

From Leafs to Jays

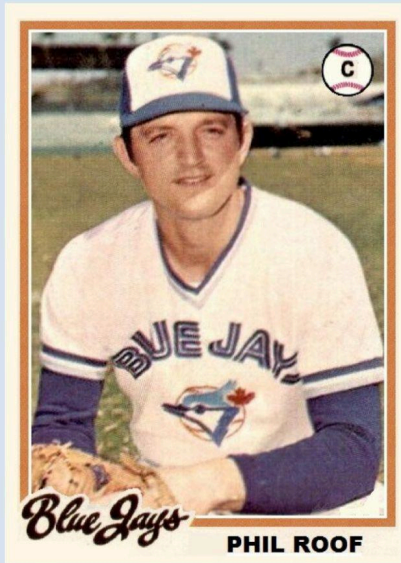
Rico Carty, Phil Roof, and a Trip
Through Toronto's Baseball History

Presentation by Mackenzie Longpré

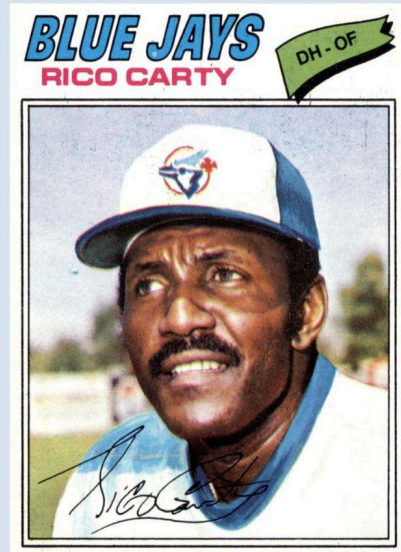
At this exact moment in Blue Jays history, it feels very inviting to reflect on teams and players from the club's past. I can think of so many Blue Jays who represent certain eras – eras of futility, eras of success, eras of staggering (and unrelenting) mediocrity. From Rick Bosetti to Ricky Romero, Pete Vuckovich to Pete Walker, José Nuñez to José Cruz; on and on we go. But why stop our reminiscing at 1977? For the baseball fan in Toronto, we can think all the way back to the late nineteenth century and the International League Maple Leafs. Why not conjure Cannonball Crane, or Buck Freeman, or Ike Boone, or Elston Howard? The history of the Leafs is longer than that of the Blue Jays, and perhaps even more illustrious.

Professional baseball in Toronto is represented by two franchises, the Maple Leafs and the Blue Jays. The history of the game in our city, as experienced through these two franchises, is a long and glorious one. Luckily for the narrative continuity of baseball in Toronto, there are two men who played for both the Maple Leafs and Blue Jays, tying together two seemingly unconnected eras of baseball in the city. Phil Roof and Rico Carty both began and ended their careers in Toronto, using the Maple Leafs as a minor league springboard and the Blue Jays as a major league terminus.

The Maple Leafs baseball club long predates the Toronto Blue Jays. In fact, they



Phil Roof (Blue Jays 1977)



Rico Carty (Blue Jays 1978)

also predate the National Hockey League Maple Leafs. After some initial baseball startups in Toronto in the late nineteenth century, the Maple Leafs were established in 1895 as a team in the Eastern League, an affiliated minor league,



which, in 1912, would become the International League. The Leafs played in a number of ballparks, including Diamond Park, Sunlight Park, Hanlan's Point Stadium, and Maple Leaf Stadium. During the franchise's history, they have had major league affiliations with the Tigers, Reds, Athletics, Pirates, Red Sox, Phillies, Browns, Indians, Braves, and Senators. Several all-time greats passed through the Leafs organization, including Nap Lajoie (who would win his only professional championship in Toronto), Ed Barrow, Joe Kelley, Hugh Duffy, Tony Lazzeri, Burleigh Grimes, Luke Sewell, Dixie Walker, Chuck Dressen, Sparky Anderson, and Dick Williams – and that's just a list of some of the managers! Over their 72-year history, the Leafs captured ten league titles. The end of the 1967 season was curtains for the club. The Leafs were moved to Louisville to become the Colonels, then to Pawtucket to become the Red Sox, and are currently in Worcester as the WooSox. The Intercounty Maple Leafs began in 1969, carried the name forward, and still function as a professional team to this day.

Toronto was without affiliated professional baseball for nine years. In 1976, a deal to move the San Francisco Giants north of the border was very nearly finalized; Toronto could well have been home to a National League club. Instead, the Big Smoke would have to settle for one of two American League expansion franchises in 1977. Adding another chapter to the illustrious history of



professional baseball in the city, the Blue Jays would finally mark Toronto's entrance into the major leagues. The Jays would play their home games in Exhibition Stadium, a football stadium barely reconfigured to house baseball. When the 1976 expansion draft commenced, the Blue Jays looked to fill out their roster with young talent left unprotected by other clubs, along with a handful of veterans to help guide the ship. With the tenth pick in that draft, Toronto selected veteran slugger, and former Maple Leaf farmhand, Rico Carty from Cleveland's roster. But before the draft had even commenced, the Blue Jays swung a deal to acquire the first player in franchise history.

Phil Roof

Phil Roof's major league career reads like that of so many journeyman backup catchers: stints with eight different clubs, only four seasons during which he played in more than one hundred games, and lacklustre offensive numbers. Though a cursory reading of his statistics may lead one to believe that he was a big league dud, his worth at the big league level is noticeable in his career's longevity, as he played in the majors for parts of fifteen seasons. Clearly, he was able to contribute at baseball's highest level, and he was prized enough to take up a big league roster spot for a decade and a half. Along with being one of only two men to play for both the International League Maple Leafs and the American League Blue Jays, Roof also seemed to find his way onto several clubs during seasons of change. In 1965, he joined the Angels organization for their first year as the "California Angels," representing the whole state, rather than just Los Angeles. He was with the Athletics for their last two years in Kansas City, as well as their first two years in Oakland. He then joined the brand-new Milwaukee Brewers after their failed season in Seattle as the Pilots. And finally, he ended his career in 1977 as a charter member of the expansion Toronto Blue Jays. A player who provided so much intangible value through fifteen major league seasons, mostly behind the plate, deserves a deeper look and should likely merit much greater appreciation. So let's dive into Phil Roof's somewhat nomadic baseball career.

Born in 1941 in Paducah, Kentucky, Roof was eighteen years old when he signed as an amateur free agent with the Milwaukee Braves. He was assigned to the Class D Midland Braves and played in fifty-two games through the remainder of the 1959 season. The following year, he moved up to the Class B Cedar Rapids Braves, and the season after that, he was moved to another Class B affiliate of Milwaukee, the Yakima Braves. But before he was sent to Yakima, Roof was called up to the big league squad as catching depth behind

Joe Torre while Milwaukee waited for other backup options to rehab from injuries.



Roof as a prospect in spring training
1963

Despite a scouting report warning of his inconsistent power stroke, Roof was on a major league roster.¹ The 20-year-old kid from Paducah was teammates with Henry Aaron, Eddie Mathews, and Warren Spahn. Given Torre's torrid spring, Roof was tasked with learning first base, though he never ended up playing first that season.² Regardless of position, Roof sat on the bench for his first couple of weeks in the big leagues. On April 29, at County Stadium in Milwaukee in a game against the San Francisco Giants, Roof made it into his first major league game as a defensive replacement. He caught reliever Ken MacKenzie in the top of the ninth inning with the Braves trailing Juan Marichal 7-1. During that inning, Roof and MacKenzie formed a battery against Jim Davenport, Willie Mays, Willie McCovey, and Orlando Cepeda. With two outs, and Davenport on first, Cepeda lashed a double to right field. With Davenport sprinting for home, John DeMerit threw to Roof, who made the tag to end the inning. On the national broadcast, Joe Garagiola praised Roof for his "good tag."³ A Braves rally in the bottom of the ninth made the score 7-3, but Johnny Logan grounded out to end the game, stranding Roof on deck. He wouldn't get another shot at a major league at bat

¹ Jim Elkins. "Paul Roof Has 'Big League Fastball Now,'" *The Paducah Sun*, March 29, 1961.
² Jim Elkins. "Phil Roof Surprised, But Happy At Recall" *The Paducah Sun*, April 11, 1961.
³ Jim Elkins. "Phil Roof Gets In Major League Game" *The Paducah Sun*, April 30, 1961.

until 1964.

The day after his big league debut, Roof would watch from the bench as Willie Mays played perhaps his finest career game, hitting four home runs off three beleaguered Braves hurlers. Nine days after that, Roof was optioned to Yakima of the Northwest League. He spent all of the 1962 season with the American Association Louisville Colonels, where he would form a battery with future Hall of Famer Phil Niekro. In 1963, he opened the season with the Triple-A Denver Bears. Maple Leafs general manager Frank Pollock had been targeting Roof during spring training. Surely he was disappointed to see Roof sent to Denver, as he was eyeing the catcher as a good looking young prospect for his Toronto squad.⁴ Pollock would be happy by June 17, when the big league Braves optioned catcher Bob Uecker to the Bears. This forced Roof from his starting spot in Denver, and necessitated a transfer of his contract to the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Roof reported to Toronto on June 21, having missed being Triple-A teammates with Rico Carty by one month. As Carty did before him, Roof played alongside future Hall of Fame manager, and Leafs second baseman, Sparky Anderson. Roof even played under Anderson when the second baseman helmed the Leafs on an interim basis, filling in for manager Bill Adair during an early July series in Buffalo. In one amusing instance during the second game of a Sunday double header on July 7, Roof was hit on the hand by a pitch. It was ruled that the ball hit the bat, and the resulting argument between Anderson and the arbiter lasted long enough for a bruise to appear on Roof's hand. The umpire then admitted to Anderson that he couldn't reverse the call, regardless of the evidence, because it risked upsetting the fans.⁵ Roof was ejected later in that game after throwing his bat in disgust following his third strike out of the contest.⁶

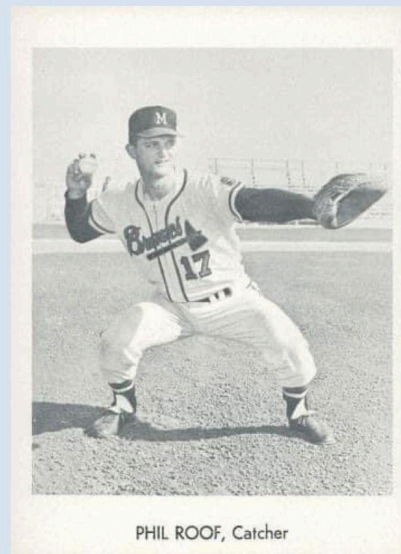
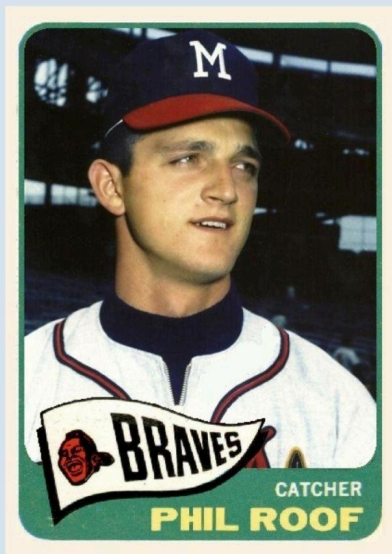
Antics aside, Roof's tenure with the Leafs was anything but stellar. He played in 23 games, during which he slashed just .129/.167/.177 with no home runs and only two extra base hits. In late July, Bob Uecker broke a finger, and Roof was shipped back to Denver to replace him. Clearly, the high altitude offensive environment of the Pacific Coast League agreed with Roof more than the pitcher-friendly International League, as he doubled his offensive output over 107 games in Denver to the tune of a .686 OPS.

⁴ "Ball Leafs Balk At Salary Offers; 12 Are Unsigned" *The Globe and Mail*, March 14, 1963.

⁵ Neil MacCarl. "Ridzik Shines In Majors" *The Toronto Star*, June 9, 1963.

⁶ Neil MacCarl "Sparky's Miscue - Benched Self" *The Toronto Star*, June 8, 1963.

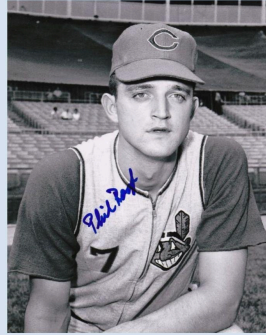
In 1964, Roof opened the season with the Braves, but rode the bench exclusively until a May 31 game against the Cubs in Chicago. With Joe Torre holding down first base for the day and backup catcher Ed Bailey getting a day off, Roof started the game behind the plate. He batted eighth in a lineup featuring Aaron, Mathews, Torre, and Felipe Alou. For the first and only time in their careers, Roof and Rico Carty were playing together, as Carty batted fifth and played in left field. In the top of the second inning, Roof came to bat for the first time in his major league career and flew out to center field to end the frame. In his next at bat, in the fifth, Roof struck out. With the Braves looking for some insurance for their narrow 3-2 lead in the seventh, Gene Oliver pinch hit for Roof and grounded into an inning-ending double play. That closed the book on Roof's big league service until the following season. Behind the plate that day, he ably handled Braves pitcher Hank Fischer, as the battery allowed only two unearned runs over their six innings together. The Cubs tied the game with two outs in the bottom of the ninth, and then won it in the tenth on Billy Williams' two-out, walk-off solo home run. Roof returned to the Braves' bench through June 17, at which point he was optioned to the Denver Bears to make room for Wade Blasingame. He would remain in Denver for the rest of the season.



Roof played for the Braves in 1961 and 1964 during which time he had two at-bats.

Aside from his first two major league at-bats, perhaps the biggest action Roof encountered that season was during a late night incident at a Houston bar. Roof and his roommate, future Hall of Famer Warren Spahn, were arrested after

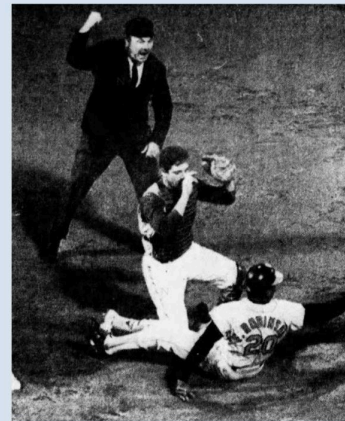
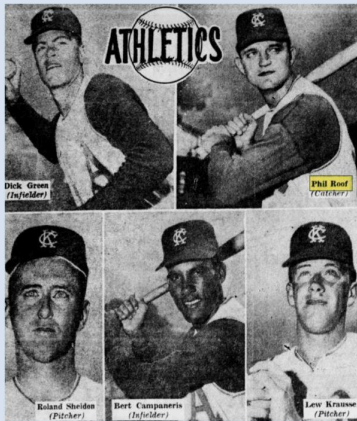
getting caught drinking just ten minutes past the establishment's 1:00am closing time. Braves manager Bobby Bragan pursued no disciplinary action, brushing the incident off as minor, and perhaps an example of puritanical overreach by the authorities.⁷



Roof split the 1965 season between California and Cleveland

Immediately following the end of the 1964 season, Roof and Canadian hurler Ron Piché were dealt by Milwaukee to the newly renamed California Angels for Dan Osinski. He barely got to unpack his bags before he was dealt again, this time to Cleveland. That offseason, he was a part of what would become a pivotal

trade in Kansas City/Oakland Athletics history. Kansas City sent Jim Landis and Jim Rittwage to Cleveland in exchange for Roof and a young outfield prospect named Joe Rudi. Roof finally got to stay put for a little while, and had his one proper shot as a first stringer. He played two years in Kansas City, appearing in 127 and 114 games in 1966 and 1967, respectively. Unfortunately, his bat never



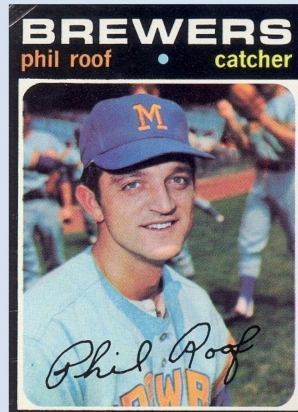
Roof spent four years with the Athletics - two in Kansas City, and two in Oakland.

1966-1969

⁷ "Spahn Won't Be Disciplined For Incident in Night Club" *The New York Times*, April 21, 1964.

clicked, as he slashed .207/.276/.326 over those two seasons. He remained an Athletic for the next two seasons, the first two to ever be played in Oakland, though he was again relegated to backup duty.

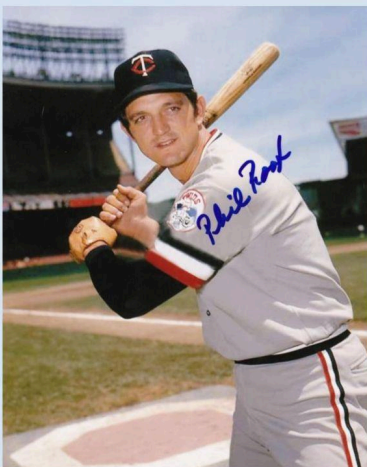
In 1970, Roof was dealt to the brand new Milwaukee Brewers, the team that had been the Seattle Pilots for just one season the year before. That officially made



Roof with the brand new Milwaukee Brewers.
1970

him one of only three men, with Felipe Alou and Henry Aaron, to play for both the Milwaukee Braves and the American League Brewers. That season, he played in 110 games, the third highest total of his career, and registered a .683 OPS, the second highest of his career. The following year, the Brewers dealt him

mid-season to the Minnesota Twins. Minnesota is the team with which Roof would spend the largest portion of his career. Over parts of six seasons with the Twins, Roof slashed .228/.282/.338. His Minnesota tenure included his best



Roof spent parts of six seasons with the Twins, his longest tenure in one city.

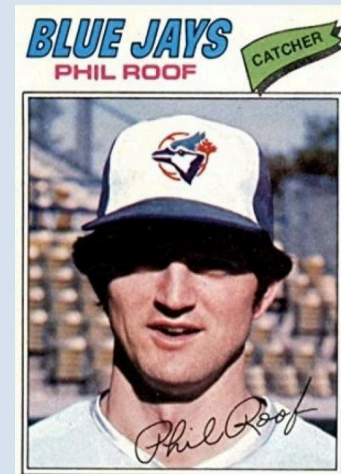
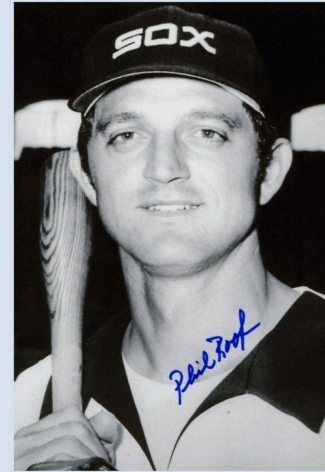
1971 - 1976

season. As a 34-year-old, Roof racked up 1.4 bWAR over 63 games played, while slashing .302/.353/.484, and posting his only above-average OPS+ at 133. In August 1976, Roof was placed on waivers and selected by the

Chicago White Sox, for whom he appeared in just four games before being sent to the minors. That offseason, the White Sox spun a deal to acquire pitcher Larry Anderson, sending Roof to Toronto, making him the first ever player to join the expansion Blue Jays.

Roof played in four games for the White Sox.

1976



Roof returned to Toronto, this time as the very first Blue Jay.

1977

Roof had been the oldest catcher in the bigs in 1976, and with the nascent Blue Jays squad, the 36-year-old backstop would be the second oldest player on the team behind Ron Fairly. Reflecting on his career to that point during spring

training with his new team, Roof said that he got “no praise or honor (for being the oldest), but it attests to the fact that you still have ability and you're still young enough to play.”⁸ At his age, Roof knew that his greatest asset was not his bat, but rather his ability to help a young pitching staff and mentor young catchers. He also knew that he could help with his arm, even mentioning that he kept in shape in the offseason by building one house and starting another.⁹ And he did bring up his minor league stint with the Maple Leafs, though he wasn't able to recall much about the city given it was just a “cup of coffee.”¹⁰ One thing he did recall was being summoned to Toronto to replace Jim Coker after Coker broke a finger, then being reassigned to Denver after Uecker broke his finger. As Roof put it, he was “chasing broken fingers around.”¹¹

As the season neared, the Blue Jays were expecting to carry three catchers. Alan Ashby would get the starting assignment, leaving Roof to battle it out with younger backstops Rick Cerone and Ernie Whitt for the backup job. Cerone would end up ahead of Roof on the depth chart. Coincidentally, it was Cerone for whom Rico Carty was traded in the offseason before the Jays' inaugural campaign, taking away any chance of a Roof/Carty reunion in Toronto. It looked like Roof would get a chance at more playing time after Cerone went on the injured list with, you guessed it, a broken finger. Unfortunately, Roof only made his way into two games in Cerone's absence before losing the backup job to Ernie Whitt. Roof would spend the majority of the 1977 season as the Blue Jays' bullpen catcher.

Roof played in a grand total of three games over the course of the entire 1977 season. He caught the first seven innings of the first game of a double header against the Red Sox on April 25, then the final three innings of the nightcap. In a game the Blue Jays would end up winning 4-3, the day game saw Roof fly out and strike out against Boston's Luis Tiant before he was lifted for a pinch hitter in the bottom of the seventh inning. In the later game, Roof replaced Ashby defensively in the top of the seventh inning with the Jays leading the Sox 5-1. Dave Lemanczyk, Pete Vuckovich, and Mike Willis teamed up to cough up the lead and fall behind 6-5. When Roof's spot in the order came up in the bottom of the ninth with the Jays trailing by a run, he was again lifted for a pinch hitter. The next and final time Roof would see any action was a start against the Royals on May 30. He registered one groundout and two flyouts against Paul Splittorff. In

⁸ “Toronto's Phil Roof has worn many caps in long career” *Tampa Bay Times*, March 16, 1977.

⁹ “Blue Jays' building starts with a Roof” *The Toronto Star*, October 22, 1976.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ “Roof to hang out baseball shingle with Toronto Jays” *The Globe and Mail*, October 22, 1976.

what would be a 4-1 loss, Roof was lifted for Alan Ashby in the top of the ninth. Though unsuccessful with the bat, Roof did put his own stamp on the game from behind the plate. With one out and one on in the second inning, Buck Martinez struck out and Roof completed the inning ending double play by catching Freddie Patek trying to swipe second base. Unfortunately for Roof, his biggest on-field win of the season occurred during a cow milking contest held as a part of "Farmer's Night" before a July game in Cleveland.¹²

Off the field, the veteran backstop served as the Blue Jays' player representative, and he also organized the club's chapel services. He was honoured at the end of the season for his large contributions to the broader Toronto community. After the final game of the season, a frustrated Roof admitted that the club's refusal to play him is what forced his hand into retirement, saying "apparently my career is over. So I'm going to go along with their judgment and call it quits."¹³ He also voiced his frustration about not getting any playing time in the final game of his career, saying "I would like to have made at least a token appearance. But I've been overlooked all year, so why should it change now?"¹⁴

Though it likely does not take the sting out of getting sent out to pasture after many years of big league service, Phil Roof can always hang his hat on being the first ever Toronto Blue Jay. That distinction should be less of a trivia question and more of a renowned and honoured place in the history of a great big league franchise. Further, along with Carty, he is one of only two men to carry the esteemed legacy of Toronto baseball through his career, from the minor league Maple Leafs to the major league Blue Jays.

Rico Carty

Rico Carty may be one of the best pure hitters the game would see in the 1960s and early 1970s. A poor defender and baserunner, his achievements on the field were likely overlooked as a result of his one-dimensional approach. It didn't help that he spent his prime years buried on some Braves teams with giants like Henry Aaron, Eddie Mathews, Orlando Cepeda, Joe Torre, and Felipe Alou. He was also not an especially easy teammate, often finding himself in spats with fellow players and management alike, not to mention a handful of physical altercations with umpires and spectators. Through his mid- to late 30s, he led a

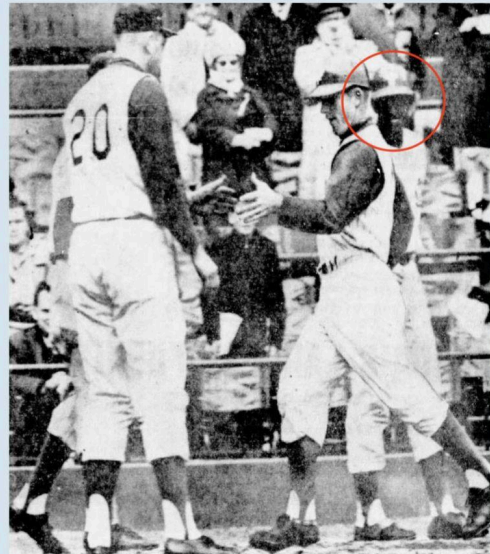
¹² Neil MacCarl. "Vuckovich saves first win for Jays' rookie Jeff Byrd" *The Toronto Star*, July 11, 1977.

¹³ Neil Campbell. "Roof ends career as Jays close debut with a split" *The Globe and Mail*, October 3, 1977.

¹⁴ Ibid.

somewhat nomadic baseball existence, bouncing around to a number of clubs to play a poor left field, or fill the new designated hitter role with whichever American League teams he ended up. Having come up in the same system, at the same time, and at the same position as Phil Roof, the two players' stories entangle and diverge in interesting and sometimes unexpected ways. They appeared in the same lineup for just one game, even though they both played for the Toronto Maple Leafs in 1963 and the Milwaukee Braves in 1964, and they were both very nearly charter members of the Toronto Blue Jays. So let's jump back into the web of the game, and trace Carty's path from minor league Leaf to major league Jay.

A native of San Pedro de Macoris in the Dominican Republic, Carty signed with the Braves as a 19-year-old in 1959 after a great showing in the Pan-Am Games in Chicago. Initially playing catcher, he worked his way through three minor league levels between 1960 and 1962. At the beginning of the 1963 season, he was assigned to the Toronto Maple Leafs, for whom he would play 21 games.



Carty opened the 1963 season with the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Though he mostly bumbled behind the plate, Carty impressed with the bat in his brief time with the Leafs. Over 75 plate appearances, he slashed .222/.347/.444 with four home runs. He suffered a cool spell towards the end of his time with the Leafs, but at the beginning of the season, he was carrying the club offensively. He had a nine game hitting streak during which he batted .462 with

three home runs, three doubles, and a triple, and drove in ten runs.¹⁵ Carty took part in a triple play in a game on April 7 against the Dallas-Fort Worth Rangers. A standard issue 6-4-3 double play, with Sparky Anderson as the pivot man at second, concluded when first baseman Steve Demeter threw to Carty, who tagged the runner trying to score from third.¹⁶ His only concern while playing in Toronto was the weather, saying “I don't like cold weather. I hope it will not be cold.”¹⁷ Well, in his first month with the Leafs, it only got as high as 18 degrees, with lows in the negatives, and there were a few days with snowfall. Carty could not have been all too thrilled.

On May 14, the Leafs acquired catcher Jimmie Coker. To make room on the roster, Carty was sent to the Austin Senators of the Texas League. That was when the Braves decided to lift the positional burden from Carty's shoulders and transition him into an outfielder. This proved a brilliant move, as Carty batted .327/.434/.632 with 27 home runs in just 111 games. His performance in Austin merited a late season call up to the big club, with whom he appeared in just two games as a pinch hitter, striking out both times.

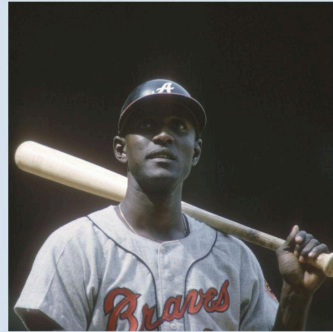
1964 would be Rico's major league coming out party. He led the Braves in batting average, ranked third in home runs behind Aaron and Mathews, and slashed .330/.388/.554 with a 161 OPS+. He came in second in Rookie of the Year voting behind Dick Allen, and placed second for the batting title behind Roberto Clemente. Even through injuries, he managed to maintain similar production over the following two years. In 1967, he fell off a cliff offensively, but much of that may have been due to back problems which were the result of a difference in the lengths of his legs. Corrective orthotics helped to solve that problem in the offseason, but a tuberculosis diagnosis kept him out of baseball for the entirety of the 1968 season. Rested and recovered, Carty regained his extraordinary form in 1969. He dealt with a shoulder injury all season, but still managed to hit .342/.401/.549 with a 164 OPS+ over 104 games. The Braves made the postseason that year and were quickly swept aside by the Mets. In the only postseason action of his career, Carty started all three games and registered two doubles and a single.

1970 was the pinnacle of Carty's career. That season, he slashed .366/.454/.584 with a 171 OPS+ and 25 home runs over 136 games played. His average won him the National League batting title and was the best in the majors, as was his

¹⁵ “Couldn't Resist Tempting Offers, So Carty Signed With Four Clubs” *The Globe and Mail*, April 3, 1963.

¹⁶ “Leafs Beat Portland, Tie Rangers, Throw in Triple Play to Boot” *The Globe and Mail*, April 8, 1963.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*



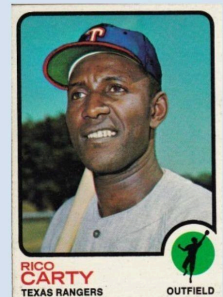
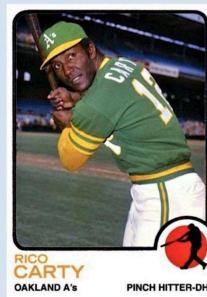
Carty had his best seasons with Atlanta, including his batting title year in 1970.

1963 - 1972

on base percentage. That summer, he was selected to his first and only All-Star Game as baseball's first ever "write-in" All-Star. Unfortunately for Carty, the 1970 campaign marked the end of the good times, at least for a while. He missed all of 1971 with a leg injury sustained while playing winter ball in

the Dominican. Elbow and hamstring problems cost him almost half of the 1972 season, during which he struggled to live up to the white-hot pace he had set for himself in 1970. A trade to the Texas Rangers in the offseason signified Atlanta's desire to move on from the oft-injured, iron-mitted, and occasionally ill-tempered outfielder with the floundering bat.

In 1973, Carty spent four subpar months with the Rangers before being claimed on waivers by the Cubs. A month in Chicago did not revitalize his bat and he was purchased by the Athletics in September. Oakland was in the stretch drive towards the pennant and their second consecutive World Series title (and second of three in a row). Carty received eight at bats, clocked a double and a home run, was left off the postseason roster, was not awarded a championship ring, and was released by the Athletics at the conclusion of the series.

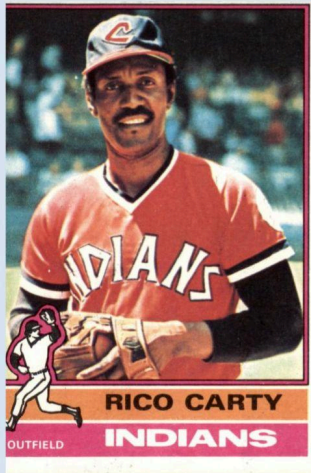


After his trade from Atlanta, Carty played for three teams in one season.

1973

Carty played in the Mexican League for a chunk of the 1974 season before

being purchased by Cleveland, where he remained for four years and enjoyed a career renaissance. Over parts of four seasons in Cleveland, Carty slashed



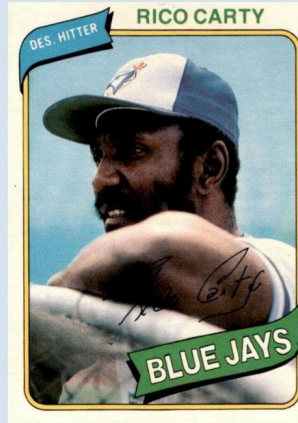
Carty enjoyed a career renaissance during his four seasons in Cleveland.

1974 - 1977

.303/.372/.455 with a 137 OPS+. In a funny twist of fate, Carty was left unprotected in the 1976 expansion draft, and was the fifth player picked by the Toronto Blue Jays. It looked as if he would be joining Phil Roof on Toronto's brand new ballclub. As they had missed each other in 1963 with the Maple Leafs, and only shared a team in Milwaukee for a brief spell in 1964, playing together in the same lineup for just one game, this could be a cosmically gifted reacquaintance of the only two men to play for the Leafs and the Jays. But it was not to be. The Toronto front office quickly dealt Carty back to Cleveland in exchange for catcher Rick Cerone and outfielder John Lowenstein. Cerone would end up being one of a glut of catchers on the 1977 Blue Jays who would contribute to Roof's near-nonexistent playing time and eventual retirement. Lowenstein was also returned to Cleveland in exchange for infielder Héctor Torres.

But in 1978, the Blue Jays sent pitcher Dennis DeBarr to Cleveland in order to reacquire Carty. In 104 games as the Jays' primary designated hitter, Carty clobbered 20 home runs and hit for a 128 OPS+. In August, he was inexplicably traded to Oakland for pitching prospect Phil Huffman, and another aging slugger, Willie Horton. Blue Jay players and fans alike had come to love Carty and were

dismayed by his departure.¹⁸ After the trade, the team barely hit, and rarely won.¹⁹ The players had grown to love him, and general manager Pat Gillick



Carty became a fan favourite in Toronto, despite a brief jaunt to Oakland in 1978.

1978 - 1979

readily spoke of Carty's positive impact on his teammates, saying “he was good with our young players and good in the clubhouse.”²⁰ But in Oakland, Carty maintained his torrid hitting form, finishing the year with a career-high 31 home runs and a 138 OPS+ between Toronto and Oakland.

Carty hit free agency in the offseason and the 39-year-old signed what was dubbed a “lifetime contract” with the Blue Jays. Lifetime contract aside, the 1979 season would be his last – it seemed that his age and his litany of injuries had caught up to him as his bat finally faltered. Carty played in 132 games, and for only the second time in his career, he failed to get his OPS+ above league average. After a poor showing and more struggles with injuries in Winter Ball the following offseason, Carty was released by the Blue Jays. His 15-year major league career was over, and unfortunately, his poor 1979 season dropped his career average below .300 to .299. With Carty's retirement, the game lost one of its greatest pure hitters, and arguably one of its most underrated stars. And baseball in the Big Smoke forged ahead with no other direct links between the

¹⁸ Neil MacCarl. “Phil Huffman: The 'other guy' in two big deals” *The Toronto Star*, March 3, 1979.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Neil Campbell. “Fan-favorite Carty gets lifetime deal” *The Globe and Mail*, January 9, 1979.

Toronto Maple Leafs and the Toronto Blue Jays.

Even by the time they left town in 1967, I'm sure the Toronto Maple Leafs felt like a baseball relic. With organizational ties to dead ball legends like Dan Brouthers or Wee Willie Keeler, Negro League stars like Leon Day, or pre-War icons like Carl Hubbell or Charlie Gehringer, it's hard to imagine any direct links to the powder blue, polyester pullover uniforms and the rock-hard astroturf of the nascent, late-70s Blue Jays franchise. But there were two such links. Rico Carty and Phil Roof each stand as symbols of two disparate eras of Toronto baseball, tying a more classical version of our game to its more modern descendant. As we watch Vladimir Guerrero Jr. and Trey Yesavage play in a slickly renovated Rogers Centre over the coming years, it feels more potent and more important than ever to remember the deep roots of baseball in Toronto. The Maple Leafs, who, at this point, existed for longer still than the Blue Jays have, spun the web of the game through our city and brought professional baseball to a town that was hungry for the game. Nine years after the Leafs' departure, the expansion Blue Jays, despite some rough early years, filled the baseball void through which so many in Toronto had been suffering. How lucky is it that there existed two players in Roof and Carty who played for both franchises? Each man served to bridge the gap between the Leafs and the Jays, and each helped to keep a sense of baseball continuity in a city so enamoured with the game.

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