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Baseball's Last Great Scout

Dan Austin

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BASEBALL'S LAST GREAT SCOUT

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TEAM CINDI Reds

COACH

NO.	NAME	POS	AGE	HT	WT	CL	B	T	A	F	R	4	P	
21	DEION SANDERS	B	✓			L	L						Y	Good
11	BARRY LARKIN	G	✓			R	R						Y	Good
23	HAL MORRIS	3	✓			L	L						Y	Good
6	Ron Sant	7	✓			R	R						Y	OK, leg OK Good
16	Reggie Sanders	9	✓			R	R						Y	Good
29	Brett Boone	4	✓			R	R						Y	Good
12	Leddie Greene	5	✓			L	R						Y	CHANGE
10	Eddie Tambusse	2	✓			L	R						Y	OK
19	Sopome Walton	8	✓			R	R						NO	AAA OR EXTRA MAN
22	Thomas Howard	9	✓			S	R						Y	Good Extra man
	BRAD BROWN	-												
20	Jeff Branson	W	✓			L	R						NO	Can hit some + Good Catcher
30	BRON HUNTER	7	✓			R	L						NO	GOOD OK Can hit
68	JERRY BROOKS	PH	✓			R	R						NO	Not enough - AAA
17	ROYITO SANTIAGO	2				R	R						NO	OK

Baseball's Last Great Scout

THE LIFE OF HUGH ALEXANDER

Dan Austin

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS | LINCOLN AND LONDON

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Set in Lyon by Laura Wellington.
Designed by Nathan Putens.

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This book is dedicated to “Uncle” Hughie Alexander and to the past and present generations of baseball scouts, whose invisible works become apparent with every spring training.

All royalties from the sale of this book are donated to the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York, in honor of Hugh Alexander and the thousands of scouts who unrelentingly look for the players who will fill the rosters of professional ball clubs for the next generation of fans.

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This book began with a simple phone call to Hugh in the early 1990s to talk about his then fifty-three-year scouting career. Immediately after the first meeting, Hugh and I talked about writing a book.

“A lot of guys want to write a book about me, but I want you to do it. Is that a promise?” Hugh asked. “We’re both midwesterners and can trust one another.”

“Yes,” I replied. “We’ll do it.”

For over seven years we met infrequently at Hugh’s ranch near Brooksville, Florida, or spoke on the phone to record his memories, delightful and studied insights into scouting. He reveled in remembering his early years as a scout in the late 1930s, culminating with his work with the Cubs sixty years later. Just a few months before his death, we had dinner together. He was weakened by cancer, but however unsteady his gait, he remained cheerful and optimistic.

The tape recordings of our meetings, as well as Hugh’s scouting reports, are now in the library of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. Only with these conversations would this book be possible. His trust in me to record and transcribe them is deeply appreciated.

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Lastly, I hold my wife, Nancy, responsible for continually reminding me about the promise I made to “Uncle Hughie” to write a book about his remarkable career. Her insistence and confidence opened doors to the baseball world hitherto unknown to a kid who grew up in Kansas and continues to this day loving the game of baseball.

BASEBALL'S LAST GREAT SCOUT

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Introduction

Baseball's Last Great Scout is the poignant, funny, and high-spirited story of Hugh “Red” Alexander, a baseball scout for sixty years. Growing up in the oil fields on the outskirts of Seminole, Oklahoma, he felt the sting of the dust storms, the rancid smell of oil, and the bites of grasshoppers during the Great Depression. None of these scourges kept him from playing baseball, basketball, and football and running track. Some say he was a born athlete, excelling in all sports. After high school he packed his glove and spikes and headed to North Dakota to play ball, unlike the thousands of Okies who fled west to California.

A stubborn, hardheaded redhead, he did have the good sense to listen when it counted. With all the gifts of an athlete and pampered as Oklahoma’s answer to Jesse Owens, he still counted only on baseball to make a living. Being a track and field star didn’t pay the bills in the 1930s.

As a ballplayer and a scout, he pursued both jobs with the same level of dedication and preparation. He loved the high drama of the game; he realized its tediousness and recognized that in all its beauty, it could also be brutally painful.

“How do I judge a ballplayer?” asked Hughie rhetorically. “Whatever talent stops me in my tracks.” Like other scouts over several decades, he followed the fads and the revolutionary changes in the

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game. Sometimes he scouted for speed; other times he looked for hitting for power or improved bench strength. Always he hunted for pitchers, not unlike today. What he stubbornly searched for, unrelentingly, was knowing the heart and the attitude of a player.

Hundreds of books have been written about the baseball greats. Fans have opinions about who is the greatest center fielder or the best fielding third baseman. What has not been extensively written about is the lesser-knowns of the baseball world, the overlooked and underappreciated scout. He's the one who looks at a kid and makes a decision about his ability to make it to the Big Show.

Scouts, a small band of invisible men and now women, have populated the grandstands for decades. They remain unnoticed except by hopeful managers and aspiring players. It is tempting to put scouts at the periphery of the game. But they are the ones who fill the club rosters five or six years hence and, hopefully, fill the grandstands for another generation of fans.

I embarked on a journey with Uncle Hughie in 1991, while interviewing some players, managers, and umpires who played during the midthirties through the midfifties for the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Bill Guilfoile, then a vice president of the Hall of Fame, asked me to interview Hugh, as little information had been collected about scouts. At that time Hughie had been a scout for fifty-three years, working with five different clubs and serving under every baseball commissioner from Judge Landis to Fay Vincent. (In 1992 Bud Selig became acting commissioner.)

Hughie became a scout out of necessity, adversity, and love of the game. After finishing his second year in baseball as an outfielder, he returned to his home a few miles east of Seminole. In December 1937 his left hand was ripped off by water well cog gears, ending his playing days. Within three months he embarked on a scouting career, the youngest scout in Major League history.

The word *scout*, according to Dan Schlossberg's *Baseball Almanac*, appeared in baseball language in the 1840s, identifying the position behind the catcher. A scout grabbed pass balls and wild pitches and

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fielded hits. In that era a batter could run on balls falling anywhere in foul territory. Hughie had the speed and quickness to be a scout, whether behind the plate, on the pitcher's mound, or in center field.

From 1991 until early 2000 Uncle Hughie and I met several times to record his rich experiences. He wanted the baseball world to know that he signed more players who made it to the Major Leagues than any other scout and that he spent sixty-two exciting years in professional baseball. In 1998 Hugh retired as director of player development of the Cubs. A heavy smoker, he was in ill health but still remained active, offering advice to other scouts whenever sought. In November 2000 he died and was buried next to his parents in Seminole, Oklahoma. Ten years earlier, in 1990, a sports complex was named in his honor and he was recognized as Scout of the Year of the Major Leagues.

Every team he worked for was a winner or on the threshold of becoming a winning club. Beginning with the Indians in 1938 through 1952, then with the White Sox from '53 through '55, switching to the Dodgers in their next-to-last season at Ebbets Field, making new beginnings in 1971 in the front office with the Phillies, and concluding his career with the Cubs from 1987 through 1998, Hugh offered a cross-country guide to baseball's places to see. From a solitary American Legion field in Anadarko, Oklahoma, to a tryout camp in Kilgore, Texas, to a beer joint near Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Hughie had his loyal contacts to find new talent for the big leagues.

He traveled the dirt roads of Oklahoma and Texas and then headed to the blacktops of Louisiana and Arkansas, winding northward to Kansas and Nebraska. Hughie became a road scholar of baseball looking for the next Jimmy Foxx, Walter Johnson, and Lou Gehrig. Hobnobbing with bartenders, coaxing a tip from an American Legion coach, but always keeping his sources close to his chest, Hugh labored in the vineyards of the Midwest for over thirty-five years and then headed to the front offices of the Phillies and Cubs for over twenty-five years.

He planned every signing, every trade, and every negotiation.

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He grew up knowing one thing: “If I’m going to compete, I want to win. It makes my work fun.” He loved to beat back opponents and test conventional wisdom.

He considered himself a sterling example in the fraternity of scouts. He did his homework. He carried no stopwatches or radar guns, nor did he load the car trunk with golf clubs. While some scouts took a few summer afternoons off for golf, Hughie chased a few more leads a hundred miles down the road.

Hughie’s reputation did not end with signing players. He earned the respect and admiration of general managers and managers. He taught others to become scouts and helped general managers appreciate the art of trading. Tough, savvy, outspoken, he challenged rules and tradition. Yet he worshipped tradition and became outspoken about the amateur draft system.

It’s up to the scout to keep fans coming to the park. Baseball fans want excitement and entertainment at the park. Happiness is a beer and a hot dog mixed with a stolen base or a bunt sacrifice. Being at the park breaks life’s doldrums and offers relief from the drudgery of everyday work.

In 1938 there were but sixteen Major League clubs, with St. Louis the farthest west. In 1998 thirty clubs existed from coast to coast. In 1938 all players in the Majors were white. By the end of the twentieth century the rosters were integrated, with African Americans, Hispanics, and Japanese.

What did not change in those six decades was the need to find ballplayers with the tools of the trade and with the right attitude to perform. That was Hughie’s job: to find the proper mix of talent and attitude for the next generation of fans.

A Stick of Dynamite

It was a cold, raw afternoon on December 5, 1937. Working on an oil well water pump near his family's home in Cromwell, Oklahoma, Hugh "Red" Alexander thought about his debut with the Cleveland Indians only three months earlier. A "stick of dynamite" his teammates had called him since his high school days. Fast, powerful, and cocky, he had the numbers to live up to it.

Called up by the Indians in late August, he had spent most of the time on the bench with a few chances to pinch-run. In three months he would be off to the Indians' spring training camp in New Orleans, but now he was helping his parents do some repair work around their home in the middle of an oil field.

Working on the water pump, he thrust his hand down into the shaft to adjust the cog gears. Suddenly his shirt sleeve was caught by one of the gears, dragging his hand into the churning machinery. He felt a sharp jerk on his left arm. Looking down, he stared momentarily in disbelief and then let out a bellowing scream. His left hand, nearly ripped off, lay enmeshed in the gears. Blood spurted everywhere. His mother, standing nearby, heard him.

"Oh, mother, my hand! It's caught!"

Finally freeing his hand, his mother rushed him to the hospital in Seminole. After an intense examination, the doctor said there was no hope for saving his left hand. He proceeded with the amputation.

The next morning, lying in a hospital bed, the twenty-year-old Cleveland rookie told a reporter from the *Seminole Producer*, “I don’t know yet just what I’ll do.” His mother stood at his bedside with tears in her eyes. “I think I will go on to college and study coaching. I haven’t heard anything from Cleveland yet, but I expect to this afternoon. Cy Slapnicka will wire as soon as he hears about it.”

Four months earlier he had gotten off a train in downtown Cleveland, just shy of his twentieth birthday. He had made it to the Big Show with just under two years in the Minors. Fiercely determined, he knew that it would not be just for a cup of coffee. With a wiry frame, packing 180 pounds, he felt cocky and bullheaded and ready to collect the rest of his \$1,000 bonus, with \$250 already in his pocket.

The Indians had kept their eye on Hughie. Cy Slapnicka, the scout who signed him and was now general manager, knew he had three of the five tools of the trade—running, throwing, and hitting with power—and he proved it in the Minor Leagues.

Now, lying in the hospital bed, he thought his career was over. A one-handed kid with no other job skills in the midst of the Great Depression invited only misery, and not much optimism. Certainly there would be no more headlines in the local newspaper, no more slaps on the back by well-wishers, no more home runs, and no more stolen bases.

However, there was one other thought that entered his head: his parents, Harry and Mae, would not tolerate his feeling sorry for himself. Yes, it was a shame that his playing days were over, but he was young and had a whole life ahead of him.

Hugh Alexander was born on July 10, 1917, in Lead Mine, Missouri, a wide space in the road about forty miles northeast of Springfield. Five years later his parents, Harry and Mae, packed up their belongings and three children and moved to Cromwell, Oklahoma, about fifteen miles northeast of Seminole, to work in the oil fields. His parents knew hard work growing up in the Ozarks. Farming was a tough and unforgiving business, especially there. The soil was so

depleted that if you wanted to raise crops, you had to haul in dirt. Even the high agricultural prices during World War I did not spread to the farmers of southern Missouri. Corn, oats, and tobacco became dependable cash crops if there was enough rain and no grasshoppers.

Oklahoma (formerly Indian Territory), which achieved statehood just ten years before the Alexanders' arrival, offered a new beginning. Oil wells had already cropped up around Blackwell, Oklahoma City, and Seminole. Black gold meant jobs, and thousands from Missouri and Arkansas poured into the state looking for any kind of work.

Harry, Mae, and the kids found housing immediately. They lived in a tent, called company housing, in the midst of an oil field. Harry took a job as a roughneck, digging ditches and laying pipe. Mae took care of the kids, cooked for the workers, and did their laundry using a scrub board and lye soap.

No one in the Alexander family or their neighbors knew even rudimentary luxury. Hardship enveloped each day in the oil fields. Nearby farmers at least could grow their own vegetables and tend to the family cow. In the oil fields nothing grew, not even weeds.

Kids learned hard work quickly. Scrubbing socks and underwear, then wringing them and hanging them out to dry was a Monday ritual. By age five, everyone had chores, even if the work was perfunctory. One of Hughie's first jobs was cleaning the globes of the kerosene lamps.

In central Oklahoma, where romantic writers describe how "the winds come sweeping down the plains," keeping house with an open doorway was sheer drudgery. The flaps of a tent were the only barrier against dust. Even when the Alexanders later moved to a house, dust constantly sneaked through every window and doorway. Every kid learned quickly about dusting furniture and washing curtains.

Company rules forbade workers to leave the oil fields to eat their meals. On call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, workers never knew when a well would blow or a fire would break out. If they ran off to town, they might not return to work sober. Rounding up a

bunch of guys in beer joints or in shacks with prostitutes in the alleys behind took too much time and could prove just as dangerous as putting out a fire in the fields.

Kids in the oil patches grew up on their own while the parents worked. The oil fields became their playground. They played ball, hide-and-go-seek, and other games. The red clay, thickened with runoff crude oil, was as slick as a slab of marble and tough on the body when sliding into “home plate” next to an oil rig.

A game of cowboys and Indians meant fashioning their own toys. From the worn-out leather bands on the rigs, they made pea-shooters. Nuts and bolts served as pellets to shoot at one another or to kill rats rummaging through the garbage pits.

One day Hughie shot his brother “Doc” right between the eyes as he peeked from behind a rig. He fell unconscious and all the kids thought he was dead. They dragged his body over to a tapped water pump to revive him, but when they turned on the valve, the water pressure almost tore off his face.

Cromwell had only a one-room school house. Most children didn’t go to school beyond the eighth grade, as they were then old enough to get a job and help the family. Every morning a bunch of kids, well-scrubbed and with a bowl of hot oatmeal and a teaspoon of cod liver oil in their bellies, ran off to a clapboard building with two outhouses to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic.

A kid’s education did not end with the school bell ringing at four o’clock in the afternoon. Harry and Mae, although working twelve to fourteen hours a day, meted out a demanding discipline at home.

Mae, a deeply religious woman, didn’t tolerate cussing from the children. One day Hughie’s brother Doc let out a barrage of profanity, and immediately Mae seized him by the collar and marched him over to the bucket with water and lye soap to “rinse” out his mouth.

Hughie muttered, “I’d like to see her do that to me.”

A Stick of Dynamite

Mae jumped over a chair and dragged him over. “Don’t you ever think you’re bigger than me!”

Hughie had the makings of a rugged individual, but his mama was boss.

By the late twenties Harry’s determination and entrepreneurship got him a promotion to field supervisor. Now, for the first time in six years, they lived in a wood-frame house. Yet the tough work continued for both him and Mae, raising kids and chickens, washing and darning clothes, and fixing meals.

They expected their children to learn quickly about how to work. Harry’s rule: when you look big enough, you start working. At age ten Hughie worked in pool halls learning how to play poker. A hustler, he gloated at beating someone out of a quarter. If someone had offered him a diploma, it would have read, “Bachelor of Arts in Street Smarts.” He didn’t have time to think about the hard, scrubby life. No one else did either. Work meant sweat; if you weren’t sweating, then you weren’t working.

The way to survive was to be resourceful. In town he cut grass, and when in high school, he lived at the fire hall. He cleaned the movie theater every night for help pay for his room and board. On a good night he made a dollar. Like most Depression kids, Hughie thought that no matter how much money he had in his pocket on one day, the next day he could be broke.

Like his father, Hughie wanted to be in control. His sister and her friends loved to dance, not something that captured his imagination, so he decided to be a manager of dancing contests in Seminole. Arranging the music and dance hall, he collected the admission and charged a handsome commission, something that irked his sister Edith and her friends. However brusque he may have been, Hughie charmed people with a disarming smile and tall tales, traits that he carried with him the rest of his life.

In the early thirties Harry bought a saloon in Seminole, where Hughie worked. Within a few seconds a saloon could change from a low-key atmosphere to hostilities. One night a drunk, slovenly

and loud-mouthed, challenged Hughie about the price of a quart of beer. “Twenty-five cents, like hell. I’m paying you only a dime, you little SOB!”

Hughie picked up a billy club from behind the bar and clobbered him.

“If you’re going to fight, throw the first punch,” was Harry’s advice to all his boys.

Other than drinking, a poker game in the darkened rear of the saloon invited the regulars to stick around. As with all other saloon-keepers, part of the action belonged to the house. No one ever said much about the rule. It was just understood.

Of course, a drunkard would easily forget the rule or get greedy, as often happened. One night a drunkard hit Harry over the head with a beer bottle, shattering the bottle and cutting him across the forehead and cheek. They struggled on the floor. Finally Harry grabbed the drunkard’s ear, sank his teeth into it, and bit it cleanly off his head.

Headstrong and cocky, Hughie loved to challenge orders. When he was a teenager, his parents decided to visit some relatives in Missouri. Harry drove his car, and Mae’s car remained at the house with its key under the control of Henry, Hughie’s older brother.

As soon as they left town, Hughie told his brother that he was driving the car to town.

“No, you’re not, Hugh!”

“Yes, I am!”

After a few more words, Henry pulled out a penknife and stabbed Hughie in the left knee. (One needed the left foot to operate the clutch pedal.) The bleeding did not stop, so Henry drove Hughie to the doctor’s office in Seminole. The doc stitched him up, wrapped a bandage around the wound, and sent him home.

“Now you better not be hobbling around when Mom and Dad get back home or I’ll tell them what you tried to do, Hugh,” Henry ordered.

A Stick of Dynamite

Hugh obeyed, and it wasn't until six months later when Mae went to town that she accidentally saw the doctor who treated Hugh. "How's Hugh doing?" the doctor asked.

"What do you mean?" she answered. Then she heard half the story. Returning home, she learned the rest of the story.

If the twenties proved burdensome for the Alexanders, the thirties brought the apocalypse. By 1934 a drought spread misery beyond the memory of any living Americans. Dust rolled up on the horizon. The years of drought and over farming the land now harvested misery. The scene spawned despair and the novel *The Grapes of Wrath*.

In the early thirties Hughie, better known as "Red," witnessed the Great Trek unfolding. Folks piled some bedding and clothing atop their black Model A, children hopped into the back seat, and they simply left their land. To reclaim a farm wrecked by wind and buffeted by economic forces appeared beyond hope. They just picked up and headed west for a new beginning in California. The Alexanders remained in Cromwell, working in the oil fields.

Seminole, like all boom towns, had a surplus of three ill-gotten commodities: guns, booze, and prostitutes. Life was tough and raw. Most people carried guns strapped around their hips, and armed posses roamed the streets at night to protect their belongings. Even in the twenties and early thirties, streets remained unpaved. After heavy rains, mules dragged their bellies in the piles of mud, pulling wagons full of machinery and food.

However poignant the lives of many Oklahomans were, children mustered a resilience to survive. Everybody struggled. No one escaped suffering. It broke some people's spirit and determination. Life just continued one day at a time, day after day after day. As Hugh's parents reminded the Alexander children, if you play it smart, there's nothing you can't do, and don't let anyone tell you differently.

In earlier years Harry had publicized himself as a boxer and took on all comers who arrived in town, especially the carnival people. In late spring and summer carnies spread across the Midwest, paying

hawkers to spread the word about them coming to town. One troupe included a 250-pound behemoth advertising himself as a world champ. If anybody could stay in the ring for more than one round, he won ten dollars. Harry took them on.

The odds of any “boxer” collecting a bounty were nil, except for Harry. He knew how to survive in the ring, getting a lot of experience in some beer joint brawls, and it was a quick way to pick up a few bucks.

Harry wanted to know what was inside his son’s head. Did Hugh (Harry always called him “Bill,” as he never liked his given name) have any guts to stick around? So he decided to put him in a boxing ring with bruisers forty to fifty pounds heavier. That was the first test.

“Now, defend yourself, or I’ll beat the hell out of you. You’re fast. Start skipping, dart in and out. Big guys can’t move. They got lead in their ass.” If Hugh didn’t mix it up, Harry would outline a boxing “ring” in the dirt, put on some boxing gloves, and get into the ring himself.

Yeah, Harry taught his son to fight! That’s right. “Bill, that’s when people respect you. You’re quick and strong. Dance around them. With your speed, you’ll wear any 250-pounder out in three rounds. Protect your territory, and then give him the sucker punch. That’s the plan.”

Hughie surprised everybody. Fast, wiry, and cocky, he wasn’t scared of anyone.

Within a few weeks Red made his boxing debut as the first carnival hit town. Harry put up the entry fee. The cash pot: five dollars if the local stayed upright in the ring for one round, ten dollars for two rounds. No one in recent memory had ever collected a dime, despite town bullies, assorted juvenile delinquents, and star athletes taking a stab for a quick dollar.

Red made some good money, and by late summer everybody knew about him. Just before one fight with a big purse, Harry took

him aside. No one would ever suspect a scrawny teenager tampering with the rules of the game.

“Bill [Hughie], I’m goin’ to wrap your fists [even as a teenager, Hughie’s fist was half again as big as a man’s] with tape and then tape a band of steel to your knuckles. Keep your mouth shut. After you knock him out, just get out of the ring and leave. I’ll collect the money later. Understand that!”

He won a few pots. No one in the crowds suspected him, but the carnies did, as he darted out of the ring each time and ran behind the tent to have Harry get rid of any tainted evidence. Word got around the carnival circuit not to let Hughie get into the ring. Well, he made some good money while it lasted.

Always find a way to beat your competitor. Harry kept beating the idea into Hugh’s head. He taught Hugh to be aggressive, but with a smile. Know people’s names, know their weaknesses and strengths and what they like and don’t like if you’re going to be around them for a while. You just never know when an old customer or rival will reappear.

Harry got his break working with a wildcat oil company by buying mineral rights from farmers. His tools of the trade: an envelope full of cash, legal descriptions of each farmer’s land, blank contracts, and a fountain pen.

Harry talked like a seasoned traveling salesman, always looking for a deal to sign. Undoubtedly, Hugh picked up a lot of pointers from his father to use later in his scouting career. “Just sign here on this piece of paper. You got it made.”

Convincing farmers to sell their mineral rights, Harry roamed the countryside earning a reputation of never taking no for an answer. Farmers couldn’t afford to drill for oil, and they probably would be stuck with a dry one anyway. “Here’s the deal,” he’d say as he pulled some green bills out of his pocket. Holding the money in his hand, Harry found that it cut out a lot of unnecessary talking.

A farmer and his wife trying to raise a bunch of kids on the dusty

A Stick of Dynamite

prairie saw instant relief. Seeing all that cash on the kitchen table brought a moment of hope. “*Cash is hot!*” Ain’t that America? *Cash* is the name of the game.

This was Hugh’s world when he entered high school. His trump cards: his athletic ability and Harry’s uncanny conniving. Even as a ten-year-old, folks around Seminole heard about his speed. He was faster than all the other kids his age, so he played football and baseball with guys five years older. Hell, that wasn’t hard. Gifted athletes matured early.

Once he began high school, the trip into Seminole took a lot of time. After school he hopped a ride home. That routine left no time for sports. Apparently Harry had thought about that predicament and began inquiring about finding a place in town for Hugh to stay during the week.

An accommodating fire chief had the answer. Hugh could stay at the firehouse across the street from the high school. He would do odd jobs around the place and sleep upstairs with the firemen. He soon had a new home. That was to be home five days a week for three years.

Harry told the fire chief to keep an eye on Hughie, but any curfew was not enforced. The “rope” around him was pretty lax. By the winter of his freshman year, he became a street urchin, a twentieth-century *Oliver Twist*, but without a Fagin to beat him. His life became a struggle between freedom and restriction. Unlicensed freedom was usually the winner, until it got him into trouble.

He loved to do his own thing. Why listen to anybody else, as nobody could compete with him on any field? He had a big mouth, cussed like a sailor, but most of the boys he ran around with did the same thing. Calling someone a “son of a bitch” was like yelling “hello.” Sailor talk, that was all it was. If a preacher or a pretty girl talked that way, they would have been run out of town.

He tried out for football and made the team. He exploded like a “stick of dynamite,” breaking loose from a tackler for another touchdown. “Paced by a Red-Headed Stick of Dynamite, Seminole High School Wins the State Crown,” read the headline.

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In one game he averaged 25 yards per carry, ending up with 6 touchdowns, 6 extra points, and 505 yards. Every time he got the ball, he scored. (In those days there was no free substitution. When the coach took a player out of the game, he remained on the sidelines for the rest of the quarter.)

With about a minute left in the game, and Seminole High leading 45-0, Hugh ran out of bounds on purpose and handed the ball to the coach.

“What the hell are you doing, Red?” the coach shouted.

“I’m tired. I just quit. I’ve been running all day.” Maybe the song “Catch Me If You Can” belonged only to Hughie.

During his junior year he was elected captain of his football, basketball, baseball, and track teams. He was fast! He ran the 100-yard dash in just under 10.0 seconds. (Jesse Owens held the world record at 9.6.)

By his junior year a couple of semipro teams in Oklahoma City heard about Red’s exploits on the baseball field. They needed his speed and power hitting, so he was able to pick up a few bucks. Playing for five bucks per game, that was good Depression money. Nobody squealed on him. A lot of guys got money, and they were still in high school.

In one doubleheader, he blasted four home runs. A few days later he hit two doubles and two home runs. Already by age sixteen he was a *ringer*. Twenty-something guys looked up to him. Everybody needs to hold on to something, to believe in something or someone. Hugh believed in himself. When he ran out on the field, his teams became winners. No, there was nothing humble about him. He had the right stuff. And he wanted everybody to know his name.

Hugh was the talk of Seminole and nearby towns. Fans of all ages slapped him on the back, waved from across the street, and laughed at his every joke. As his fame grew, so did his bragging and cockiness.