

Don Money - An Underrated MLB Third Baseman

In 2015, **Baseball Reference** unveiled a new feature highlighting the top players by Wins Above Replacement (better known as WAR) for any given franchise. It also gives the Top WAR leaders for any given season.

While Wins Above Replacement isn't everyone's favorite stat, it is a great stat when it comes to comparing players in relation to their contemporaries. When I was perusing the Milwaukee Brewers page, I found a name that I didn't recognize. He was a third baseman by the name of **Don Money**. The name sounded vaguely familiar, so I decided to research a baseball bios piece. In the process, I discovered he was, in fact, "Easy" Money for the Brewers.

Don Money with the Pirates and Phillies

Don Money was originally signed by the Pittsburgh Pirates. They traded him to the Philadelphia Phillies for Hall of Famer Jim Bunning and others. Bunning was solid for the Pirates before being traded to LA in 1969, so it would be a good trade for them. As a utility infielder, Money had one above average season for the Phillies, mostly playing third base in 1970 with an OPS+ of 123 (meaning his batting line was 23 percent better than league average). His other three seasons with the Phillies were mediocre, providing most of his value from sheer defensive versatility. He did have a fine season with the glove in 1969 while playing mostly at shortstop.

Don Money with the Brewers

Money was traded to the Milwaukee Brewers after the 1972 season in a trade highlighted by pitcher Jim Lonborg (which also netted the Phillies a good season from pitcher Ken Brett). The Phillies had no idea that they were trading away a future 4-time All-Star. Then again, **the guy who took over for Don Money in Philly was some dude named Mike Schmidt**. This third baseman would put up over 100 WAR over his career. Larry Bowa also proved to be fine at shortstop. They did OK in the long term, though.

Still, the Brewers were very happy with that trade. Pitcher Bill Champion had a couple of decent years before giving away all of that value with his next two bad years, becoming a net zero from that deal. Infielder John Vukovich was also terrible, costing the Brewers about one win of value in 1973 and being about replacement level in 1974.

But Don Money would be a steal, netting the Brewers 27.1 WAR over 11 years. In 1973, the utility man picked up 3.2 WAR, before having a 5 WAR season in 1974, one in which he also netted his first of 4 All-Star appearances. They were all deserved. His other All-Star seasons were 1976 (3.6 WAR), 1977 (5.1 WAR and his best year), and 1978 (4.8 WAR). Not bad for a guy who played all over the infield. In his prime, though, he mostly started at third base, and later first base.

Don Money, All-Star Infielder

By all accounts, Don Money was a very good defensive player. Particularly at third base, Money was such a good fielder that [he even picked up the nickname "Brooks" after the Gold Glove third baseman Brooks Robinson](#). According to the defensive metrics, he was very above average in some seasons. But in others, his defense was decidedly below average. Still, his bat was just good enough to consistently keep him an above-average regular.

Money did have some down years. In 1975 he played in only 109 games and his glove wasn't as good as usual, but his bat still made him an above-average player according to Baseball-Reference - FanGraphs wasn't as kind. 1979 and 1981 were truly bad seasons. Sal Bando played a lot of third for the Brewers in 1979, and wasn't great. Money bounced back in 1980 as Bando proved to be done and had a 2+ WAR season even in only 86 games. In 1981, though, he shared time with both Roy Howell and Sal Bando, the latter of whom was truly done - and was about replacement level in 60 games.

The End for Don Money

Money was truly "cashed out" by 1983 and soon after retired from the MLB. The Brewers were okay though, with some Paul Molitor guy taking over full time at third in 1982. While Molitor had already established himself in the bigs as a second baseman, the Brewers decided to go with the better defensive player in Jim Gantner at the keystone, moving Molitor to third. Molitor would go on to be a Hall of Famer, and Gantner was solid, so the Brewers made the correct choices.

Money would actually play a short stint in Japan in 1984. While he actually played fairly well, it was not a good experience for him and his family. In 1987, he would return to baseball as a fairly successful minor league manager. Some years later, in 2007, he was named the Southern League Manager of the Year for his work with the Double-A Huntsville Stars. After 2011, he would move into the front office as the Brewers' special instructor of player development.

So, Money did okay. He left Philly to make room for Mike Schmidt. He manned the hot corner for the Brewers well until yet another future Hall of Famer Paul Molitor assumed his role. While he's no Hall of Famer, Money truly provided some great value and while he was a decently known

player in his day, who ended up replacing him on both the Phillies and Brewers overshadowed a true All-Star career.

~ Amelia Desertsong

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