

The Wonderful Life of Yankee Pitcher: Bob Grim

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Story by R.R. Keene
Photos courtesy of Anton Grim Jr.

Sixty feet, 6 inches from the mound to home plate. Not that far, but not that close. A pitch can be perfectly thrown for the first 60 feet, then, well, that's why baseball is magic.

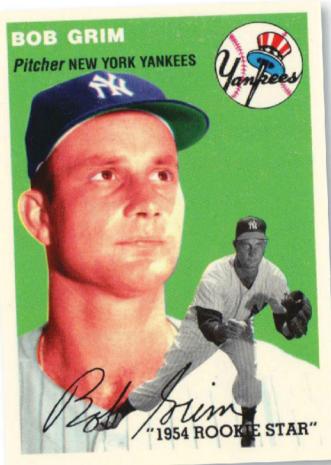
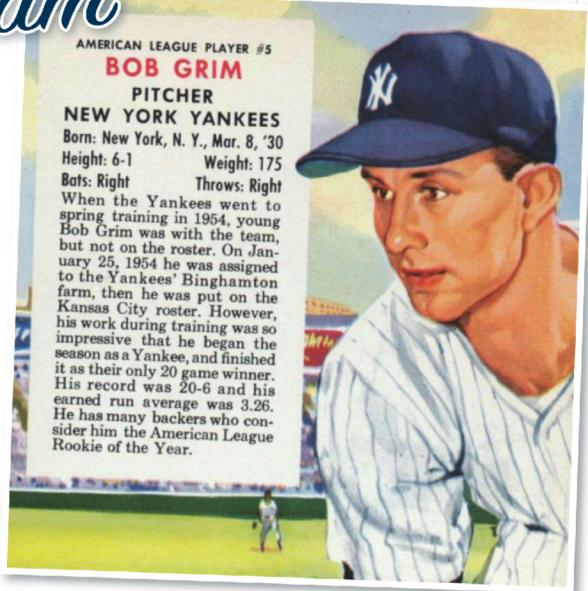
Robert A. "Bob" Grim wore Yankee pinstripes and had to believe in magic. He found it hard to believe that he was even on the same diamond with the likes of the legendary Mickey Mantle, Yogi Berra, Billy Martin and Don Larsen and that he was considered one of Brooklyn's great gifts to the Bronx. He became the first Rookie of the Year to win 20 games in a season since Russ Ford pitched for the Yankees in 1910.

Everybody who knew him had a feeling that Bobby Grim was destined for something special. They all knew it would probably be baseball; if not that, maybe the Marines.

During many spring and summer days in East New York, Brooklyn, N.Y., the alley on Hull Street echoed with the snap of his sinker as it hit Hank Schaezle's glove. Hank and Bob, both of whom eventually would go into the Marine Corps, were the best of buddies and liked to play catch with Hank signaling Bob what to pitch from behind an imaginary home plate and then calling the throw as it popped into his glove. Bob would pitch the equivalent of nine innings. Every boy's dream: he could hear the imaginary crowd cheer as he stepped off the rubber and walked to the dugout in glory. The game of catch also helped perfect his sinker and strengthen his arm.

"He loved baseball and grew up wanting to be a Yankee," said his nephew Anton Grim Jr. "Even though he was from Brooklyn, he just loved the Yankees from Babe Ruth to Joe DiMaggio."

As a youngster, Bob Grim was already a big right-hander on his way to 6'1" and 180 pounds. At Our Lady of Lourdes Grammar School he was a standout in Catholic Youth



Bob Grim was only 18 when he signed with the Yankees as a free agent. He became Rookie of the Year in 1954. Today, his rookie card doesn't go for much on COMC (Check Out My Collectibles) Card Marketplace, but according to his nephew, Anton, mint-condition cards sell for around \$300. "An autographed baseball depending on the condition and if it is signed with 'Rookie of the Year' can cost \$300 to \$1,000," he said.

Organization baseball. By the time he was pitching for Franklin K. Lane High School of Woodhaven, major league scouts from the New York Giants, Brooklyn Dodgers, Boston Braves, Chicago Cubs and the Yankees were watching him and taking notes. He was still a high school senior in 1948 when he was signed as an amateur free agent with the Yankees for \$3,500. He was only 18.

"Bob was a real New Yorker," said Grim's nephew, Anton, who went on to explain the Grim family history in New York. Bob Grim was born to Hungarian immigrants March 8, 1930, in Manhattan

and was raised on the streets of East New York, Brooklyn. His parents, Robert and Veronika, owned a small diner and lunch wagon on Eastern Parkway and eventually a bar on Broadway called Grim's Bar and Grill. He not only was on his way to playing Major League Baseball, but he would do it across the East River in the Bronx at Yankee Stadium.

Although other teams were interested in him, he still nourished that childhood dream of being a Yankee. He spent a few years in the minor leagues and began his professional baseball career with eight victories at Butler, Mid-Atlantic League, in 1948. He had 10 victories at Norfolk in 1950 and compiled a 16-5 record with 118 strikeouts in Binghamton in 1951.

Then, the Korean War broke out. Yankee second baseman Gerald "Jerry" Coleman went into the Marine Corps, as did Red Sox slugger Ted Williams. Bob Grim went too, taking the train to Yemassee, S.C., and the Marine Corps Recruit Depot at Parris Island in 1951.

His time in the Marines was well spent. When they realized he could pitch, they sent him to North Carolina's Camp Lejeune baseball team and assigned him to Special Services. He finished 16-11 in 1952, and in 1953, he ended the season with a 23-4 record. In later years Grim said being a Marine not only helped build his personality, confidence and physical strength but helped him prepare for a career in the major leagues. His control and arm strength came from the Marines, he always said.

He received his discharge papers in 1954, and the Yankees hadn't abandoned him. They invited him back for spring training, and manager Casey Stengel liked what he saw. If anything, Grim had gotten better in the Marines. Stengel made Grim, at age 24, the youngest starter for the team.

"My biggest thrill happened just a few weeks before the American League season opened," Grim once said. "It was a dream come true. As long as I can remember, I have always had the desire to become a major leaguer. I might go a little further and say I had always wanted to be a Yankee. As I said, it was a dream come true because I had signed a major league contract to play with the New York Yankees."

Now, he was playing catch with Larry "Yogi" Berra.

It was a sweetheart deal that paid off. Bob Grim was the 1954 American League Rookie of the Year. He won 20 games, lost six and had a 3.26 ERA. He started 20 games and made 17 relief appearances. He was the ace of the Yankee bullpen; eight of his wins came in relief. He worked 199 innings, allowing 175 hits. Grim was the only pitcher to win 20 games and pitch fewer than 200 innings for almost 50 years.



Above: Pitchers owe a lot to their catchers. Grim's catcher was Larry "Yogi" Berra, who was named the American League's Most Valuable Player in 1951, 1954 and 1955. Here, he is photographed with Grim, right, who was the Rookie of the Year in 1954.

Right: A private first class freshly minted out of Parris Island, Bob Grim posed for this photo with his sailor brother, Seaman Apprentice Anton Grim.



"I was on top of the world," Grim told sports writers.

According to sports writer Jim Mancari, Grim always claimed that his success was due to prayer, especially prayers from his mother and father. He never missed Mass, wore a gold medal of the "Blessed Mother" and carried a Sacred Heart Scapular.

Sixty feet, 6 inches is not that far, but it is a distance a pitcher can never take for granted.

"Stay away from the slider," Grim warned rookie Cincinnati Reds pitcher Tom Browning in a 1985 interview with Thomas Rogers of *The New York Times*. "It's a great pitch, but it's awful hard on

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your arm," Grim remarked in response to Browning becoming the first rookie pitcher since Grim to win 20 major league games.

A slider is a pitch that breaks laterally and down with a speed between that of a curveball and a fastball. The slider is released off the index finger. When throwing a slider, or any breaking pitch in baseball, it is important not to come "around" the baseball. When the pitcher does that, the pitcher puts extra tension on his pitching arm to throw that pitch.

"After my rookie year, my arm began hurting," continued Grim in Rogers' *New York Times* article. "X-rays showed nothing, but there were calcium deposits on my elbow. That was bad. I was a thrower, not a finesse pitcher."

Bob was the son of Robert and Veronika Grim and raised in New York. He lived at home during his time with the Yankees, and his mother, upon hearing her son was named Rookie of the Year, cooked him a steak in front of photographers.

However, he played in two World Series. In 1955 the Yankees lost to the Brooklyn Dodgers and lost to the Milwaukee Braves in 1957. That year, Grim was exclusively a relief pitcher, but a damn good one. He led the league with 19 saves and made the All-Star team. With the American League up by one run with two outs in the ninth inning, Grim was called upon to pitch in relief. Pinch-hitting for the National League was veteran Dodger Gil Hodges who coincidentally was a decorated Marine veteran of World War II. Grim got Hodges to fly out to left field. The crowd cheered, and Grim walked off the mound in glory.

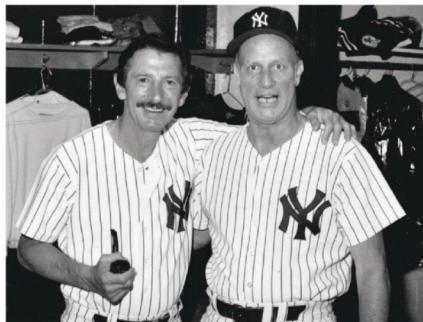
Within a few years, however, Grim's arm issues and the Yankees' need for starting pitchers resulted in Grim being sent to the Kansas City Athletics.

It is worth noting on April 15, 1959, Grim, while with the Athletics, hit a grand slam off Barry Latman as the A's topped the White Sox, 10-8.

Grim won six games for the Athletics in 1959, but by the end of the 1960 season, he had been traded three more times—to the Cleveland Indians, the Cincinnati Reds and the St. Louis Cardinals. He retired at the end of the season with a career total of 61 wins and 41 losses and a 3.61 ERA. Grim settled in Kansas and died in 1996. Carrying on the family's baseball legacy, his nephew, Bob Grim, is the business development director of the Chicago White Sox.



Edward C. "Whitey" Ford, a National Baseball Hall of Fame (1974) major league pitcher, spent his entire 16-year career with the New York Yankees and was friends with Bob Grim.



Yankee Alfred M. "Billy" Martin, left, played second base when Bob Grim was pitching. Martin won four World Series championships as a Yankees player and one while managing the team. This early 1980s photo was taken of him and Bob Grim in the locker room prior to an "old-timers" game.