

Joe Pickart

Joseph Albert Pickart, born on February 4, 1924 to Oscar and Mary (Boddicker) Pickart, was a native of the Norway area yet spent the majority of his later town ball career playing for rival Watkins. He, along with brothers Lyle and Glen and sisters Hazel, Ruth, and Pearl, was born and raised on what is now the Gibney farm, halfway between the two towns. Oscar had played on a Norway town team called the 'Cubs' in 1912, along with Joe's uncle Ed Pickart. Another brother, Clyde, was a local umpire. As with almost all Norway boys of the Twentieth century, Joe grew up around baseball.

Pickart attended Norway high school for two years, playing on the high school baseball and basketball teams, until his family moved and forced him to transfer to Franklin High School in Cedar Rapids. Joe had never wanted to leave Norway, and as a new student was relentlessly harassed about being a 'country' kid. It didn't help that, too often, all he had to wear to school were overalls. Joe soon soured on Franklin, and quit high school during his junior year. Free from school, he took a job at the Quaker Oats mill in Cedar Rapids.

With stories of World War II combat dominating the news, Joe enlisted in the Army Air Forces on January 20, 1943. Not quite nineteen years old, his enlistment record declared him to be 5'10" tall and weighed in at 148 pounds. Naturally, during his military service, he found time to play baseball on one of the bases at which he was stationed.

Returning home at the end of the war, Joe split time with the semi-pro Storm Lake *Whitecaps*, and as an outfielder with the Paul 'Daffy' Dean's Rockford *Rox*, the Cincinnati Reds Class C farm team in the Central Association. At Rockford his left-handed bat made him a bit more valuable than his right-handed peers, but he played in only thirteen games that year and left after the season. Pickart's time at Storm Lake, however, was a study in success.

Playing a season that spanned June 9 until September 5, the Whitecaps played teams from across the Iowa and Eastern Nebraska, including the towns of Harlan, Spencer, Lake City, Vermillion, and Akron, as well as barnstorming clubs like the famed "House of David". Teamed with Notre Dame and Cedar Rapids slugger (and future baseball icon) Ray Petrzela and catcher John Naughton, Pickart led most of the league in batting. After the first month of play he was hitting .476, and he finished the season with a batting average over .370. Those marks eventually paced Storm Lake to an 11-8 win over nearby Schaller 11-8 in the Class B championship tournament at the end of the season.

Pickart returned to Eastern Iowa during the off seasons, where he worked at the Quaker Oats mill while playing in the "Manufacturers and Jobbers" (M&J) League and on the Watkins town team. During these games, Joe continued to play with, and against, some of Norway's finest, including minor leaguers Ray Waychoff and Art Holland, brothers Robert and Harold Primrose, and 'Babe' Cypra, as well as Cedar Rapids' standouts like Ken Charipar (himself a future coach of major leaguer Mike Boddicker).

Encouraged by his success the previous year, Pickart spent 1948 with three different minor league teams. From Visalia, California to Decatur, Illinois, he appeared in ninety-nine game for three different teams in the Chicago Cubs' system. Joe began the year signing a contract with the Class 'B' Decatur *Commodores* in the old Three-I League (Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana) on March 3. After his batting average dipped to .225, Decatur optioned him to the Visalia *Cubs* of the California League for 34 games, and on July 1 he was sent to the Class 'C' Boise *Pilots* of the Pioneer League. There he drilled five homeruns in fifty-two games, but finally called it a career and returned to Iowa.

During the offseason between the 1947 and 1948 seasons, he again returned to Cedar Rapids, and this time he convinced Helen Travnicek to be his wife. They were married on October 1, 1948, and eventually grew their family to five with the additions of sons Tom and Jerry, and daughter Debbie.

On April 27, 1949, Pickart placed himself on the 'Voluntarily Retired List', formally ending his professional

baseball. He continued with Storm Lake for a while, as well as with the “M&J” league, but found other interests as well, including music. Joe was a self-taught musician who learned both the bass guitar and harmonica entirely by ear, and played in the Carol Chipman band in Iowa until he moved a decade later.

During the early 1950s he opened “Pickart Mattress” in Coralville, and also served as an officer in the American Legion post there. In February 1967, the family packed up the business and moved to Arizona, where Pickart spent his working days in the mattress and carpet businesses, and playing the bass and harmonica in a local Arizona band called ‘4 Guys’ for the rest of his life.

On September 5, 2010, Joe Pickart passed away in Scottsdale, Arizona.