherbrooke (.368/11/79). Adrian Zabala was his starting pitcher (18-8). Danny Gardella was a late-season arrival, and Bobby Estalella (.374/24/95) suited up with the St. Jean Braves.

The die was cast. In 1949 eight more jumpers hooked up with the Provincial League, bringing the total to 12 over the two years.

### **12 of the 22 Played in Quebec in 1948 or 1949**

Alex Carrasquel	Senators	St. Jean '49
Bobby Estalella	Athletics	St. Jean '48
Harry Feldman	Giants	Sherbrooke '49
Danny Gardella	Giants	Drummondville '48-49
Roland Gladu	Dodgers	Sherbrooke '48-49
Red Hayworth	Browns	St. Jean '49
Lou Klein	Cards	St. Jean '49
Max Lanier	Cards	Drummondville '49
Sal Maglie	Giants	Drummondville '49
Fred Martin	Cards	Sherbrooke '49
Adrian Zabala	Giants	Sherbrooke '48-49
Roy Zimmerman	Giants	Drummondville '49

In addition, the league did not hesitate to take on other past and future major leaguers, or Hispanic players and a number of players from the Negro Leagues.

The league was so strong, it boasted that there was no other baseball league in Canada to match it. In fact, it established an All-Star team to challenge the Montreal Royals. The Royals declined, ostensibly because of Chandler’s decree, although old timers in the region still insist that the Royals backed down out of fear of being beaten.

The Provincial League’s six teams were Drummondville, Sherbrooke, Farnham, St. Hyacinthe, St. Jean and Granby. Only St. Hyacinthe and Farnham did not sign jumpers.

As one might imagine, this was all too much for the Commissioner. On June 5, he officially declared that as of that moment “the jumpers’ bans were being reduced from five years to three...and that all jumpers were now free to return to the game.” Players were given a thirty-day period to rejoin their clubs, after which they would be kept, traded or released.

But not all went that year. Roland Gladu stayed behind with Sherbrooke and strengthened his position as one of the most significant builders the Quebec game had seen. Red Hayworth chose not to return to the Browns, remaining as St. Jean manager until he was injured in mid-August and returned home. And Drummondville’s Sal Maglie, Danny Gardella and Roy Zimmerman all stayed put for the balance of the season.

This chart summarises how successful the different players were in re-integrating with their old clubs.

### Re-integration after the jump

Name	Team	Quebec	1949	1950	1951+
Ace Adams	Giants				
Alex Carrasquel	Senators	St. Jean '49	x		
Bobby Estalella	Athletics	St. Jean '48	x		
Harry Feldman	Giants	Sherbrooke '49			
Moe Franklin	Tigers				

Danny Gardella	Giants	D'ville '48-49		xx	
Roland Gladu	Dodgers	Sherbrooke '48-49			
Chile Gomez	Senators				
Geo. Hausmann	Giants		x		
Red Hayworth	Browns	St. Jean '49			
Chico Hernandez	Cubs				
Lou Klein	Cards	St Jean '49	x		xxx
Max Lanier	Cards	D'ville '49	x	xx	xxx+
Sal Maglie	Giants	D'ville '49		xx	xxx+
Fred Martin	Cards	Sherbrooke '49	x	xx	
R. Monteagudo	Phillies				
Luis Olmo	Dodgers		x	xx	xxx
Roberto Ortiz	Senators		x	xx	
Mickey Owen	Dodgers		x	xx	xxx+
Nap Reyes	Giants			xx	
Adrian Zabala	Giants	Sherbrooke '48-49		xx	
Roy Zimmerman	Giants	D'ville '49			

Note that 9 of the 22 never returned to the Major Leagues. Only 3 (Lanier, Maglie and Owen) remained in the majors beyond 1951.

Here are five conclusions that can be drawn from these events:

1. Danny Gardella considered himself a free agent, no matter what the Commissioner thought. He took his fight to court. His case progressed slowly through the system, until in 1949 it seemed about ready to go before the judges. At that moment Chandler blinked: baseball could not afford to see its players drift from one team to the other. Hence, the Commissioner offered \$60,000 to Gardella, along with the same freedom to return to the old club accorded all other jumpers. Gardella accepted, splitting the sum with his lawyer. And baseball learned a lesson. The next time



this kind of challenge was seriously considered, Marvin Miller was at the helm.

2. The Quebec Provincial League in 1949 was a force to be reckoned with. It was so solid as an independent league that Chandler was concerned other minor leagues might follow its example, and wreak even more havoc within professional baseball's structure. Hence he managed to convince Quebec Provincial League members to become part of Organized Baseball, a decision that opened even more doors for up-and-comers and old-timers alike.



3. Sal Maglie's glorious career post-jump is something that gets lost when considering how solid he was through the 1950s. (Above, Maglie at far left as part of Drummondville's pitching staff for 1949. Max Lanier is second from right.) We forget he was a 28-year old rookie in 1945, and he did not return to the major leagues until 1950, when he was 33. During that period of the '50s Maglie won twice as many games as he lost. His most 'famous' loss was to Don Larsen in the 1956 World Series, giving up two runs to Larsen's perfecto.

4. Roland Gladu became a force in Quebec baseball in this period. He had already played in the Quebec Provincial League in the 1930s for several teams, had introduced baseball to England in the mid-'30s, played for the Boston Braves in 1944, been outstanding for the Montreal Royals in 1945, played summer and winter baseball in Latin America, and introduced a whole new wave of ball players to the charms of Quebec. Before he was done, he led Sherbrooke to pennants in '48 and '51...and when his playing days were over he became a scout for the Braves, signing among others Georges Maranda, Ron Piche and Claude Raymond. At some point he will be surely nominated to the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame.
5. Max Lanier's leadership reflected Rudyard Kipling's "If": "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs, and blaming it on you...you'll be a man my son." He was probably the most successful of all the jumpers before 1946, and yet in Mexico he took his lumps with the rest of them. He was the one to challenge Chandler's dictum of isolation by renting a bus, filling it full of jumpers and hitting the road. It was an expensive proposition – often families accompanied the ballplayers – and ultimately he shut it down. He was a superstar in Drummondville, going 8-1 before he returned to the major leagues. But even then he did it on his terms: he would not return until the



Cards agreed to pay him, not what he earned in 1946, but what the Provincial League had anted up...and that included free lodging. And once he returned, by then in his late '30s, he hung around for four years, going 34-36 over that period.



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