

GEORGE HALAS

fastball, Johnson came back with an 0-2 curveball that sent the rookie right fielder back to the dugout.

Several decades after that 12-inning game ended in a tie, Halas — who finished 0-for-5 — was asked by a reporter in Chicago to name his greatest thrill in sports.

“The day I hit two over the fence off Walter Johnson,” Halas said.

The reporter, unsure of what he meant, countered with a follow-up.

“For home runs?”

“Yeah,” Halas responded. “If they’d stayed fair.”

Three days after the game against Washington, Halas was on the bench in Detroit, but it didn’t stop him from making his presence known. When the legendary Ty Cobb came to the plate, Halas’s teammates — in particular, Yankees catcher Truck Hannah — encouraged the rookie to “get on” the Tigers’ often hostile superstar and future Hall of Famer.

“I started hollering at him from the bench,” Halas told *The Sporting News* in ’76. “He had no trouble hearing me. Finally, Cobb dropped his bat and came over toward our dugout. He said, ‘You fresh kid. I’ll kick your teeth out.’ Well, I told him that I would meet him after the game.

“The other players, led by Hannah, were quick to get dressed after the game to see what was going to happen,” Halas continued. “I have to admit now to delaying a little. The dressing rooms were close together, and when I walked out, not knowing what was going to happen, Cobb walked out of the Tigers locker room at almost the same exact second. He had cooled down, and he just looked at me and said, ‘Why don’t you save that pep and energy for when you get on the field instead of popping off?’”

The two met again later in New York City and took a long walk together.

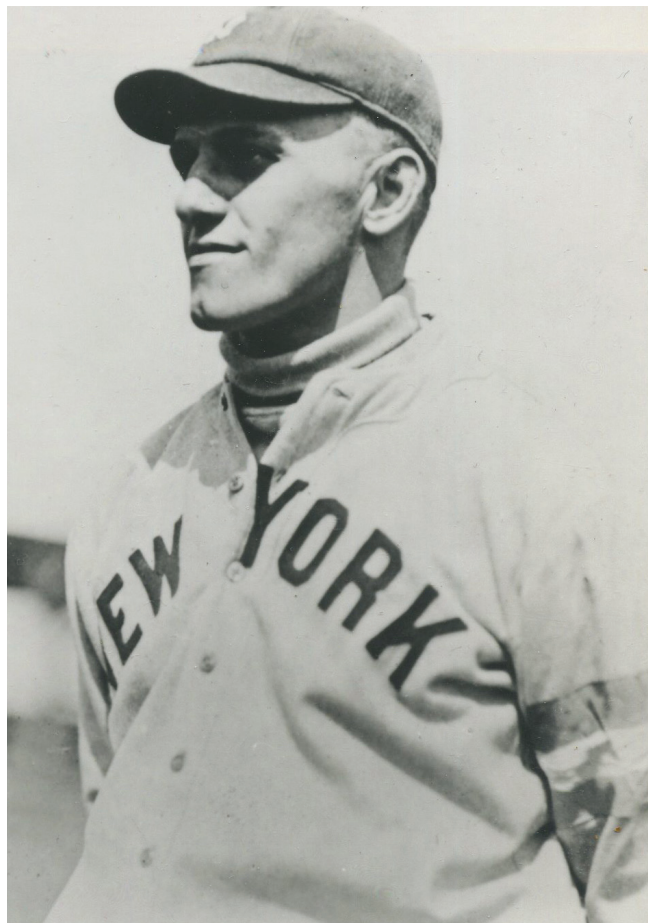
“As the years went by, we became good friends,” Halas said in *The Sporting News* article. “I worshipped him as a player. He could do all of the things I wanted to do on a baseball field.”

As spring turned to summer in 1919, it became more apparent that Halas was not going to turn into the type of player Cobb was anytime soon. The rookie’s hip injury was more severe than anyone originally believed, and after 22 at-bats, he still had just two hits, good for a .091 batting average.

Other than taking long walks, Halas wasn’t given any other directives as to how he could improve the condition of his hip. He had a severe limp, and on two occasions, he was picked off base after coming into games as a pinch-runner.

In mid-June, Halas asked Huggins if he could visit John “Bone-setter” Reese, a well-known trainer and chiropractor in Youngstown, Ohio. Reese diagnosed the injury as a dislocated hip, and he wasted no time in trying to fix it.

“I got up on the table in his office,” Halas told *The Sporting News*. “He dug those strong fingers of his into my legs and back. He told me that I had twisted my thigh bone when I slid into third base. He felt for the bone and actually twisted it back into place, and I was fine after that.”



Even though Halas was no longer experiencing pain, Huggins believed that he needed to gain experience in the minors in order to improve his ability to hit major league curveballs. When Halas rejoined the Yankees in Cleveland, Huggins delivered the news that the young outfielder would be spending the remainder of the 1919 season with the St. Paul Saints of the American Association.

“I was devastated,” Halas later wrote in his autobiography, *Halas by Halas*. “But looking back on it, I was grateful for the manner in which Miller Huggins told me. Through the years, when I had to cut a player, I tried to emulate Huggins’ grace and consideration.”

The demotion proved to be beneficial to Halas’s baseball career, if only for a short time. While working with Saints manager Mike Kelley, Halas batted .274 in 39 games. More importantly, he seemed to have made strides under Kelley’s tutelage.

“He was a terrific coach, and he taught me how to hit the curveball,” Halas told Chicago sportscaster Brad Palmer in an interview decades later. “I had previously moved up in the batter’s box and tried to hit the pitch before it broke. But he put me back deep and showed me how to wait on the ball. I felt like that season in St. Paul helped me, and Mike believed I was ready for the big leagues the next spring.”