

Rob Ducey

May 24, 1965 -

Cambridge's Rob Ducey did what few Canadians had done before him -- make it to the major leagues. By the time he retired in 2001 he had played in 13 different seasons in the Major Leagues, the longest career of any Ontario position player since Thunder Bay's Jeff Heath played 14 seasons from 1936-1949.

Along the way he accomplished some remarkable things, including playing for Canada at the 2004 Olympics, winning the Tip O'Neil Award as Canada's top baseball player, and playing alongside of such stars as Dave Stieb, Roberto Alomar, Fred McGriff, Ken Griffey, Jr., Nolan Ryan, Randy Johnson, and Curt Schilling, to name a few.

Even as a youngster, Ducey was quick on his feet, was a gifted fielder possessing natural talent, and could throw and hit.

He was first noticed by the Cambridge Terrier's Herb Schiel when he was still playing softball as a 15-year-old.

Three years later he signed his first pro contract, and by the age of 21, just five years after playing his first baseball game, he played his first Major League game. He was 21.

When Ducey was 15 it was suggested he play midget ball for the Cambridge Colts as he was too young to play Junior -- he played a few games for the Junior Bulldogs --, even though his ability was evident even at that age. Soon he was playing for the Junior Intercounty Bulldogs.

And Ducey shone.

Said longtime friend Al Findlay: "If it wasn't for Ed Heather, Rob would probably not be where he is today."

He left home in 1983 to play baseball for Seminole Community College in Florida.

Soon he was being scouted by Major League scouts.

Along the way he would help out part-time at the awards store.

"Robbie deserved everything he got," said Findlay. "He had the heart and drive, and everything about him was aces."

Walt Jeffries, a scout with the Jays, first noticed him and he was signed as a free agent in 1984, and he was sent to the Jays minor league team in Medicine Hat, Alberta. That year he won the MVP award.

"Rob had natural ability," said stepfather Ed Heather. "He liked to play, and worked hard at it. He had great instincts for the game, something that can't be taught, and was coachable. He enjoyed the game."

Ducey made the adjustment from softball to baseball in stride, though it took a little while for his arm to develop

When he was poised to crack the roster of the Blue Jays, after having spent a few years in the minor leagues, the task seemed almost insurmountable. He would be vying for a job with the team that had, as it was commonly referred to at the time, "the best outfield in baseball."

That outfield included George Bell, Devon White and Lloyd Moseby.

Yet Ducey, the young Canadian, met the challenge and made the final roster for the Jays. He split time with the AAA Syracuse farm team to get playing time, and when he finally seemed to be on the verge of great things, suffered a devastating knee injury at SkyDome that altered the course of his career.

That first year with the Jays saw Ducey hit the first home run (Sept. 14, 1987) in the team's record-setting spree of 10 home runs -- and all-time high -- in a single game.

Among the other highlights of his career include:

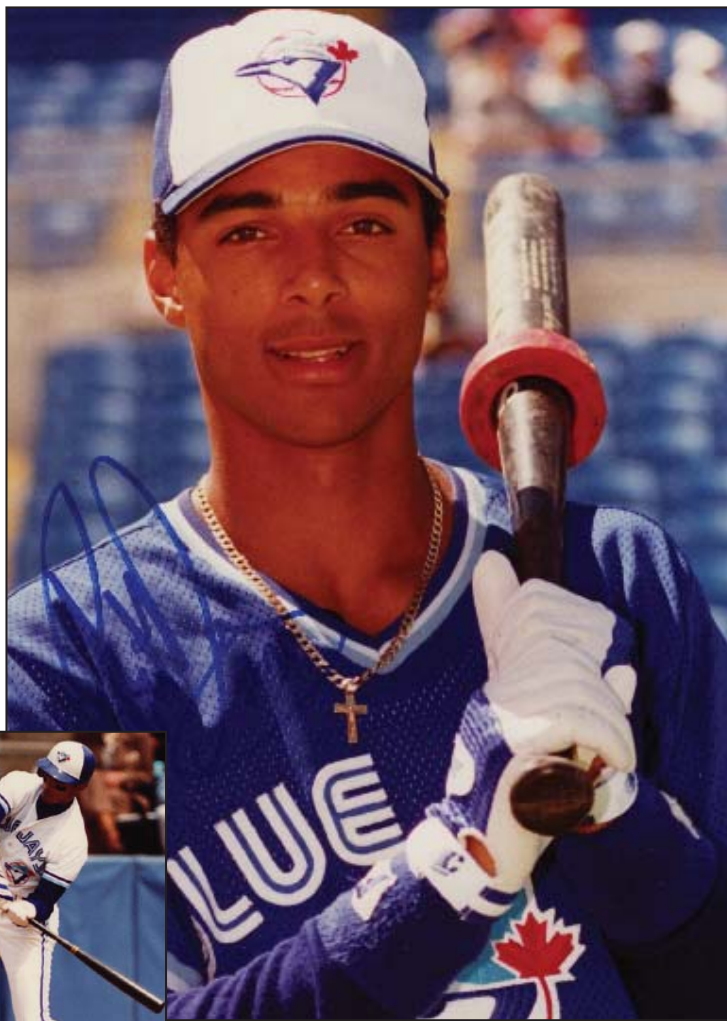
- played first ever game at SkyDome
- Minor League all-star four times
- hit for the cycle twice in the same year playing pro in Venezuela
- was the last Texas Ranger to hit a home run in the old park (1993) before moving into the new stadium in 1994
- played outfield for the Rangers in the last-ever game pitched by Nolan Ryan at Seattle
- played on three division championship teams (two with Toronto, one with Seattle)
- 1986 winner of Canadian player of the year award (Tip O'Neil Award), an award presented by widow of late Jackie Robinson, Mrs. Rachel Robinson
- won 1992 World Series ring in 1992 with Jays, though traded mid-season to Angels
- won MVP award in first season of pro ball with Medicine Hat
- had five hits in one game against San Diego (1999)
- three times had four hits in a Major League game, including one at Fenway Park
- set all-time team record for pinch batting with Philadelphia in 2000 (73 appearances)
- played in game when George Brett had 3,000th hit
- most unsung player award, Seattle, 1997
- tied an all-time record in Japan in 1996 when he hit eight leadoff home runs
- hit last Major League home run as an Expo against Blue Jays in Montreal (2001) off Chris Carpenter

Ducey remained with Toronto from 1987 until 1992 when he was traded to California.

The following season he was dealt to the Texas Rangers, where he remained until 1994.

He then changed course and accepted an offer to play in Japan (1995-96), hitting 51 home runs in two seasons with the Nippon Ham Fighters..

In 1997 he returned to the Major Leagues with the Seattle Mariners. In 1999 he became a Philadelphia Phillie.



Cambridge's Rob Ducey, above, after breaking into the major leagues with the Toronto Blue Jays, had a lengthy career as a big league player with several teams, including Texas, California, Seattle, Philadelphia and Montreal. He also spent a couple of seasons playing professionally in Japan.



It was in Philadelphia that Ducey had the distinction of receiving the ceremonial first pitch on Opening Day by a man who had the world's first hand transplant.

Ducey closed out his Major League playing career with the Montreal Expos, one of only two Canadian players -- Dennis Boucher is the other -- to wear both uniforms of Canada's only two Major League teams.

Interestingly, both coached with Team Canada at the same time.

Ducey was encouraged by his late mother, Anita, and later, by his stepfather Ed. In 2004 he played one last time for Canada at the Olympics.

"We developed some great friendships and that was a true team we played on at the Athens Olympics," he said.

Since his retirement Ducey has been a batting coach with the Expos and Yankees organizations and in 2005, coached the Yankees Rookie League team. He joined the Toronto Blue Jays in 2006 as a pro scout, and hopes to return to the Majors as a coach or executive some day.

"That's absolutely what I'm going to do," he said. "No one wants to be in the minors for the rest of their career. Eventually, whether it's as a coach or in the front office, you set your goal to be in the major leagues."

Inducted 2006