

Corky Reddell:

Scottsdale's First Superstar

BY MARSHALL TRIMBLE, OFFICIAL ARIZONA STATE HISTORIAN

A DECADE BEFORE Scottsdale High School product Jim Palmer was making headlines pitching for the Baltimore Orioles during a career that would earn him three coveted Cy Young Awards and land him in baseball's Hall of Fame, Le Roy "Corky" Reddell, also from Scottsdale High, was tearing up the Class C Arizona Texas League for the Tucson Cowboys.

In the early 1950s, long before big-league professional sports came to Arizona, the newspaper sports pages devoted front-page coverage to the Class C Arizona-Texas League. The Phoenix Senators, the Tucson Cowboys, the Bisbee-Douglas Copper Kings, and the Globe-Miami Browns made up the state's contingent in the league. The other teams were El Paso, Juarez, and Cananea. Among those players who made it all the way to the big show was Billy Martin. He played (and fought) the 1947 season for the Phoenix Senators in the old stadium on South Central Avenue and Mohave.

In 1953, Arizona sportswriters and fans focused their attention on an amazing pitcher for the Tucson Cowboys. His name was Corky Reddell. Corky was a native of Scottsdale and grew up on a farm where the Civic Plaza is today. Scottsdale was so small in those days that they had to share their one horse with another town. There were no traffic lights, but they had lots of stop signs, causing outsiders to dub the place "Stopsdale." Corky was in the fifth grade before he knew the town's name wasn't "Speed Limit 15."

Corky became the ace hurler for the Tucson Cowboys, and in that magical 1953 season, he had a year that most pitchers at any level would kill for. That year, Arizonans watched in awe as he chalked up victory after victory for the Cowboys. It seemed as if he were pitching every other game. When the season ended, he'd won an amazing twenty-eight games while losing only five.

Unfortunately, Corky's brilliant career was brief. Pitching all those games that

season took a toll on his pitching arm, and he never was the same afterward. He soon returned to his hometown to pitch for the local semipro Scottsdale Blues.

In the spring of 1956, I was a 17-year-old kid fresh out of high school playing for the



Glendale Greys when we opened the season against the Blues at the brand new ballpark in Scottsdale. The Baltimore Orioles had just finished spring training and headed east. Roy Coppinger, who would later go on to become the legendary baseball coach for Coronado High School, was catching and Reddell was pitching.

I stood in the on-deck circle in the first inning watching in awe as he warmed up. To me, he was right up there with Whitey Ford, Preacher Roe, Warren Spahn, and other great pitchers of that time. In reality, though, his tired pitching arm was only a shadow of what it had been when he had won twenty-eight games.

Still, I took the first three pitches, unable to work up the courage to take a cut. Then, on the fourth pitch, I gritted my teeth and swung the bat as hard as I could. I heard the distinctive sound of the wooden bat making contact with the horsehide baseball. I looked up and saw the ball drop in the grass between the shortstop and left fielder. I ran as hard as I could to first base and stood there grinning like a mule eating cactus. Corky dismissed my grin with a bored look and turned to face the next hitter.

I don't remember anything else about the game. I don't recall who won or what I did the rest of my at-bats. I was on cloud nine and had a sports moment I would never forget.

It turned out to be a magical season for the Greys, made up of a bunch of guys from Glendale. We advanced through the winner's bracket of the state tournament and reached the championship by beating the Phoenix Blue Sox in ten innings. I went four for five, knocking in the tying run and scoring the winning run in the tenth inning.

Unfortunately, we lost the next two games to the mighty Casa Grande Cotton Kings, the New York Yankees of the Arizona Semi-Pro League.

Despite our amazing run in the state tournament, when I think back on that season more than fifty years ago, my fondest memory was the day I came up to bat against the great Corky Reddell. 



He has been called a cowboy singer, a humorist, and a storyteller, and he's Arizona's official state historian, but Marshall Trimble's most treasured title is teacher. He hopes people will realize the im-

portance and fun involved in Arizona history and culture. marshall@northvalleymagazine.com