



## KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

### Ralph Houk (1919 - Present)

The New York Yankees have a storied history in Major League Baseball that continues on today. The organization's legacy includes one Kansan in particular who contributed as a player, coach and manager of the legendary team. Ralph Houk, nicknamed "Major," also managed the Detroit Tigers and Boston Red Sox before retiring from his extraordinary baseball career.



Born in Lawrence, Kan., in 1919, Ralph Houk started his baseball career working his way up in the Yankee farm league. His career was put on hold when he enlisted in the army during World War II. From 1942 to 1945, Houk served with the Rangers of the 9th Armored Division as private and eventually as major. He participated in the fighting at Bastogne and the Battle of the Bulge, for which he received a Bronze Star, Silver Star and Purple Heart.

After returning from the war, Houk finally made it to the majors, playing catcher in the 1947 season and batting .272 in 41 games. Once the Yankees picked up Yogi Berra, Houk served as back-up catcher and only played in another 50 games in his eight years as a major league player. In the 1953-1954 season, Houk spent time as the bullpen coach, beginning a new part of his baseball career.



For the next three seasons, Houk managed the Denver Bears, an American Association affiliate of the Yankees. He then returned to the Yankees as a first base coach for manager Casey Stengel. When Stengel became ill in 1960, Houk filled in as manager and received the title on his own the following season. On Oct. 9, 1961, the Yankees won the World Series, making Houk only the third rookie manager to win the pennant.

Houk coached legendary Yankee players including Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris and Whitney Ford. The Yankees again won the pennant in 1962, and Houk delivered three consecutive American League championships before the Los Angeles Dodgers swept the Yankees in the 1963 World Series. Houk moved to the front office for the Yankee organization, serving as general manager for two unsuccessful seasons before returning to the bench as coach.



Houk coached the Yankees through the 1973 season and through a long rebuilding process before joining the Detroit Tigers, where he served as manager for five years. He led the Tigers through a successful organization rebuilding before retiring in 1978. However, Houk couldn't stay away from the game, and he returned to manage the Boston Red Sox, a team he also looked to rebuild before retiring again just before his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Once in retirement, the Minnesota Twins hired Houk to serve as vice president of the organization in 1986, an organization he helped guide to the pennant the following season. Houk is remembered as a true players' coach, with a penchant for developing young talent. In 20 seasons of management, he maintained a .514 winning percentage and coached 16 World Series games.

