

Former Yankee, Athletics pitcher won eight Gold Glove Awards

Bobby Shantz: 1952 A.L. MVP collects memories

By Chuck McAnulla

Okay, 1958 Topps baseball isn't everyone's favorite card set. But it is from the good old days and has lots of stars. A classic card of this set is no. 289, featuring "Series Hurling Rivals Lou Burdette and Bobby Shantz."

Although Burdette was the 1957 World Series hero, winning three games against the New York Yankees, Shantz is hailed on the card as "the comeback story of the year." As pictured on the card front, the diminutive Shantz, who played at 5-foot-6 and 139 lbs., rises only to the tip of Burdette's nose, but they're both laughing their heads off and just having a grand old time. Anyone who had the pleasure of meeting Shantz at Lerner Enterprises' show at Hofstra University on Long Island can verify that Shantz still enjoys remembering his days as a major league ballplayer.

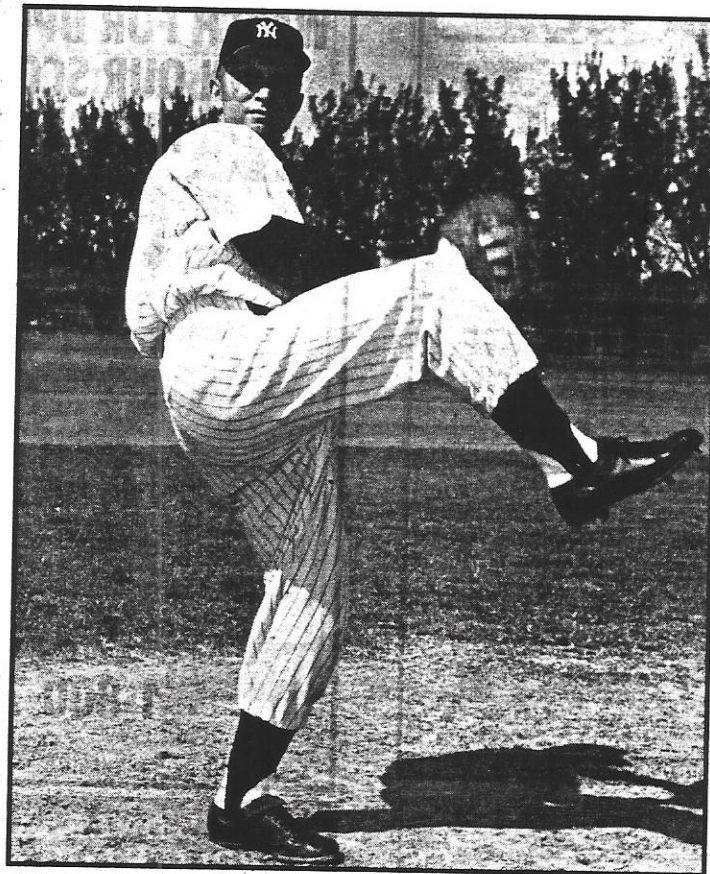
Shantz debuted in the big leagues in spectacular fashion in 1949 with the Philadelphia Athletics. Overall, his adjustment to the Big Show wasn't easy; he was 6-8 as a rookie and 8-14 in 1950.

In '51, Shantz more than reversed his previous year's totals and concluded with a record of 18-10 for a sixth-place team. Shantz had his career year the following season, leading the league in victories and winning percentage (.774) as he finished with a record of 24-7. He had 27 complete games, five shutouts, pitched a perfect inning in the All-Star game and was the American League's MVP. During those pre-Cy Young Awards years, pitchers more frequently took MVP honors than they do today. Shantz was the first A's player selected as MVP since Jimmie Foxx (1933) and the team's first pitcher so honored since Lefty Grove (1931).

But, if 1952 was the best of years for Shantz, it was also the worst of years, as, with three weeks left in the season and more starts remaining, he was hit by a line drive that broke his wrist in two places. He spent most of that winter in a cast and, during the spring of '53, he hurt his shoulder. Shantz finished the season at 5-9 and spent the rest of his pitching career in varying degrees of pain. Not coincidentally, '52 was the Philadelphia A's last decent year; they finished fourth.

Bad luck continued to plague Shantz in '53 when he started the season opener, tore a ligament in his arm, and missed the rest of the campaign. Things turned around for him, though, when manager Eddie Joost urged him to convert to a reliever, believing that Shantz would never again be effective as a starter due to the condition of his arm.

Shantz found himself in Yankee pinstripes for the '57 season. Starting and relieving, he was a lifesaver for the Yanks that year, going 11-5 with a league-leading 2.45 ERA. He was named to the All-Star team for the third time and was chosen "Comeback Player of the Year." That year, the first



Shantz spent four seasons (1957-1960) with the New York Yankees. He's pictured on card no. 289 of the 1958 Topps set with Lou Burdette.



SERIES HURLING RIVALS
LOU BURDETTE - BOBBY SHANTZ

Gold Gloves were awarded; one major league player was chosen for each position. Shantz won that, too, and would continue to win his league's fielding award each year until he retired.

Continuing to pitch well for New York, Shantz had a winning record in each of his four years there and pitched for them in two World Series, although his last Series appearance (1960) ended in disappointment for the lefty and his team. The Pittsburgh Pirates rallied and the Yanks lost the game on Bill Mazeroski's home run.

Ironically, Shantz was traded to the Pirates the following year and was 6-3. The next two years, he had identical 6-4 records with Houston and St. Louis. It wasn't until Shantz's final year,

in addition to Bowman and other issues. After his allotted time at Al Lerner's show, he graciously stayed overtime to converse with SCD.

SCD: Where do you live now and what you do besides card shows?"

BS: I live in Ambler, Pa. I just do a couple of card shows a year. I'm retired so I play a lot of golf. I play at a course just outside of my town. Robin Roberts and Curt Simmons own it, so I get to play for nothin'. That's pretty nice.

SCD: How about your family?"

BS: I have a wife and four children, three boys and a girl. And five grandchildren.

SCD: What were some of your early baseball influences and experiences?"

BS: I started in the Pennsylvania sandlots in Philadelphia. When I graduated from high school, we moved to Philadelphia, and from there I was signed by the Philadelphia A's scout Harry O'Donnell. Of course, I went to the minor leagues for the Athletics at Lincoln, Neb., in the old Western League in 1948. I won 18 games that first year and I came right to the big leagues the next year.

SCD: Is it true that, in your debut in Philadelphia, you pitched nine no-hit innings in relief?"

BS: That's right.

SCD: That's amazing.

BS: I relieved Carl Scheib in the third inning and I pitched nine innings of no-hit, no-run ball until the 13th inning. This was in Detroit. In the beginning of the 13th, Wally Moses, who used to play with the A's, hit a home run with a man on and we went ahead by two runs. In the bottom of the inning, they got two hits off me and they scored a run, but we ended up winning the game.

SCD: Your record had a big turnaround between 1950 and '51. What do you attribute that to?"

BS: I think I was just learning to pitch a little. I started changing speeds. I always changed speeds on my curveball, but I never

changed speeds on my fastball, and they were starting to hit me a little bit. Not a little bit, they were starting to hit me pretty good. Our catcher, Joe Astroth, said, "You're going to have to start changing up on your fastball."

SCD: What do you remember most about that great year when you were 24-7?"

BS: I think the highlight of that year was not that I was picked as the Most Valuable Player, but I beat the Yankees four times that year, and one game I beat 'em, I pitched 14 innings, and beat 'em, 2-1. That was the best game I ever pitched in my life. I don't remember pitching another game like that.

SCD: Once, that year, they were on a big winning streak and they beat everybody but you. You interrupted the streak.

BS: I don't remember that, but I'll

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—Bobby Shantz

1964, that he had a losing record, splitting the year with St. Louis, the Cubs and, finally, the Phillies, thus ending his big

league career where it had all begun.

During the course of 16 years, Shantz compiled a record of 119-99 with a 3.38 ERA in 537 games. He had 16 shutouts and a .195 B.A. In World Series play, he was 0-1 and had one base hit. In addition to his MVP year and three All-Star appearances, he won eight Gold Gloves.

One of the highlights of his career was that his brother, Wilmer "Billy" Shantz, was Bobby's A's teammate in '54 and '55 and briefly with the Yankees. Billy Shantz had a lifetime B.A. of .257 in a career that spanned 1,312 games. They are pictured together in the '55 Bowman set. Bobby Shantz appeared on 15 Topps cards in

... always remember that game. Mantle hit a home run off me in the third inning, and it was 1-1 going into the top of the 14th inning and we got a run. We're in the bottom of the 14th. I still had to get them out, so I got the first two guys out and Mantle comes up again and he hit a line drive off the left-field auxiliary fence out there. Then I got the next guy out. That was the greatest game I ever pitched in my life.

SCD: You had a great experience in the '52 All-Star game. You struck out the side.

BS: Yeah. In that game, I only pitched one inning and I struck out the side. It was Whitey Lockman and Stan Musial and Jackie Robinson. Then it started raining.

SCD: How did the fans and the players take the move to Kansas City?

BS: Well, it wasn't that bad there because we weren't winning. I had hurt my arm; I had gotten my wrist broken and that really hurt us, because I was really the only pitcher that was winning games for 'em at the time. That was the end of the season.

SCD: That injury at the end of that career, did that affect the rest of your career?

BS: It sure did.

SCD: One thing led to another after that.

BS: I had my wrist in a cast over that winter. I came back the following season. I opened the season against Boston, and I pulled something in my shoulder. I don't really know what the heck it was. Man, from then on ...! I still hung around for the next twelve years, but I was taking a lot of cortisone. You know, a lot of cortisone shots, so I could pitch.

I had a lot of pain, especially for the last four years. And the cortisone was probably wearing off. I was traded to the Yankees and I ended up winning 30 and I lost maybe 18 in those four years. I had about 30 saves or something like that.

SCD: Can you tell us about Shibe Park?

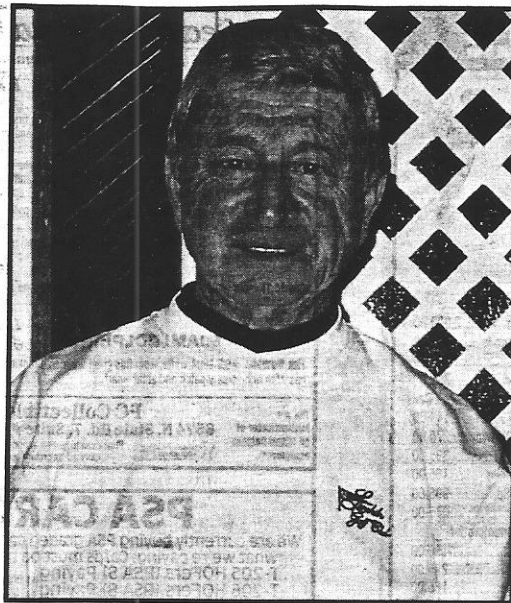
BS: I was always used to playing on sandlots. Shibe Park was really an old park, but it looked like a beautiful stadium to me because I was used to playing on these rock piles. I always liked to pitch in Shibe Park.

SCD: What was your reaction to being traded to the Yankees for 1957.

BS: I got my bag and I ran all the way up there. I couldn't wait. I couldn't believe I was traded to the Yankees. When I got to spring training the first year, Casey [Stengel] called me over and said, "You know why we got you? 'Cause you always beat us, you little son-of-a-gun."

SCD: What do you recollect about Stengel?

BS: He called me "the little feller." Casey was a darn good manager, I thought, but he had a lot of help. He had a hell of a good ballclub, to begin with. And then he had Ralph Houk, Frank Crosetti and Jim Turner. They were really good coaches. When he fell asleep in the dugout, they'd wake him up. One time, he was sitting in the corner of the dugout and we needed a pinch-hitter and he was sleeping. He was dozing off, and Crosetti said, "We need a pinch-hitter, Casey."



Shantz, 72, is retired and lives in Ambler, Pa. He said he plays a lot of golf and still receives a lot of fan mail and autograph requests.

Casey tried to put Elston Howard in the game and Elston was catching the whole game. He didn't even know he was catching. He did crazy things.

SCD: You've been called the lifesaver of the '57 Yankees' pitching staff. At one point in the season, you were 9-1.

BS: When we came back from spring training, Casey was going to use me in the bullpen, and Whitey Ford was having trouble with his arm, so [Stengel] asked me if I thought I could start and I said, "I don't see why not."

My arm was feeling pretty good, so I did start and ended up winning nine

games before the All-Star game. I went to the All-Star game and, after that, Whitey's arm came around and I went right in the bullpen. I ended up 11-5 and led the league in E.R.A. that year. We won the pennant, but we got beat in the World Series by Milwaukee when Burdette beat us three times. That was a good year for me. If Casey would have let me start a few more times, I think I could've won some ball games, but they needed a left-hander in the bullpen.

SCD: What do you remember about Game 7 of the 1960 World Series? Should you have been left in that game longer?

BS: Well, I was doin' good. I come in in the second or third inning. I think I relieved [Bob] Turley and I went to the seventh inning and I hadn't given them a hit yet. And then [Gino] Cimoli started off the inning with a base hit and Bill Virdon was the next hitter and he hit a ball to Kubek. It took a bad hop and hit him in the throat. That was a double-play ball and we'd have been out of the inning. I'm sure I could've gotten the next out to get out of the inning, but Casey took me out. He brought in Jim Coates.

Clemente topped the ball down the first base line. [Moose] Skowron got the ball and he went to throw to Coates and Coates didn't get over in time. That wouldn't been the third out. As a result, Hal Smith was the next hitter, and he hit a three-run homer. That's what hurt us more than Mazeroski's home run. We would never have had to worry about that if they make that play. We were out of the inning. Three runs wouldn't have scored. That's what killed us.

SCD: You went in the expansion draft to Washington and then got traded to Pittsburgh.

BS: I took a lot of ribbing because they beat us in the World Series the year before. But I told them the best team didn't win! [Laughter.] I won six and lost three. I was used in the bullpen; I might've started one or two games there.

SCD: After baseball?
BS: After baseball, I got into a little business with my old catcher, Joe Astroth. We opened a

dairy bar and a bowling alley. The dairy bar was like cheese steaks and hoagies and that kind of stuff. That was in Pennsylvania, about 10 miles from Ambler. I ended up a few years later buying Joe out. He was getting old enough to retire. I ran the dairy bar for 22 years and I leased the bowling alley out. Then I sold it when I got to be 62 years old. I just retired. I collect my social security and my pension and I'm playing golf, or trying to

SCD: How many Gold Gloves did you win?

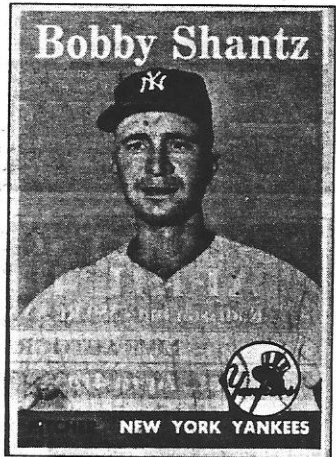
BS: I got eight. Yeah. The first year they had it was '57 and I got it every year until I retired.

SCD: Tell us about somebody you admired, as a player or coach.

BS: The guy I admired really more than anybody was Ted Williams and then I ended up pitching against the guy. Man, was he tough. He had such great eyes. You couldn't fool the son-of-a-gun.

SCD: Do you remember the first time you saw yourself on a baseball card?

BS: Oh, God. I was so happy to have my picture on a card. They gave us \$125. Now, I guess they get about \$5,000 or \$10,000, I don't know.



Bobby Shantz' 1958 Topps card.

SCD: Did you do any collecting as a player?

BS: No, I never did. I don't collect anything. The only time I get anything to do with the cards is people send me an extra card and say, "Keep it." I throw it in my drawer. That's the only cards I have.

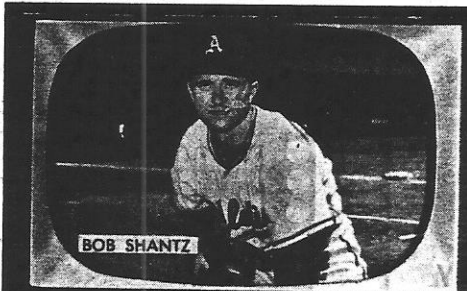
SCD: Do you have any memorabilia, like uniforms?

BS: No, I never saved anything. My Most Valuable Player plaque I have on the wall. There's been a lot of people who've called me. They want to buy that, but they're not gonna get it.

SCD: Why do you think people collect?

BS: I don't know. It must be a great thing to do, because an awful lot of people do it. I get a lot of stuff in the mail yet to sign. I'm 72 years old and they're still sending me stuff to sign.

(Note: Some quotes in this story were excerpted from We Played the Game by Danny Peary.)



Bobby Shantz is pictured on two 1955 Bowman cards. Card no. 140 is shown above. He's also on card no. 139 with his brother Wilmer.