

Springtime means many things for many people. But for sports fans it means the ending of basketball and the beginning of spring training in baseball. And for a former Brevard college student that brings back memories of playing collegiate and professional baseball.

Gil Coan, an outfielder for many teams, played the majority of his career with the Washington Senators. But before Coan began his professional career he played at Brevard College.

"I was from a small town (Mineral Springs, N.C.) and came to BC in 1940," said Coan.

But Coan did not just come to Brevard to play baseball and then go professional. He had a little more trouble than that. "I met my wife at school, then I got out in spring of '41 and I went to work in Spartanburg and came back and worked for Ecusta and I got married in Sept. of '41," said Coan.

But playing baseball was not on his mind after he got married. "I was in love and not going to leave Brevard. When I played baseball, scouts saw me and offered me a contract with Winston-Salem of Class B ball. I instead played for the inter-departmental league at Ecusta," said Coan.

After being out of baseball for a while, Coan decided to give it another chance. "I called the scout who signed me and went to spring training," said Coan.

After spring training, Coan was assigned to Kingsport, Tenn. "I was leading the league in everything," Coan said, "and got called up to Chattanooga."

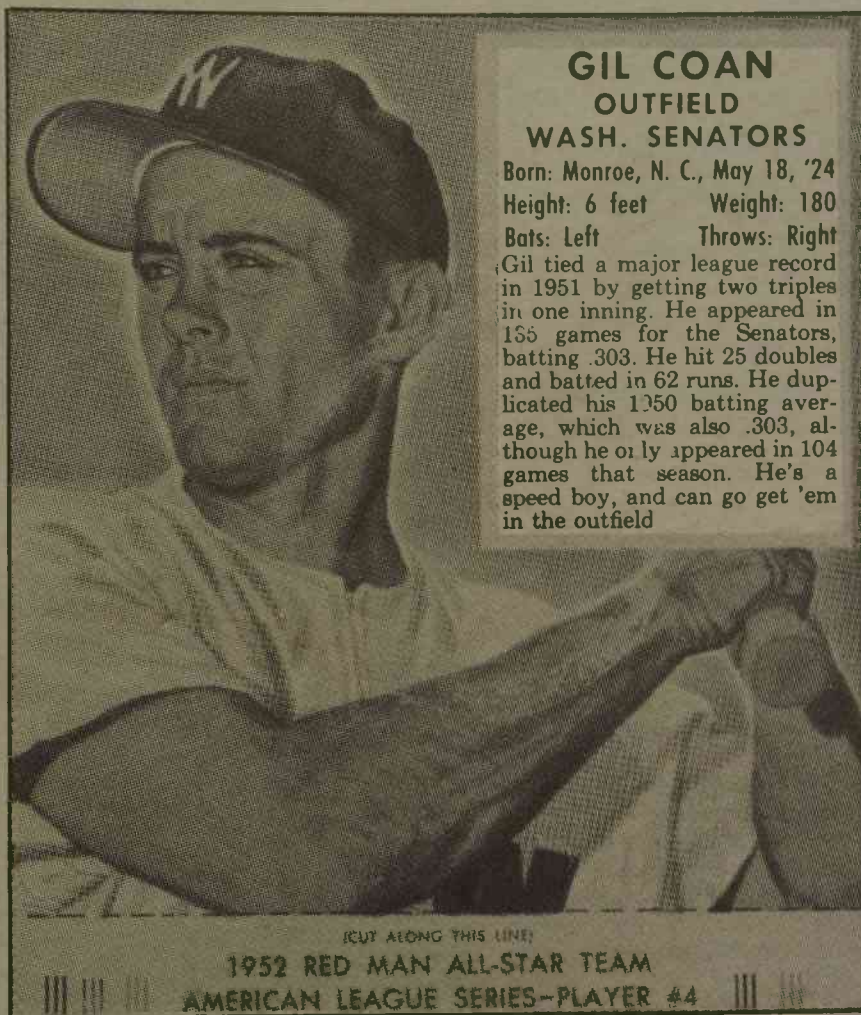
And led the league he did.

He led the league in hits (201), doubles (40), triples (28), homers (16) and batting (.372).

After playing for Chattanooga for a year, Coan got the big chance when his contract was sold to the Washington Senators in '46. He played eight of his 10 years with Washington. After the '53 season he was traded to the Baltimore Orioles. After that season he moved to the Chicago White Sox, then to the New York Giants and finally finished out his career at Minneapolis.



Gil Coan, front and center, on the 1941 Brevard College baseball team.



The star infielder and former Tornado star depicted on a 1952 Red Man Chewing Tobacco baseball card.

A talk with Brevard's

Mr. Baseball

by Jeff Turner

During his career he played at the most famous ballparks of all time.

He has played in Yankee Stadium, Comiskey Park, Fenway Park and Wrigley Field, to name a few.

Coan has played with some of the greatest ball players of all time including Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams and Willie Mays.

But of all the great baseball players Coan said he most enjoyed meeting Connie Mack, former coach and owner of the Philadelphia A's. "I sat down and talked to him. We were going on a train from Washington to Philadelphia. I sat down and talked to him while eating dinner. He was quite an individual," Coan said.

Coan also said he met Babe Ruth in spring training of '47. Even though Ruth was sick you could still see his greatness, said Coan.

Along with baseball greats, he also met some of America's heroes. "I met Harry Truman, General Eisenhower and Vice President Nixon. He (Nixon) and his wife came over and talked to me before a parade in Baltimore because I had played in Washington," said Coan.

But Coan had problems with all of his exposure. "If you like that kind of thing you could meet anyone and be around anyone."

Of course playing major league baseball brings back fond memories for Coan. "Within my memory was the '46 season. We opened against the Yankees with Joe DiMaggio, Frank Kelly, Joe Gordon - and Ed Ruthen was the pitcher. 60,000 people were in Yankee Stadium. In the ninth inning we were losing and I was called to pinch hit. I fouled off about 15 pitches before he finally struck me out," said Coan.

But Coan's greatest memory was not a game but a whole weekend. "It was the fourth of July weekend and in the first game I hit two home runs and had six runs batted in. In the next game I knocked in the winning run in the eighth inning and then hit a home run the next day," said Coan.

After retiring from professional baseball he came back to Brevard College and coached for two years, before opening his insurance business. "I bought half the business in '56 and the other half in '62," said Coan.

Coan has retired and bought a farm, which he says he enjoys.

He says it was time. "No, I did not have any desire to stay in baseball. I got into business here and I haven't missed it," said Coan. "Too many players stay around too long and eventually get too old. I was only 34 when I got out of baseball."

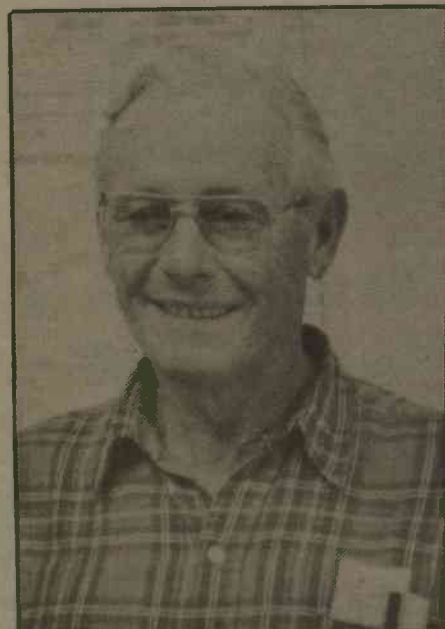
Coan did do a couple of Firsts in his career the first of which was to fly in an airplane. He was playing in St. Louis when the train engineers went on strike. In order to get the team back to Washington they had to fly back.

"Everyone was scared to death," said Coan, "because of the chance of an accident the whole team would be wiped out."

There is only one reason Coan says he regrets leaving baseball. "I wished I would have played longer for the pension. It is up to the maximum allowed by the federal government. I was a charter member when it was formed in '46," said Coan. The average players pension now after playing 12 years is \$90,000 a year.

Regarding baseball at BC, Coan said, "I wish they could have baseball, but with schools being out May 1, it's hard. When I was in college we were in until the end of May. Unless you've got a program with some money where you can play in Georgia or Florida, I don't think it's advisable," said Coan.

But for a man who put his life of his family before his first love. Coan did a great job with his baseball career as well as in his career life.



Gil Coan today: no regrets. (Jeff Turner photo)