



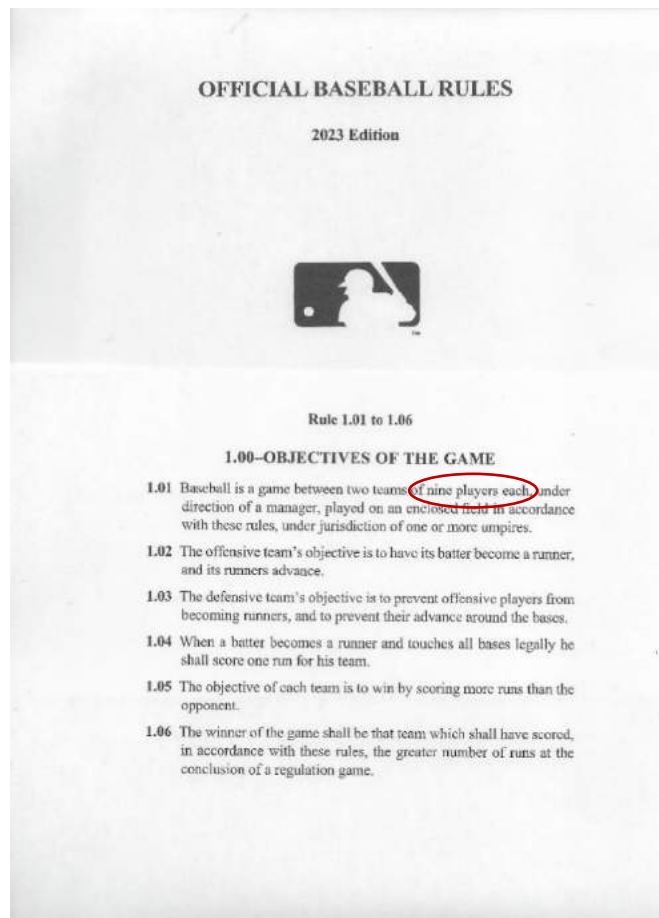
In reviewing the number of Canadians who have made it to the major leagues in baseball, it has been recorded by Baseball-Reference.com that 260 major leaguers were born in Canada. Of this list, 135 (roughly half) were born in Ontario. However, when taking a second-level look at the origins, it can easily be concluded that the richest source of Canadian major leaguers is actually New Brunswick.

***Major Leaguers by Province***

<b><i>Province</i></b>	<b><i>No. of MLB Players</i></b>	<b><i>Provincial Population</i></b>	<b><i>Players per 100,000 Population</i></b>	<b><i>Relative to highest %</i></b>
Alberta	10	4,262,635	0.237	10.70%
British Columbia	40	5,000,879	0.800	36.49%
Manitoba	4	1,342,153	0.298	13.60%
New Brunswick	17	775,610	2.192	100.00%
Nova Scotia	10	969,383	1.031	47.07%

Ontario	135	14,223,942	0.949	43.30%
Prince Edward Island	3	154,331	1.944	88.69%
Quebec	32	8,501,833	0.376	17.17%
Saskatchewan	9	1,132,505	0.795	36.26%
Canada (Statistics Canada 2021)	260	36,363,271	0.700	

The purpose of this article is to document the impact of the New Brunswick major leaguers and to describe some of their accomplishments. Of the 17 New Brunswickers who got to the majors, we will provide sketches of ten of these. Ten, of course, being the number of players in a lineup --- that is, contrary to the “Official Baseball Rules”!



There is a term widely used in the context of player development for the Major Leagues: “The Cradle of Shortstops.” This is a term usually applied to the small town of San Pedro de Macoris, in the Dominican Republic, for the extraordinary number of Major League shortstops who began to play baseball in this very remote location. At last count, 99 major leaguers had their origins in The Cradle of Shortstops. Inspired by this, it seems only fair to label the province of New Brunswick “the cradle of Canadian major leaguers”, or in the Nouveau-Brunswick spirit “le berceau des joueurs canadiens des ligues majeures”.



With a population of 775,610, the fact is that New Brunswick has produced 17 major leaguers --- more than 2 major leaguers per 100,000 population. Even though Ontario has produced 135, British Columbia 40, and Quebec 32, per 100K

this is less than half the percentage of New Brunswickers. Of the 17 New Brunswick-born major leaguers, we will provide below sketches of ten. Of these ten, eight are enshrined in the New Brunswick Sports Hall of Fame in Fredericton. The sketches describe some noteworthy accomplishments or circumstances, including:

- was a teammate of many of the Chicago “Black Sox”
- was blocked from the majors because the Dodgers had to keep Sandy Koufax in Brooklyn because of the “Bonus Baby” rule
- while playing for 19 years and 13 major league teams, hit one more career home run than the player who hit the “shot heard ‘round the world”
- pitched in the majors for 16 years, playing for eight fewer teams than the previous player, and rang up one more strikeout than 2014 Hall of Famer Tom Glavine
- also won the Stanley Cup in hockey
- played alongside two Hall of Fame managers
- was American League Rookie of the Year
- was shot and killed in a bar by the bartender

Here are some brief descriptions of our New Brunswick Ten:

**Tom Daly** (*Saint John*) was a catcher who spent eight years in the majors, from 1913 to 1921. His first three years in the majors were with the American League’s White Sox, where he caught a total of 92 games. In 1914 he had his best batting average for the White Sox, batting .237. In 1916, his contract was bought from the White Sox by the Indians, for whom he played 31 games. He returned to Chicago with the National League’s Cubs for the three seasons from 1919-21, hitting a career-high .311 in 90 at bats in 1920. Although he left the White Sox four years before the 1919 Black Sox scandal, when he did play in 1915 he was the backup catcher to one of the innocents in the scandal, Ray Schalk. Another of the clean members of that Chicago





team with whom he played was second baseman Eddie Collins; both Collins and Schalk are in the Baseball Hall of Fame. However, Daley was also a 1915 teammate of several of the players who would become banished from baseball because of that scandal: Eddie Cicotte, Happy Felsch, and Shoeless Joe Jackson.

**Bill Harris** (*Dorchester and Moncton*)

was the pitcher with a long and successful minor league career, perhaps most notably with the Montreal Royals, then the top farm team of the Brooklyn Dodgers. He also had brief stays with the Dodgers, but in an interview this author conducted, Harris believed that his path to the majors had been blocked



by the then “bonus baby” rule that required Sandy Koufax to spend his first two years on the Major League squad, occupying a roster spot that might otherwise have belonged to Harris. (Note Tom Lasorda behind Harris in the image above.)

Harris did have a few “cups of coffee” with the Dodgers, but finished his playing years for the Los Angeles Dodgers AAA franchise in Spokane, Washington. After retiring as a player, he moved to Kennewick, Washington where he opened “Billy's Bar”. The author spent a day with him a few years before he passed away. When asked if he believed that Sandy Koufax had blocked him from a real shot at the majors, he answered that he did--but he and Sandy had become good friends, and Sandy would periodically visit him in Kennewick.

**Matt Stairs** (*Saint John and Fredericton*) had a remarkable 19-year career, playing



for 13 Major League teams: Montreal, Boston, Oakland, Chicago Cubs, Milwaukee Brewers, Pittsburgh, Kansas City Royals, Texas Rangers, Detroit Tigers, Toronto, Philadelphia, San Diego, and Washington. In those nineteen years he amassed 265 home runs. Those 265 home runs place him 216th all-time at the time of this

writing (the top 1% of 23,099). This career total places him one home run above the hitter of perhaps one of the most famous home runs in history: the “shot heard ‘round the world” by the New York Giants’ Bobby Thomson (264 career home runs), the home run to win the 1951 National League Pennant in the playoffs against the Brooklyn Dodgers.

**Rheal Cormier** (*Grande Digue and Moncton*): The left-hander had a long Major League career, pitching for 16 years in the majors for five teams overall. In his first few seasons, primarily as a starter for the Cardinals and Expos, he had 108 starts and logged about 714 innings pitched. He then became primarily a relief pitcher for another 11 seasons, with the Red Sox, Phillies, and Reds, compiling an ERA as a relief pitcher of 4.23.



Cormier pitched in 683 games over his career, ranking 138<sup>th</sup> in all-time game appearances, one appearance ahead of Hall of Fame left-hander Tom Glavine of the Atlanta Braves and several other teams.

**Jim Riley** (*Bayfield and Moncton*) is the only person to have played Major League baseball and to have also been a member of a Stanley Cup winning team. He had two brief appearances in the Major Leagues, but also had an extensive minor league career. There have been 67 athletes who played Major League baseball and



also played in the NFL, another 15 major leaguers who also played in the NBA, but only one player who reached baseball’s top level and won a Stanley Cup in the NHL. This lone baseball/hockey player, Jim Riley (pictured at left as a member of the minor league Vancouver Beavers of the Class B Pacific Coast International League), was born and raised in Bayfield, NB, near the author’s hometown of Moncton. Riley’s career featured a Stanley

Cup in hockey, and later two seasons in the baseball majors with the St. Louis Browns and the Washington Senators.

Riley was a member of the Seattle Metropolitans club that won the 1917 Stanley Cup over the Montreal Canadiens in five games. Shortly after the Stanley Cup series ended, Riley joined the Canadian Army and was stationed in England for the balance of World War I, rising to the rank of Sergeant. At the end of the war, Riley rejoined the Metropolitans for the 1918 season and remained with them through 1924. He became a more prolific scorer, as Seattle again qualified for the Stanley Cup championship in 1919.

After the 1920-21 hockey season, Jim Riley decided to develop his baseball career, signing as the second baseman for the Vancouver Beavers of the Pacific Coast International League. As *The Sporting News* reported that season,

"Jim Riley, the famous Seattle hockey star, is another slated for promotion. Riley is the Ruth of the circuit and let it be mentioned also that at the Keystone bag he has no peer in this company, although only breaking in this season. Riley started the season batting just above the pitchers. Today he's in the cleanup hole on the Vancouver squad and delivering all the time."

The St. Louis Browns brought him up later that season, where he played a few games at second base alongside first baseman and baseball Hall of Famer George Sisler.

Riley returned to the Seattle Metropolitans for two more seasons, and in 1922-23 he again tallied 23 times and finished third in scoring in the league. However, for these years he would interleave the hockey and baseball seasons, eventually batting over .300 in six minor league baseball seasons. He would appear again in the majors for only a few games with the Washington Senators in 1923.

**Jason Dickson** (*Miramichi*) was not born in New Brunswick, but his family moved to Newcastle (now merged with Chatham, and renamed Miramichi) when he was a small child. Dickson, who played 11 pro seasons, performed on the national and world stage. Before turning pro, he won the Canadian Midget title with the Chatham Ironmen in 1990, and the World Junior title with Team Canada the

following year. He was named American League rookie pitcher of the year by *The Sporting News* in 1997, and he was an all-star in his first full season in Major League baseball, the first New Brunswicker to achieve that honour. He finished that season with a 13-9 record. Overall, he had a 26-25 record in his major league career.



He is a member of the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame, played for Team Canada at the 2004 Olympics in Athens, and was inducted into the New Brunswick Sports Hall of Fame in 2014.

**Larry McLean** (*Fredericton*) spent 13 years in the majors primarily as a catcher, playing 761 games behind the plate and another 37 at first base. He compiled a career batting average of .262 in the early part of the 20th century with the Red Sox, Cubs, Cardinals, Reds, and Giants. McLean played his best baseball for Cincinnati, for whom he batted over .285 three times. He was a star of his only World Series in 1913, batting 6-for-12 for the New York Giants.

At 6'5" and nearly 230 pounds, McLean was one of the largest players of his era.



He was born on July 18, 1881, in Fredericton, and grew up in the Boston area. He started his baseball career in 1899, playing in Canada with the Saint John Roses and Fredericton Tartars. Shortly thereafter, he made his major league debut with the Boston Americans in 1901, hitting a pinch double off Joe McGinnity in Baltimore.

In 1903 he was awarded to the Chicago Cubs in a contract dispute. He played only one game for Chicago before being traded to the St. Louis Cardinals in exchange for future Hall-of-Famer Mordecai "Three-Finger" Brown.

McLean was demoted to the Pacific Coast League in 1905 after playing briefly for the Cardinals. He played for that league's Portland team in 1906, hitting .355 and helping Portland to the PCL pennant, having survived the



San Francisco earthquake while in town as a member of the visiting team. However, Portland withheld \$200 of his salary for failing to be “sober and temperate”.

Toward the end of the 1906 season Portland sold McLean to the Cincinnati Reds. Larry played in a dozen games down the stretch, then returned in 1907 and spent his first full season in the majors, appearing in 113 games and batting .289. While with Cincinnati McLean collared a murder suspect on the street, and was said to have swum the Ohio River rather than arrive late to the ballpark.

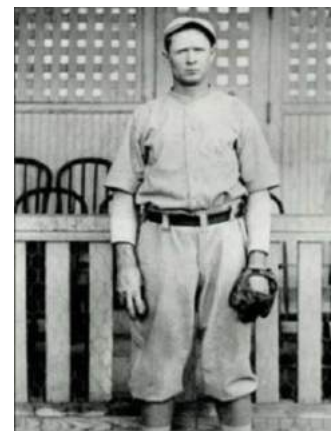
Fighting a continuing drinking problem, in 1908 he pledged \$1,000 that he wouldn't drink for one full year. Forty percent of his salary was held back as a season's-end sobriety bonus, the entire contract to be voided if McLean touched “a single drink.”

McLean remained with Cincinnati until September 1912, when he was suspended for failing to show up for an exhibition game in Syracuse. After the season the Reds sold him to the Cardinals, but he broke his arm in a poolroom brawl just weeks before the start of spring training.

In 1913, the Cards traded him to the Giants, where he hit .320 in 30 games down the stretch. After the starting catcher was injured, McLean replaced him, and as mentioned above, batted .500 and was one of the heroes of Game Two, the Giants' lone victory. After the Series, Giants manager John McGraw said, “McLean behaved like a man from the moment we got him. I found him easy to handle.”

After baseball, his problems with alcohol continued. On March 24, 1921, he got into an argument in a Boston speakeasy. When he attempted to climb over the bar, the bartender drew a pistol and shot him. McLean staggered outside and died on the street. He was 39 years old.

**Bill Phillips** (*Saint John*) spent 10 years in what was considered the majors in the late 19th century. He played first base and outfield for several teams, primarily with the then National League Cleveland team from 1879 to 1884. He then moved to Brooklyn in the American Association from 1885 to 1877. In 1885, he hit .302 and was among the top 10 in the league in batting average. His .364 on base



percentage ranked in the league's top five. Still in Brooklyn in 1887, he had 101 RBI, the only time in his career he reached the century mark.

**John J. O'Brien** (*Saint John*), nicknamed "Chewing Gum," played major league baseball for six seasons between 1891 and 1899. In this time, he played for six different teams: Brooklyn, Chicago Colts, Louisville Colonels, Washington Senators, Baltimore Orioles, and Pittsburgh Pirates. His best year as a batter was in 1896 for Louisville, where he hit .339 over 49 games. That season, playing for both Louisville and Washington, he reached his high in home runs with six.



In O'Brien's years in the majors, he played beside and under four members of baseball's Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. Two of these were both his teammates and his managers. In 1893, for the National League Chicago Colts, he played second base alongside first baseman Cap Anson, who also managed the team. Six years later (1899), he played second for the Baltimore Orioles, with John McGraw as third baseman and manager. Each of these teams also had a Hall of Fame pitcher. For Chicago, Joe McGinnity won 28 of his career 246 games in 1893. In 1899, Baltimore had pitcher Clark Griffith, who later went into the Hall of Fame as a Builder, as he was the longtime owner of the Washington Senators.

Regarding Anson, as David Fleitz has written, "regrettably, Anson used his stature to drive minority players from the game. An 1883 exhibition game in Toledo, Ohio, between the local team and the White Stockings nearly ended before it began when Anson angrily refused to take the field against Toledo's African-American catcher, Moses Fleetwood Walker."

**Paul Hodgson** (*Fredericton*). Hodgson, although born in Montreal, moved early to New Brunswick and graduated from Fredericton High School. He reached the majors in 1980 (at age 20) with the Toronto Blue Jays, thus becoming the first New Brunswick player to play for the Jays. He only played for Toronto in that one season for 20 games, batting .220 with 41 at bats and one home run.



Previously, Hodgson had spent seven years in the minors in the Blue Jays system. In 1980, he batted .352 for the Class A Kinston affiliate of the Blue Jays, where he was a teammate of future Jays' shortstop Tony Fernandez.

Not only was he the first New Brunswicker to play for the Jays, he was also the first New Brunswicker to play for a Canadian major league team. His arrival with the Jays in 1980 preceded Rheel Cormier with the Expos in 1996 and Matt Stairs with the Jays in 2000.

Wayne Patterson  
November 2023