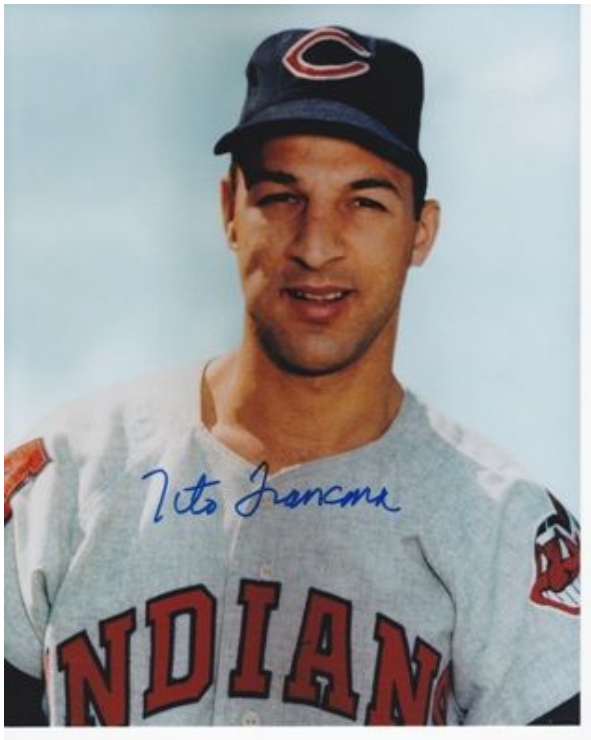


(A hearty "welcome back" to Cleveland to Tito's son, manager Terry Francona.)

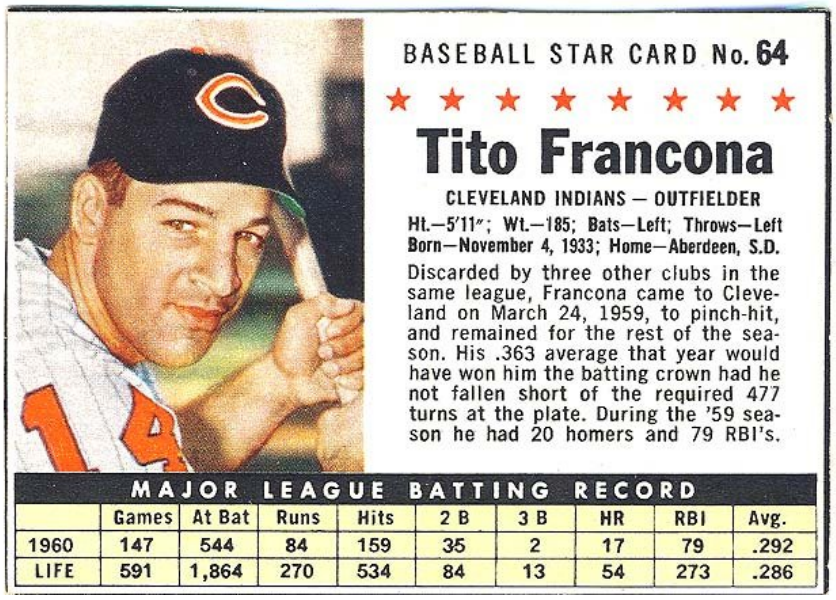
By 1959, the Cleveland Indians were in the dumper. Only five seasons earlier, the franchise had won a record 111 regular season games, out of 154 total. One more than had been won by the famed New York Yankees of 1927. They had spent a decade of contention battling New York, and over the previous twelve seasons, the Indians were the only team besides the Yankees to finish first (they accomplished it twice).

But the pitching staff that manager Al Lopez had called the "best ever" was now only a memory. Bob Feller and Art Houtteman had retired after long big league careers. Bob Lemon and Mike Garcia had succumbed to injury. Herb Score had been the phenom-in-waiting for the Tribe's post-1954 reload. He famously was struck in the eye by a ball off the bat of contrite Yankee Gil McDougald (although Score attributed his shortened career to an elbow injury suffered later). Early Wynn had been dealt. The formidable relief tandem of Ray Narleski and Don Mossi was pressed into the starting rotation out of necessity, before *they* were dealt.

The man doing the wheeling and dealing was the infamous Frank Lane. The nonstop-talking, self-promoting 60yr old from Cincinnati arrived after the 1957 season. He had been the St. Louis Cardinals' GM, winning the Executive of the Year award by

The Sporting News
. It was a dark time in the history of the Tribe; attendance had dropped all the way

down around 700,000. One of the board of directors, (former general manager) Hank Greenberg, was actively negotiating to move the team to Minnesota.



It was obvious that changes needed to be made on the Indians' roster, so "Trader" Lane was given a lot of freedom to deal. And that first one, the Wynn trade to the Chicago White Sox, was a stunner. He also gave up center fielder Al Smith, without getting much in return. The Wynn/Smith trade remains one of the worst deals in Indians history, but "Frantic Frank" wasn't done. Among a flurry of comings and goings, also unloaded in 1958 were such standouts and prospects as veteran catcher Jim Hegan, future 61*-home run man Roger Maris, and the aforementioned Mossi and Narleski.

There were some bright spots in 1958, such as the emergence of slugging right fielder Rocky Colavito and young pitchers Cal McLish, Gary Bell and Mudcat Grant. The Indians finished one

game over .500. Trader Lane, whose compensation was partly based on attendance (which Cleveland fans hated), continued to deal. 1959 saw twelve more trades take place. Lane was dotting the roster with vocal, colorful personalities- players like Jimmy Piersall, Minnie Minoso and Billy Martin, who perhaps reminded him of himself.

One of Lane's trades was with the Detroit Tigers in late March. Veteran Larry Doby, in his second stint with the Tribe and at the end of a historical career, was dealt for 1B-OF Tito Francona. In its 1959 preseason issue, *Sports Illustrated* allowed that Francona "says he can hit if played regularly."

In a surprising start to the 1959 season, the Yankees emerged slowly out of the gate. And the Cleveland Indians were sitting atop the American League into the month of May. They won six straight – and 10 of their first 11 – until getting swept in three games by the Chicago White Sox *(a foreshadowing, to a cliffhanger…)*
. Infielder Woody Held appeared to shrug off being, well, Woody Held at the plate (I know, not fair). He stroked five home runs in the first seven games of the season. Veteran George Strickland was playing shortstop and swinging the bat like he never had before. With third baseman Vic Power's move to first, and Martin manning second base, the infield defense was sound. The Tribe's starting pitching was looking particularly tough- especially Score, McLish, and Bell.

The 10-4 Indians played host to the Yankees for a two-game series, beginning May 1. Tribe

manager Joe Gordon (above right, with Lane)

	New York Yankees				Cleveland Ind
1	Tony Kubek	CF		1	Jim Piersall
2	Mary Throneberry	RF		2	Vic Power
3	Gil McDougald	2B		3	Minnie Minoso
4	Bill Skowron	1B		4	Rocky Colavito
5	Yogi Berra	C		5	Russ Nixon
6	Elston Howard	LF		6	Billy Martin
7	Jerry Lumpe	SS		7	George Strickla
8	Andy Carey	3B		8	Gene Leek
9	Art Ditmar	P		9	Cal McLish

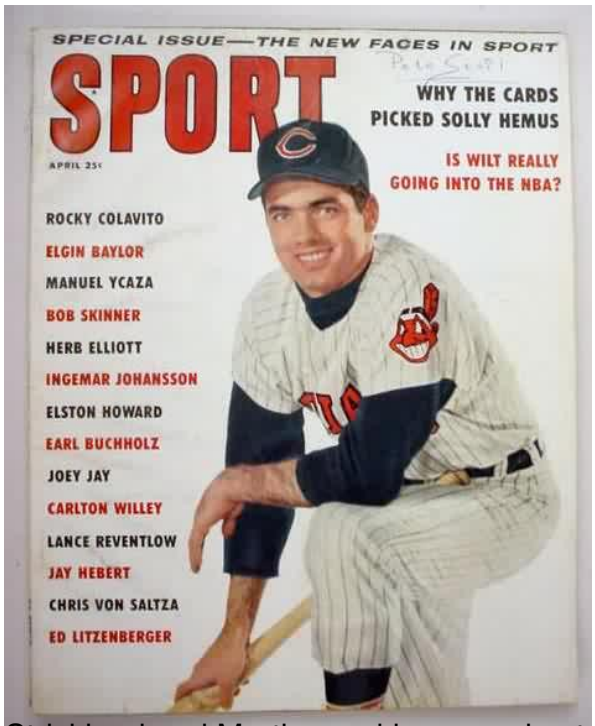
sent Cal McLish to the mound; the Yankees' Casey Stengel countered with Art Ditmar. Over 36,000 fans braved the chill for the opener on that Friday night. It was the second largest crowd in the American League that season to date. Small sample size noted, the Indians were on pace to double their season attendance over the prior year.

Thanks to baseball-reference.com, see to the left for the starting lineups.

TOP OF THE 1st: McLish was victimized by a two-out error by Strickland. He walked Skowron before inducing Berra into a grounder to Power, McLish covering. The Indians were retired in order. **AFTER 1, NO SCORE**.

Nothing of consequence happened on offense for the next several innings- only one batter over the minimum was faced by both pitchers, all the way until the bottom of the 5th inning.

BOTTOM OF THE 5th: Leading off, Colavito crushed a home run off of Ditmar to deep left field- the legend continued to grow. Russ Nixon then lined out before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EARL BUCHHOLZ
JOEY JAY
CARLTON WILLEY
LANCE REVENTLOW
JAY HEBERT
CHRIS VON SALTZA
ED LITZENBERGER

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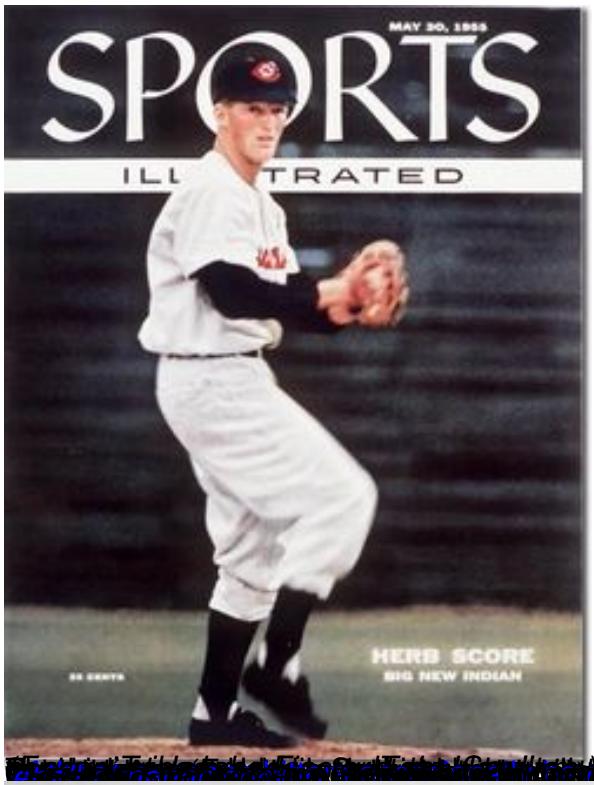
MAY 30, 1955
SPORTS
ILLUSTRATED
HERB SCORE
BIG NEW INDIAN

KS
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KS
KING-SMITH
REALTY

Indians