

Jimmy Hunter: Perquimans High To Cy Young

(Continued from Page 6)

by any means. Jimmy, like his four brothers and most friends, was "just one of the boys."

THE HUNTERS' parents now live in the house Jimmy and Helen vacated when their new one was completed one year ago.

They have raised two grandchildren, Debbie and Kenneth Ray Boyce, the offspring of a divorced daughter, Lily.

Mr. Hunter still works the fields and enjoys hunting as much as he always has. Mrs. Hunter continues to take care of the clan, though she is often fighting a losing battle with asthma.

"I just hope," she said, "that we'll still be around for our big anniversary." The Hunters will be married 50 years Feb. 15.

Abbott Hunter is a man of relatively few words—to those he does not know, anyway. He does not seem to enjoy discussing in detail the background of his most famous son.

Mrs. Hunter, on the other hand, is a proud mama.

"WHEN JIMMY was a small boy," she recalled, "he'd be running around and saying how nice it would be to play big league baseball. But I guess a lot of youngsters do that."

Not many, though, turn out to be prophetic.

"We're mighty proud of him," she continued. "He's pitched two perfect games, you know—one against Elizabeth City (junior year in high school) and one against Minnesota (for the A's in 1968)."

Kenneth Ray Boyce is now 16



Before Finley: Employer Bill Fowler

years old, and only time will tell if another prophecy is fulfilled.

"When Mr. Finley was here to sign Jimmy," recalled Mrs. Hunter, "he said to Kenneth, 'I'll be back in 12 years to sign you.'"

That was 10 years ago, and the consensus among Hertford natives is that Kenneth Ray could become a major leaguer, "with continued improvement."

JIMMY HUNTER was "courtin'" too, when he was in high school. And he was working on the farm. And at Fowler's country store and service station across the road from Perquimans High.

Actually, Hunter has had just two fulltime employers—Charles O. Finley and Bill Fowler.

On a given day, Fowler is still found working feverishly in a shack next to the gas pumps, chomping on the end of a cigar.

"Jimmy's one of the nicest, most honest men I've ever had helping me," he beamed. "He worked nights, after school, on Saturdays and even on Sundays throughout high school."

"I think as much about him as I could about any other man. I've never heard him curse, fuss or grumble or nothin'."

"And he hasn't changed a bit, not one bit. He's the same Jimmy . . . he loves to hunt, loves to fish. He's an everyday boy in everybody's book."

CHARLES WOODARD, a graduate of Carolina, and Francis Combs, a graduate of N.C. State, were classmates of Hunter's. They all continue to be good friends.

"I went to school with Jimmy from first grade on up," said Woodard, as he took time out from filling Monday afternoon prescriptions. "In grammar school I played third base and

Jimmy pitched. We'd all just sit back in the field because no one ever hit the ball.

"But by the sixth or seventh grade, I could tell he'd be really good. That's when the pitchers usually just throw straight and hard as they can. But even then, Jimmy had a curve that made some of us jump straight across the plate."

"Most of the things I remember, though, were off the high school team. His baseball ability was something. He was so much better, so far superior to everyone else. There were 10 or 12 scouts at most all our games. I knew it was just a matter of time before he'd hit the big leagues . . . though I didn't think it would be quite as fast as it was."

Hunter the pitcher has only gotten better. And Combs, who spent two weeks with the Hunters in Oakland over the summer, thinks Hunter the man has grown neither better nor worse.

"Since he's gotten all this attention," said Combs, "he's maybe a little more outspoken than he used to be. He says a little more what he thinks, but what he thinks hasn't changed. He still takes everything in stride."

THERE IS nary a dissenting

COMBS, WHOSE twin brother Fred earned All-ACC honors as a defensive back at State in the late '60s, was Hunter's catcher in both high school and legion ball. Francis spent some time in the New York Yankee organization and now is a salesman in Raleigh.

"We played legion ball in Ahsokie, two or three games a week for two years," said Combs. "It was about an hour drive, but it was the closest we could play ball."

voice. Jimmy Hunter, Major League Superstar with the World Champion Oakland A's (or the Zany A's as the wire services call them), is still Jimmy Hunter, Perquimans High, class of '64.

"Had I not been able to play pro baseball and had I gone to college," said Hunter, "I probably would have gone to East Carolina and become a game warden."

But with \$100,000-plus per

year contracts for as long as he wants to continue playing ball, and with the unspoiled countryside of down-east Carolina to roam and scour in the off-season, Hunter is now "playing it cool."

"When it's all over, I just want to come back here to Hertford and farm."

And hunt, fish and be "just a country boy."

Jimmy Hunter will not have changed then, either.

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