

Morgan Snyder (1909-1990): Clay Center's Contribution to Professional Baseball



Figure 1: Morgan Snyder with the Kansas City Blues, 1932. Source: Roger Mall's collection.

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This assignment details the life of Morgan Snyder, with a focus on his baseball career. Most of the sources and material comes from his nephew, Mr. Roger Mall, whose assistance made this project possible. Some sources are from online baseball encyclopedias.

Baseball is an integral part of America's culture. Small towns such as Clay Center have made important contributions to American society. Normally athletes from small towns who go on to play professionally leave behind a lasting legacy in their hometown. One needs to look no further than Jordy Nelson (Kansas State Wildcats/Green Bay Packers wide receiver) from nearby Riley, Kansas to witness this phenomenon firsthand. However, Morgan Snyder, Clay Center's contribution to America's pastime (1928-1935)¹ has been forgotten in the sands of time. With the aid of his nephew Roger Mall, I will tell the story of his baseball career and his life.

Morgan John Snyder was born on December 5th, 1909 in Broughton, Kansas, to John and Josephine Snyder. He had an older sister (Gaye) and a younger brother (Gordon). He attended Clay County Community High School (now known as Clay Center High School), where he played football and basketball. He was a center in football and a guard in basketball. The CCCHS football team was very successful during Morgan's tenure. In the fall of 1927, Snyder's senior season, they were undefeated and untied with Snyder playing a crucial role as the center.² The basketball team did not reach the same level of success as the football team, but Morgan Snyder was still a key player. In the description of Clay County's season-ending 30-26 basketball victory over Concordia High School, the Clay Center Dispatch had this to say about Snyder's performance: "Snyder, cage ace of last season, was in a suit of orange and black and played the guard position. He showed that he had not forgotten his basket ball [sic] while being 'laid up' since having an appendicitis operation last fall. He dropped in some nice shots."³

Morgan Snyder was not a dumb athlete. While he never attended college, he graduated from CCCHS in 1928. In April of 1924, he earned a special academic commendation. "This certifies that Morgan Snyder, a pupil of Clay County, Kansas, is commended for Excellence in

¹ "baseball-reference.com." <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/player.cgi?id=snyder001mor>

² "An All-Victorious Team." *Clay Center Dispatch*, November 25, 1927. Roger Mall's collection.

³ "Closed With A Victory." *Clay Center Dispatch*, March 7, 1928. Roger Mall's collection.

Spelling, having made One Hundred perfect recitations in Spelling, and therefore merits this Award”.⁴

CCCHS did not have a baseball team at the time, so Morgan Snyder played for a public Clay Center team sponsored by a Ford dealership.⁵ His main position was catcher but he also played a handful of games in leftfield. He threw with his right hand and batted left-handed. The article describing this Ford-sponsored squad had a description of the team: “They make a bunch of fast baseball players for boys and some of them are bound to be heard from in baseball, as the years go on. Clay Center should be proud of young players such as these boys.” This was an accurate prediction, as Morgan Snyder would begin playing professional baseball in a few years.

Following his high school graduation, Morgan Snyder signed to play for the York club of the Nebraska State League.⁶ For about a week and a half he played for another team in the same league (McCook) but there are no available records detailing why – Snyder simply appears in a handful of McCook box scores before appearing in York box scores, but there are no articles about him signing with McCook or describing how he was transferred from one team to the other. The NSL was a developmental league so perhaps the teams had agreements to share or exchange players. The Nebraska State League was not affiliated with any Major League franchises and it was not part of the A, AA and AAA system used by MLB, so these statistics do not show up in the baseball-reference.com footnote from earlier but technically it was still professional baseball because he was signed to a contract and paid to play baseball. Snyder played with the York Dukes for the remainder of the 1928 season following his graduation and

⁴ Original high school diploma and the spelling certificate. Roger Mall’s collection.

⁵ “Clay Center’s Champion Kid Players.” Undated photo and article from a local newspaper, most likely the *Clay Center Dispatch*. This article described the team as 16 and under - that means it could not have been later than spring of 1926 (the last baseball season Morgan Snyder would have been 16). Roger Mall’s collection.

⁶ “Snyder With York, Nebr.” Unknown newspaper, likely from the *Clay Center Dispatch*. Dated 1928. No exact date but it is sometime between June 18th (high school graduation) and July 2nd (Snyder’s first appearance in a York box score). Roger Mall’s collection.

the 1929 season before he would move on to his next club. On September 2nd, 1929, Snyder was voted as the first team All Star catcher of the NSL.⁷

Sometime following the end of the 1929 Nebraska State League season, Morgan Snyder was acquired by the AA Kansas City Blues.⁸ His contribution was minimal because he was picked up towards the end of Kansas City's season, but the 1929 Blues went 111-56, which is an incredible .665 winning percentage. Baseball historians would eventually label them as one of the best minor league teams of all time.⁹



Figure 2, left: Morgan Snyder poses for the camera during spring training with the Kansas City Blues, 1932. Source: Roger Mall's collection.

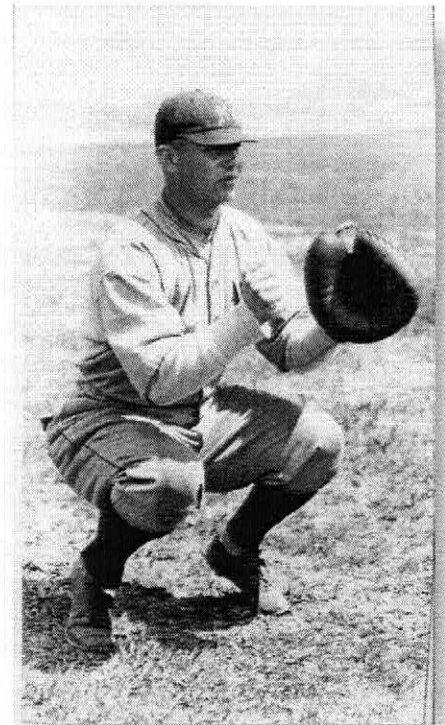


Figure 3, right: Morgan Snyder wearing a catcher's glove with the Kansas City Blues, 1932. Source: Roger Mall's collection.

⁷ "All-Stars In Nebraska State League Named By Votes Of Team Pilots." Unknown paper but it is not the *Clay Center Dispatch*, probably a paper local to one of the cities with a team in the NSL. September 2nd, 1929. Roger Mall's collection.

⁸ "Blues Get New Players." Unknown paper, possibly the *Kansas City Times*. Specific date is unknown but it is from 1929 and sometime between September 5th (final box score with York) and September 23rd (first appearance with Kansas City). Roger Mall's collection.

⁹ Weiss, Bill, and Marshall Wright. MiLB, "28. 1929 Kansas City Blues." <http://www.milb.com/milb/history/top100.jsp?id=28>.

Morgan Snyder spent the next few seasons bouncing around between different teams and several leagues. Snyder played a handful of games for the Blues but spent most of the 1930 season with a Clay Center junior league team called the Young Men's Club. They competed against various local squads from Manhattan, Minneapolis, Salina and other towns.¹⁰ It is unclear whether or not Snyder was paid for this season, but he was still under contract with the Kansas City Blues so they were possibly paying him while loaning him to the Young Men's Club. In 1931 he reported to spring training with the Kansas City Blues in Lake Charles, Louisiana but was sent to their lower-division affiliate, the Springfield (Illinois) Senators of the Illinois-Indiana-Iowa League.¹¹ This was not a punishment. Management simply felt that Snyder needed more seasoning against easier competition. In 70 games with Springfield in 1931, Snyder had a .310 batting average, which was impressive enough to earn him another invitation to Kansas City's spring training in 1932.¹²

Morgan Snyder's career gets a little murky in the 1932 season. He meticulously kept scrapbooks with every one of his box scores and all related stories about his baseball career – a habit that he continued for the rest of his life, and the habit that provided nearly every source for this project. However, there are no paper sources detailing 1932, so we must rely on the very first footnote from baseball-reference.com. It says he played 19 games for San Antonio (A) of the Texas League before he was recalled by Kansas City, where he played 74 games and had a .264 batting average. Statistics were limited in the 1930s – we do not know how many runs he batted in or how many runs he scored, but he hit two home runs, three triples and 11 doubles in

¹⁰ "Junior Leaguers Go To Manhattan Today." *Clay Center Dispatch*, July 1st, 2nd or 3rd, 1930. Roger Mall's Collection.

¹¹ "Morgan Snyder Goes To Illini Three-I Team." Possibly from the *Clay Center Dispatch*, as Snyder is described as a local boy. March 30th, 1931. Roger Mall's collection.

¹² "Recalls Snyder." *Clay Center Dispatch*, September 19th, 1931. Roger Mall's collection.

1932. This would be Snyder's longest appearance at the highest level of professional baseball that he reached (AA).¹³

Morgan Snyder played a lot of games for the Topeka Senators (A) over the next two seasons (243 combined). He batted .319 in 1933 and .301 in 1934 with a total of 11 home runs.¹⁴ Snyder ended up in Topeka because of a contract dispute with Kansas City. In February of 1933, he was sent a letter from Kansas City's president that stated the following: "Dear Mr. Snyder: I received your letter also your unsigned contract. The salary we have named in your contract is what we honestly and sincerely feel and know is the best we can do for you. I am returning your contract for your signature."¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, an article that begins "Morgan Snyder, recently released by the Kansas City Blues..." came out a few months after that dispute.¹⁶

However, getting released by a double A team and signing with a single A team over a contract dispute may not be as foolish as it appears. The Topeka Senators had a contract with MLB's Cincinnati Reds stipulating that the Reds could take Topeka's two best players at the end of Topeka's season and try them out at the major league level.¹⁷ This path to the majors did not work out for Snyder, but it did offer a potential shortcut that Kansas City did not have (the Blues did not have a major league affiliate at the time Snyder played for them so players had to hope to be noticed by scouts to advance).

Just before he was released by Kansas City, Morgan Snyder married his high school sweetheart, Leah Rita Ertz. The two started dating in 1926 while they were in school together. On March 4th, 1933, they were married in Hebron, Nebraska. They spent their honeymoon

¹³ "baseball-reference.com." <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/player.cgi?id=snyder001mor>

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Original letter, although there was no contract to be found. Dated February 18th, 1933. Roger Mall's collection.

¹⁶ "Morgan Snyder Signs With Topeka of Western League as Main Catcher." Unknown newspaper, dated May 12th 1933. Roger Mall's collection.

¹⁷ Ibid

visiting relatives in Grand Island, Nebraska. For reasons that are not entirely clear, they decided to have a secret wedding. The only guests were Morgan's mother and sister, and it was not published in any newspapers until September.¹⁸ They were a childless couple and their marriage lasted until Morgan's death in 1990.

Morgan Snyder never played in the major leagues but he came very close. In 1934 the Chicago White Sox invited him to their spring training session in Pasadena, California. Chicago released both of their catchers following the 1933 season and Chicago's manager Lew Fonseca was impressed by Snyder's 5'10 and a half, 188 pound build. Snyder also showed impressive stamina by catching all 123 games with Topeka the previous season,¹⁹ but for reasons that are not detailed he did not impress the White Sox enough to earn a major league position so he had to renegotiate another contract with Topeka for the upcoming year.²⁰ Snyder received an indefinite suspension at the end of the 1934 season for arguing balls and strikes with the umpire.²¹ The verbal exchange escalated when Snyder decided to shove the umpire, which resulted in fisticuffs. For his trouble, Snyder received a gash above his eye and was ejected, in addition to the suspension. Snyder had caught every game for Topeka in 1933 and 1934 so his suspension meant they had to plug in somebody who was not very experienced to catch both games in the season-ending doubleheader.

¹⁸ "School Day Romance Culminates In Secret Wedding For Couple." Likely from the *Clay Center Dispatch*. September 26th, 1933. Roger Mall's collection.

¹⁹ "Off For Spring Training." Probably from the *Clay Center Dispatch*. No exact date but it is from sometime in March of 1933. Roger Mall's collection.

²⁰ Two original letters from Topeka's president and manager Art Ewoldt. In the first one Ewoldt expresses surprise over Snyder not being signed by Chicago and includes a contract. Snyder rejects this contract. In the second letter Ewoldt is surprised again, this time because he thought the first contract offer was fair. He promises to do all he can to trade Snyder to a higher level team so he can be paid more, but he explains that he is handcuffed by red tape. Obviously this deal never happens because Snyder finishes his career at the single A level. The letters are dated 4/7/34 and 4/13/34. There is no copy of Snyder's responses so it's impossible to know how the whole conversation went, but in the end some kind of deal was worked out since Snyder played for Topeka again in 1934. Roger Mall's collection.

²¹ "Snyder Is Suspended." Unknown newspaper. September 8th, 1934. Roger Mall's collection.

Morgan Snyder regularly argued with his team about his contract and was thrown out of a game for arguing balls and strikes with an umpire. It's nice to see that ballplayers today have not changed much over the last seven decades. Fortunately for Snyder, his indefinite suspension was lifted at the start of the 1935 season – his final season of professional baseball. He played for the single A Keokuk (Iowa) Indians in 1935. There were no clipped out newspaper articles explaining why he was no longer playing for Topeka but there are a variety of educated guesses that could have believably caused their separation (Topeka was tired of his contract arguments, they were unhappy with his umpire altercation, Snyder thought he could get a better deal with Keokuk). Snyder played in 66 games for Keokuk, batting only .259, a dramatic drop-off from his .300+ days in Topeka.²²

Morgan Snyder retired from professional baseball following the 1935 season. Why would a 25 year old baseball player retire? 25 is when most baseball players are entering their prime, but Snyder decided to hang 'em up instead. There were no newspaper articles about this either, but fortunately his nephew Roger Mall was able to answer this question. Morgan thought it was too much work to keep playing baseball. He was getting burned out and wanted to take it easy, so he did just that.

Following his retirement from baseball, Morgan Snyder was a jack of all trades. He served in the Army in WWII and reached the rank of Staff Sergeant. He was stationed in Hawaii during the war.²³ He also worked at an auto supply store,²⁴ became the head of a Masonic

²² "baseball-reference.com." <http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/player.cgi?id=snyder001mor>

²³ Untitled article. *Clay Center Dispatch*. Date unknown. Describes Staff Sergeant Morgan Snyder's three year deployment in Hawaii. Roger Mall's collection.

²⁴ "Resigns Position." *Clay Center Dispatch*. Date unknown, but it is shortly after he returns from service in Hawaii. Roger Mall's collection.

lodge²⁵ and was named Deputy Sheriff of Clay County.²⁶ Morgan Snyder was a busy man – he also ran a Conoco station,²⁷ he opened a shoe store²⁸ and he temporarily moved to Topeka to learn the jewelry business from his brother.²⁹ He retired for good in 1975 at the age of 66.³⁰

Morgan Snyder died on Tuesday, August 21st, 1990 at the Clay County Hospital. His cause of death is not listed. He was buried on August 24th at Greenwood Cemetery in Clay Center. Roger Mall was one of his pallbearers.³¹ He was a three sport athlete, a talented baseball player who never got the one big break to make it to the majors, a soldier, a sheriff, a salesman – a jack of all trades. In today's world where everyone is increasingly specialized and fewer people have a wide variety of skills, Morgan Snyder was one of the last of a dying breed: the jack of all trades.

²⁵ "Snyder To Head Masonic Lodge." Unknown newspaper. No exact date, but it is from sometime in December of 1961. Roger Mall's collection.

²⁶ "Morgan Snyder Is Named Deputy Sheriff." Probably from the *Clay Center Dispatch*. No exact date but it is sometime after he returns from Hawaii. Roger Mall's collection.

²⁷ "Here Is Where Your Car Gets A 100% Lubrication Job." Advertisement in a newspaper – likely the *Clay Center Dispatch*. Post-WWII. Roger Mall's collection.

²⁸ "New Shoe Store." *Clay Center Dispatch*, March 4th, 1949. Roger Mall's collection.

²⁹ "Move To Topeka." *Clay Center Dispatch*. No exact date – sometime in 1951. Roger Mall's collection.

³⁰ Morgan Snyder's obituary. Roger Mall's collection.

³¹ Ibid

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