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Locklear

(Continued from page 1)

dian and there are things about his dentity that disturb him.

It would be easy to place superficial tags of "moody" or "brooding" on Gene Locklear. But those labels are misleading. They may describe a part of his per-

sonality, but not its sum total. The best way to talk about Gene Lock-lear is to divide his life into its two distinct parts.

Baseball Player

There wasn't much recreation except baseball when Locklear was growing up in Pembroke.

He do things so much easier than oth-er youngsters that he knew he had a tal-ent for the game. He had an outstanding career at Pembroke High, which went unnoticed.

He was not even offered a scholarship to Pembroke State University, which galls him.

"If your home town school won't offer you a scholarship, who will?" he said. "We've had a lot of players from around here in the last few years that have gone to other schools.

"Why wasn't I good enough to go to Pembroke? I don't know. They saw me play. You tell me."

LOCKLEAR ATTENDED a Pittsburgh Pirates tryout camp in 1969. He said he was the fastest player there, had a good arm and hit three pitches out of the park in five swings.

Yet the Pirates told him he wasn't a prospect.

But a Cincinnati scout had seen him and arranged for a tryout. The Reds liked what they saw and signed him. "I got no bonus money, just a plane ticket to Tampa, Fla.," Locklear said.

'To me, that was all I needed. I was young and I just wanted a chance to play paseball

"Maybe if I had had the right backing, the right people behind me, I could have gotten a big bonus. But you can't go through life saying 'could have.' "

Two years after Locklear signed, he led the AA Eastern League in hitting with a .323 mark. In 1972 he was Player of the Year in the American Association with a .325 average, 15 homers and 65 RBIs.

The Reds brought him up in 1973, but he figured his days were numbered be-cause of some of the other young players they had, like Ken Griffey and Dan Driessen. He was traded to San Diego, which looked like a good opportunity.

IT WASN'T.

The Padres used Locklear sparingly the rest of 1973 and he hit just .233 in a mere 180 at bats. He began 1974 at Hawaii and was hit-

ting .341 with 14 homers and 52 RBIs in just 77 games when he was promoted. But the Padres wasted him on the bench and he got only 70 at bats.

It looked like 1975 would finally be Locklear's year. He got off to a torrid start and was hitting over .400 in the ear-ly going when he was abruptly shipped to the minors.

"What happened was that I demanded to play," Locklear said. "I was making \$20,000 and hitting .400 and still playing behind Bobby Tolan, who was making \$100,000 and hitting .220. I didn't think

earned a high school degree is con cial art and advertising.

"I took correspondence courses three years," he said. "They sent a li-son each mouth, dealing with all law of art-sketching, oil painting, cartoon commercial art and so on. I hears technique through these courses.

"If the opportunity in baseball hadn't come along, I had planned on a career in

Locklear worked with crayons and wa-ter colors in his youth and sold his first paintings in the seventh grade. The wall with the Biblical scene, de-picting the birth and death of Christ, was done with house ensured mint.

was done with house enamel paint.

"I did that in about a week-and-a-half," he said. "I always work fast be-cause I get going on something and keep at it until it's done.

"I wanted to do a subject on a wall and I thought the religious scene would keep my mind in touch with God and re-mind me to be thankful for the things that had happened to me."

LOCKLEAR PAINTS all kinds of subjects, always with the idea that someone might buy them. Pete Rose has about 25 of Locklear's pieces in his restaurant and Johnny Bench has some in his.

In addition, Locklear has donated paintings to the governor and lieutenant governor and had one to hang in the White House.

"When Gerald Ford was president, I had the opportunity to tour the White House with Dr. Theodore C. Marrs (special assistant to the president for Special Affairs).

"It was something I really enjoyed and to show my appreciation to Dr. Marrs, I painted a country scene and donated it to him. It hung in the White House until Ford left and Dr. Marrs has it at one of his homes now."

Playing in Japan will open some other doors for his work, both as a source to draw from and as a market to sell in. He has already talked to some people about doing prints of Japanese players, such as Sadaharu Oh, the all-time home run king.

"Painting is my way of knowing that I've accomplished something," he ex-plained. "People waste a lot of time in their lives. If I was married and had kids, it might be different. But a single person has to try and get the most he can out of his life. When you get bored, you turn to drugs or alcohol."

self a professional artist, although he has sold about 100 pieces for as much as \$1,500. But he wants to be able to make a living as an artist when he finishes hi baseball career.

"I've given a lot of paintings away to non-profit organizations and things," he said. "I figure the more work I get out, the better-known I'll become."??

Locklear has a studio in his home which he shares with his mother. In fact, she's the reason he doesn't spent the offseason in New York or California or somewhere else he could have a studio and have his work widely seen.

"My mother sacrificed her time to do the best she could for me," he said. "So why can't I sacrifice some of my time

JUST AS Locklear's life would have been different without baseball, so would it have taken a different turn without painting.

Locklear doesn't really consider him-

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SERVICES

Fort Sill, Okla .-- Pvt. Londell McNeill, son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry McNeill, Jr., Route 2, Maxton, N.C., recently completed training as a cannoneer under the One Station Unit Training (OSUT) Program at Fort Sill, Okla. OSUT is a 13 week period which combines basic combat training with advanced individual training.

Students learned the duties of a howitzer or gun section crewman and received instruction in handling ammunition, setting fuses and preparing charges, communica-tions and maintenance.

McNeill entered the Army in November 1977.

The private is a 1975 graduate of Hoke - County High School, Rasford.

that was fair. So, instead of playing me, they sent me down to teach me a lesson or something.'

Locklear was in Hawaii only 18 games and then recalled, but he ended the season with just 237 at bats. He hit .321, best average on the club.

In 1976, he again played sparingly with San Diego and was finally sold to the Yankees, for whom he played in just 13 games.

LOOKING OVER the Yankee roster in spring training last year, Locklear

knew there was no way he'd stick. "they had too many guys making too much money to keep me," he said. "So I

decided to play out my option." He spent the year at Syracuse, where the highlight of his season was hitting four homers in one game, which hadn't been done in the minors since 1956.

The Yankees apparently were not im-pressed by Locklear's feats. Instead of calling him up for the pennant race, they purchased players like Cliff Johnson and Dave Kingman,

So Locklear's major league career hasn't progressed as he had hoped. He may have picked up a bad reputation, however unjustly, because of the incident in San Diego when he was sent down while hitting 400. Now 28, his speed isn't what it used to be, but his bat is as good as ever.

· LOCKLEAR BECAME a free agent after last year and talked with several teams, but nothing ever developed. Fi-nally, he recently signed to play in Japan with the Nippon Ham Fighters of Tokyo. It could be an excellent opportunity.

"I signed a two-year contract with them for more than \$100,000 a year," he said. "I know they'll play me because they'll want to protect their investment. "It will be difficult, with the cultural

and language differences, but if you're making enough money, you can put up with anything. They'll have interpreters there and quite a few people speak En-

"It's not the big leagues, but the com-petition is about equal to AAA. I'd like to play well there, then sign another contract for several more years for even better money.

Locklear will probably leave sometime this week and stay through the Japanese peason, which lasts until Oct. 1.

It may not be the big leagues, but it's certainly better than just hanging around for a couple of years putting in some time toward his pension. And it will be more money than he's ever made by far.

The Artist

n Gene Locklear was nt. He had his first

to keep her happy? She lives for my coming home in the winter. I want to show her respect while she's still living. When she's gone, there's nothing I can do for her. ...

THERE IS ONE more side to Gene Locklear- his Lumbee Indian heritage. This troubles him.

"I don't like my heritage because I don't know what it is," he said. "It's all mixed up, so how can I depict it in a painting

"Our people always tried to get out of their heritage and raise themselves like the white man. So all we know is what we've learned from whites

"I'd love to know if I'm full-blooded or not. And I'd love to know what things were like for our people 200 years ago. Maybc it would help explain my makeup to me. But that's just not the way it is.

"I guess it's really not that important. I deal with now and tomorrow, not with the past.'

Locklear maintains a certain identity with Jim Thorpe, the marvelous Indian athlete in the early part of this century. Thorpe, who became an alcoholic before he died, was not appreciated by his people despite his accomplia

"I've been down part of that road my-self," Locklear said. "I had a dream to do something with my life and I've done it, despite people who tried to tell me there was no way an Indian could do it.

"I just did what God gave me the abil-ity to do. It took hard work, dedication and self respect. I don't have the ability that Jim Thorpe had, but at least I can say that I tried."

And judging from his work on canvas and to a lesser extent on the baseba field, Gene Locklear has succeeded

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