

George Kell - Red Sox Player Profile

"I have always said that George Kell has taken more from this great game of baseball than he can ever give back. And now I know, I am deeper in debt than ever before." - George Kell at his 1983 Hall of Fame induction

Most people think of Baseball Hall-of-Fame third baseman **George Kell** as a Detroit Tiger. That's not surprising, as he played in parts of seven seasons with the Tigers and was a Tigers broadcaster for thirty-seven years. But, Kell actually started out with the Philadelphia A's, playing for them from 1943 to 1946. Kell was traded to the Tigers in mid-1946 for outfielder Barney McCosky. While McCosky was a good player for the rest of that year and two seasons more, the Tigers definitely got the much better player.

In 1952, amid a below average season for him, the Tigers traded George Kell to the Boston Red Sox. Kell was part of a nine-player trade that involved Red Sox legend Johnny Pesky going to Detroit. After the trade, Kell returned to his old self, hitting .319/.390/.453 for the Sox in 75 games. Unfortunately, Kell's presence wasn't enough to save the '52 Sox from a losing record of 75-78. In 1953, Kell would hit .307/.383/.483 and enjoy a 3 WAR season for an 84-win Red Sox team.

For the Tigers, Pesky was never the same as he'd been in Boston, although his strong defense still made him valuable through the 1954 season. Pitcher Bill Wight would be a nice pickup for 1952, but implode in 1953. Fortunately for the Tigers, Wight would be flipped for infielder Ray Boone, who enjoyed his best years in Detroit. So, the Kell trade inevitably worked out in the positive for Detroit.

Unfortunately for Kell, 1954 would see him hit only .258/.361/.290 in 26 games for the Sox. He'd be traded to the Chicago White Sox early in the season for infielder Grady Hatton and \$100,000. Hatton would finish out 1954 well with the Red Sox, and still be a useful defensive piece in 1955, although Kell would not rebound all that well. Fortunately, Kell would have one more good season with the White Sox in 1955, before finishing his career with the Baltimore Orioles in 1956 and 1957. Actually, Kell went out on a high, putting up an All-Star season hitting a solid .297/.352/.413 with 9 HR, compiling a 1.4 WAR in just 99 games.

Despite a relatively low 37.6 career WAR, Kell was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. After all, WAR wasn't a stat back in 1983. The 10-time All Star was never a power hitter, but his career .306 batting average and 2054 hits were enough to get him in the Hall. It's also extraordinary just how incredible his contact skills were; he walked 621 times and struck out just 287 times in 7529 career at-bats. A 3.8% strikeout percentage would be unheard of today, but was pretty good back then, too.

The Gold Glove awards didn't exist until 1957, but the press at the time considered him the best defensive third baseman of his day. It's likely he would've won a few, but unfortunately before 1953, there aren't advanced fielding metrics available. According to the Total Zone ratings

available for the last four seasons of his career, he was slightly below average, but these numbers cover only his age 30 to 34 seasons. This means we have to measure him by Range Factor, which he was better than league average six times at third base. He was certainly somewhat above average with the glove, and had we the Total Zone data to back it up, his career WAR total would likely be somewhat higher.

If for nothing else, [George Kell will be remembered historically for beating Ted Williams for the 1949 batting title](#). That's one heck of an achievement, as it actually cost Williams his bid for the Triple Crown – leading the league in batting average, home runs, and runs batted in. Statistically, the Triple Crown isn't nearly as celebrated today, as we know batting average and runs batted in aren't the best measures of a player's true talent. But hitting .343 in 1949 was enough to beat The Splendid Splinter at something, and that's saying something.

While Ted Williams was flying in the Korean War for much of 1952 and 1953, George Kell would get to share a few games with Ted in the same uniform. It's a shame that Kell was gone early on in the 1954 season, when Teddy Ballgame came back to baseball full time.

After retiring from playing baseball, Kell went right into broadcasting, first for CBS Television, then as the play-by-play announcer for the Tigers from 1959 to 1963 before returning to Arkansas to spend more time at home. In 1965, Kell was persuaded to return to the booth, where he would stay until 1996, spending most of that time with Tigers legend Al Kaline as his color commentator. Kell passed away in 2009 at the age of 86 in his hometown of Swifton, Arkansas.

Thanks for the memories, George!

~ Amelia Desertsong