National...Washington...Baltimore **AFRO SPORTS** ...Richmond...New Jersey...Philadelphia

Cooperstown's McCovey: conqueror of ills

By Joe Illuzzi

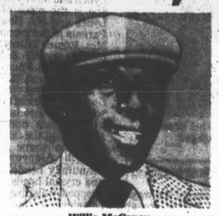
NEW YORK — From Willie McCovey's first season in the majors, he experienced pain. Twenty-seven years later, that pain became worthwhile when McCovey was voted into Basketball's Hall of Fame.

McCovey, who this summer will become the 194th person to be inducted into the Cooperstown, N.Y. shrine, was never fully healthy in his 22 years in baseball.

The slugging first baseman had knee surgery to repair torn cartilage before his rookie season with the San Francisco Giants in January 1959. He went to spring training the next month, his knee not fully rehabilitated. McCovey won the National League Rookie of the Year that season, but suffered through an injury-plagued career.

"I enjoyed playing the game,"McCovey said at a news conference the morning after he was voted into the Hall. "I had no choice. I played hurt my entire career. I didn't know what it was like to play without pain."

McCovey played through the entire 1971 season with torn cartilage in his other knee. With the Giants in a heated pennant race with the Dodgers, he postponed surgery until after the season. San Francisco won the NFL the NL West, but lost to Pittsburgh in the playoffs.



Willie McCovey went through pains to fame

"I got through that season on cortisone shots." McCovey said. "I was reluctant to have knee surgery, but I had it and bounced back had a good spring. But then in the second series of the season in San Diego I broke my arm."

Despite all the injuries, McCovey still went on to become the most prolific left-handed home run hitter in NL history. He finished his career with 521 homers, which ranks him ninth on the all-time list. He was an imposing presence at the plate and one of the most feared hitters of his day.

The former slugger, who Friday turned 48, was voted into the Hall in his first year of eligibility, becoming only the 16th player to be elected on the first try.

Former Cubs outfield Billy Williams finished second in the Hall of Fame voting to McCovey, falling four short of the 75 percent required for induction.

"I was looking forward to going in together" McCovey said. "It would have been great for Mobile. Hank Aaron (also a Mobile native) called me and expressed the same thing, but it's not going to happen."

TOUGH TWOSOME — One of the rare pictures of Calvin Peete lining up a putt with the aid of his caddy David "Golf Ball" Jamieson. "Golf Ball" is credited by Peete for his recent brilliance in "reading" greens to determine whether and in which direction the rolling ball will break. The combination was in tune for Calvin's record-shattering win in last week's Tournament of Champions tournament.

HACKER'S CORNER by Don Haskins

Let's discuss this week the importance of balance in the golf swing.

Balance and tempo are the result of excellent posture-weight distribution, weight shift and solid head position. For our purposes here, I will discuss balance only; in future editions of HACKER'S CORNER, I will analyze tempo.

Balance begins with a proper stance which—for most people, on most long shots—will be as wide as the width of your shoulders, measured from the ball of one foot to the other.

For shorter shots, the stance should narrow to accommodate the smaller turn of the body. Simply take a club — any club — and place the end of the club at the outer edge of one shoulder and extend it to the outer edge of the other shoulder and measure the distance by placing a finger on the club.

That measurement should approximate the width of your stance measured from the inside of your foot to the other. Moreover, you must stand with the back straight to the base of the spine, bending slightly from the waist toward the ball- squatting only minimally in the knees with the buttocks protruding rearward just enough to get the feeling you are standing out and overtop of your feet.

Stand up....pick up a club...assume the proper grip and allow your arms to hang down and away from you naturally while rocking your body toward your toes and back toward your heels. Where you are neither on your toes nor on your heels....That is the place where your weight should remain throughout the golf swing while shifting your weight from one side to the other.

Your head is the fulcrum around which you turn and should be anchored behind the ball. The head does move but only minimally.

The following example is illustrative of my point. When the wind blows-the top of the tree moves-not the trunk. The opposite is true in golf. The lower body moves (the weight transfers from one side to the other) while the head remains fairly constant.

The constancy of the solid head position behind the ball in addition to good use of the legs promotes dynamic balance.

That's it folks...That's all there is to it..until next time...that is....Fore!

★★★