

# Baseball great, recreation advocate Red Layton going into Kings Mountain Sports Hall of Fame

(ED. NOTE - The late James "Red" Layton will be inducted into the Kings Mountain Sports Hall of Fame Tuesday night, May 16 at 7 p.m. at the Kings Mountain Community Center along with the late Bud Bumgardner, Punch Parker and the 1966 Teener League baseball all-star team. ACC basketball Coach of the Year Dave Odom of Wake Forest University will be the guest speaker. Tickets are \$10 each and available at Carolina State Bank, McGinnis Department Store and the Kings Mountain Herald).

When Kings Mountain sports fans get together to talk about the good old days and their all-time favorite players, the name of Red Layton always comes up.

Layton was a three-sport star for the Mountaineers in the early 1930's, and he played several years of semi-professional and professional baseball.

Layton, also, was one of the town's biggest supporters of youth sports. The hundreds of youngsters - and adults - who take advantage of the facilities offered at Kings Mountain Parks and Recreation Department may not recognize Layton's name but they have him to thank for helping organize the recreation program.

Layton was a city commissioner in the early 1950s and was the town's first Recreation Director. At that time the recreation program was held in the schools because the town had no facilities other than City Stadium which was used for baseball and softball programs.

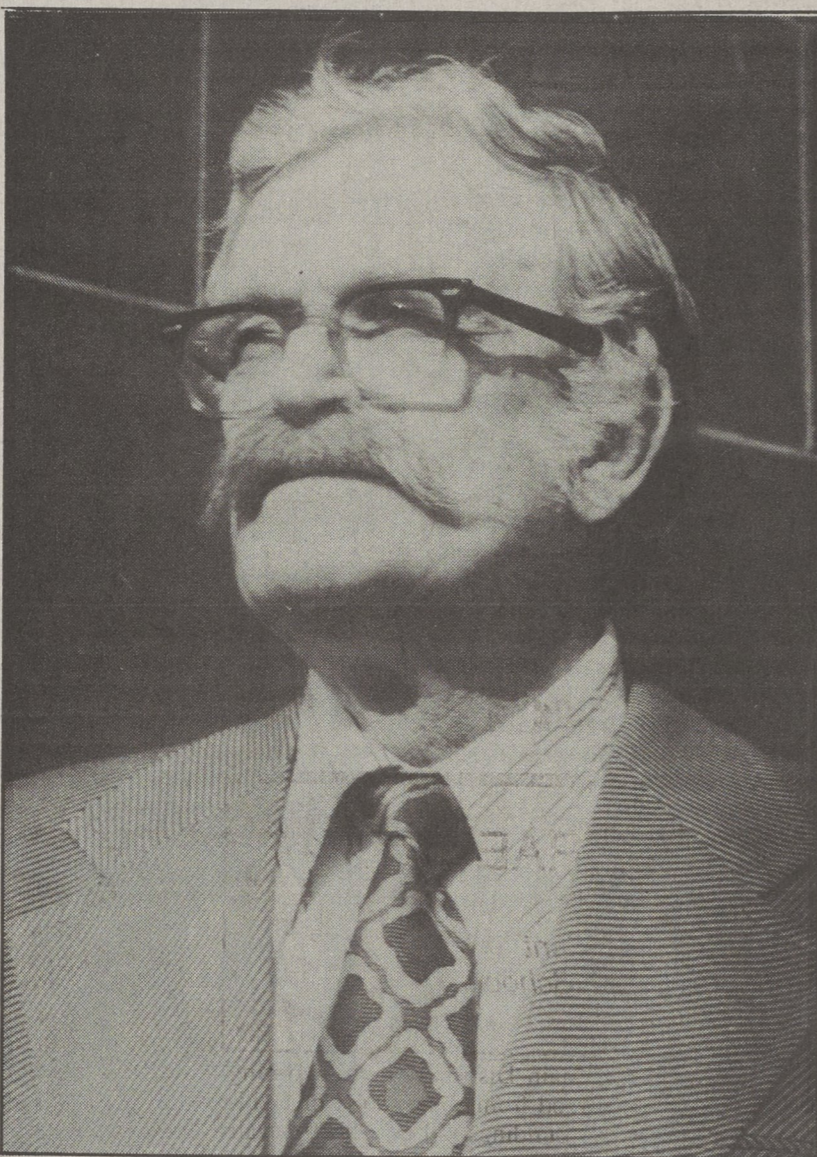
But Layton and fellow commissioner Lloyd Davis pushed hard for a recreation program and facilities, and in 1953 Layton organized the city's first Little League baseball program. Shortly afterward work began on a playing facility which is now known as Jake Early Park and is located adjacent to the Community Center.

What was once a four-team baseball league for players ages 8-12 has now expanded to include T-Ball, Dixie Youth Minor and Major Leagues and Dixie Boys, girls softball and various other sports with several hundred youngsters participating.

At the same time the little league was forming, Layton and others organized a Pony League. Because it was not affiliated with organized leagues for several years, the first place team would meet a team of all-stars from the second, third and fourth place teams at season's end.

The Little League, however, was affiliated with Little League Baseball and from the very start placed an all-star team in district competition. The first all-star team in 1953 lost to a good Mt. Holly team in the opening round of the district playoffs.

If records of KMHS sports were kept in the early 1930s, they have long been destroyed, but many for-



After his baseball career was over Red Layton served as a Kings Mountain City Commissioner and the town's first Recreation Director. He organized the first Little League and Pony League in Kings Mountain.

*"Red Layton was the best athlete I've ever seen."*

*-Toby Williams*

mer athletes and fans recall Red Layton as one of the best all-around athletes in KMHS history.

Toby Williams, who is a member of the KM Hall of Fame and was Layton's teammate at KMHS and has seen most of the athletes here since the late twenties, said in a feature story in the Herald several years ago that Layton was "the best athlete I've ever seen."

"He could do it all," said Williams. "He was as fast as a ghost. He could fly."

Layton was best known for his baseball prowess, but Williams said in this day of wide-open football he would have been an excellent pass receiver. "He could leap and had excellent hands," he said.

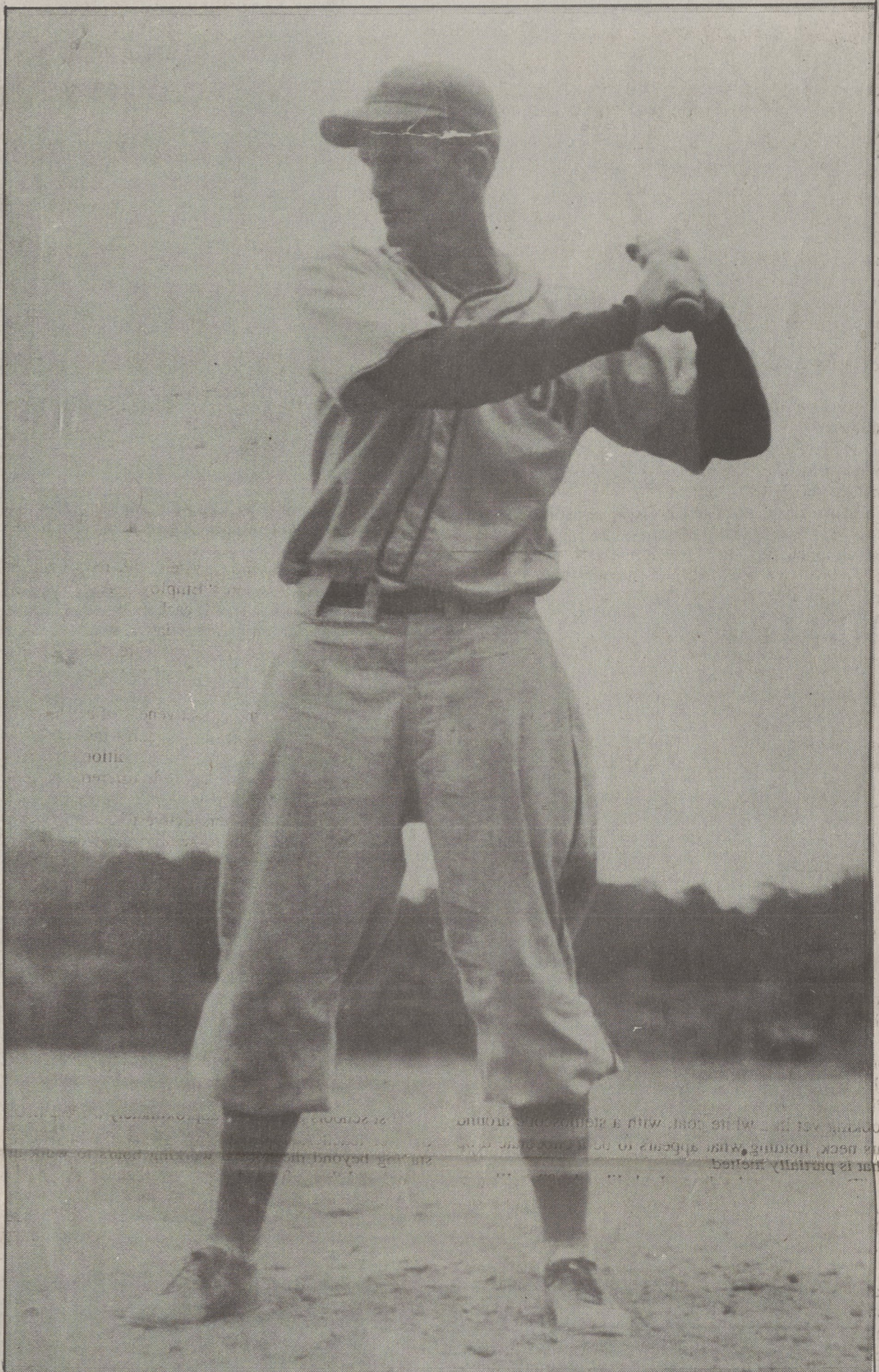
Layton was a powerful left-hand hitter, played in the outfield and was an outstanding drag bunter and base runner. "He could get to first base quicker than anybody I've ever seen," Williams said. "He could

beat Mickey Mantle. If he hit the ball to deep short it was a hit, and he could steal bases."

Layton played some pro baseball after graduating high school, and the story through the years is that he would have made the major leagues if he hadn't seriously injured his hip in an automobile accident. Layton's son, Dr. James (Ronnie) Layton, a Mountaineer football standout in the early fifties, said that story is a bit misleading. He said the biggest obstacle in Layton's path to the big leagues was that he was madly in love with the woman who would later become his wife, and spent most of his time coming home to Kings Mountain to see her. Dr. Layton said the automobile accident occurred long after his father's pro baseball career was over.

Layton helped organize, and was a leading player, in some of the local textile league teams in Kings Mountain in the mid-thirties, and he was also an outstanding softball player. He is a member of the Crumerton Softball Hall of Fame.

In a stretch from 1934-36 Layton was an outfielder on the Neisler Mills semi-pro team which was one of the most feared teams in the American Textile League. The team featured some of Kings Mountain's best all-time baseball players, including catcher Jake Early, who went on to play 10



Red Layton was a left-hand hitting outfielder who had power to all fields and was an excellent base runner and defensive player. He played high school and Textile League baseball in Kings Mountain and also played professional baseball in the Boston organization.

years in the major leagues, Coman Falls, Red Ormand, Bill Huffstetler, Robert Allen, Arthur Hord, Clyde McSwain, W.J. Fulkerson, Charlie Moss, Ralph Mitcham, and others.

Layton hit .412 and clubbed five home runs for Neisler in 1934, and in 1936 he hit .400 and helped lead the team to a 19-12 record and the league championship.

The late Robert Allen, who played shortstop on those teams, recalled in a feature story in the

Herald several years ago that Layton and Coman Falls were an unbeatable combination in the outfield.

"With Coman Falls in center and Red Layton in right, we had the best outfield of any team around here," Allen recalled. "Layton was the fastest thing to ever come out of Kings Mountain. He and Coman Falls were about as equal in talent as any two players you'd ever find."

Allen recalled that the Neisler

Mills teams played at a field located at the present site of the Dilling Street water plant. It later moved to a field located where the American Legion is now.

"The old legion field was a huge park," he noted. "There were never but two balls hit over the right field fence, which was well over 400 feet. Red Layton hit one out and a boy from Lenoir named Lefty Chestnut hit the other. I was fortunate enough to see both of them."



1935 MARGRACE MILL TEAM - The 1935 Margrace Mill baseball team included many of the legends of Kings Mountain sports. The team competed in the highly competitive American Textile League. Front row, left to right, business manager C.C. "Shorty" Edens, pitcher Horace Styers, catcher Jake Early, shortstop Robert Allen, third baseman Bill Huffstetler, batboy C.C. Edens Jr., first baseman-field manager Hugh "Red" Ormand and centerfielder Coman Falls. Back row, catcher-outfielder Carodine Moss, pitcher Willie Grice, pitcher W.J. Fulkerson, pitcher Howard Pursley, second baseman Skinny Jenkins, rightfielder Red Layton, catcher Ralph Mitchem, and scorekeeper Happy McDaniel. The man in the background was one of the team's fans, Wash Layton.



Red Layton, far right, was a City Commissioner in 1953 when the new entrance to Mountain Rest Cemetery was dedicated on East Gold Street. Pictured, left to right, are Commissioners B.T. Wright Sr. and L.E. Davis, Cemetery Supt. Sam Suber, Mayor Garland E. Still, and Commissioners Olland Pearson and Layton. Layton was instrumental in the organization of the Kings Mountain Recreation Department and the building of Deal Street and Davidson Park sports complexes.