

## Ted Williams with the Minneapolis Millers

**T**AGGED “THE KID” in spring training, 19-year-old Ted Williams was a boy among men the summer he spent with the Minneapolis Millers in 1938. Those were different times, when players wore flannel uniforms and fielded with stuffed mitts. Instead of checking Twitter and Instagram feeds on their phones, they read *The Sporting News*—the “Bible of Baseball”—and even smoked cigarettes in the clubhouse. But Williams would have distinguished himself in any era with his talent and quirks.

Brash and irreverent, Williams carried a six-foot-three frame that belied the child inside. Before one game at Nicollet Park, he rode a delivery boy’s bicycle across the grass. When chasing fly balls in the outfield, he often pretended he was riding a horse, shouting, “Hi-yo, Silver.”

He bought a red Buick convertible and invited a 17-year-old high school dropout and peanut vendor at the park for a joyride. After hitting speeds of 100 miles per hour on Wayzata Boulevard, the vendor—Sid Hartman—later recalled, “I thought I was going to get killed.”

In right field, Williams did jumping jacks between pitches with his back to the action, occasionally missing balls hit his way. One time, after the team trainer refused to give him a ball to autograph for a fan, he pouted in the outfield and refused to field a ball hit to him. Another time, he threw a ball at hecklers in the stands (and hit an innocent fan). Yet another, he punched the watercooler in the dugout, shattering the glass and cutting his hand.

Such antics infuriated Millers manager Donie Bush. When Williams threatened to go home during a midseason slump, Bush offered to pay his way. Williams stayed, but Bush later gave owner Mike Kelley the ultimatum, “Either that kid goes or I do.”

Kelley replied, “Was nice to know you, Donie.”



Ted Williams (second from left) with Minneapolis Millers teammates in the clubhouse, May 19, 1938.

(MNHS COLLECTIONS)

For all his quirks, the Kid could hit. And hard. In the 1938 home opener, Williams blasted a ball onto a rooftop across Nicollet Avenue. It was the first of many long shots that threatened—and occasionally smashed—the front windows of Minken’s department store and President Cafe. That season, Williams won the American Association Triple Crown, batting .366 with 43 home runs and 142 RBIs. He would go on to spend 19 seasons with the Boston Red Sox in his Hall of Fame career—twice interrupted to serve as a pilot during World War II and the Korean War—but he seemed reluctant to leave Minneapolis in ’38, saying, “I want to stay right here with the Millers for another year at least.”

—John Rosengren

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