

WILMER "VINEGAR BEND" MIZELL

Born: Aug. 13, 1930, Leakesville, Mississippi

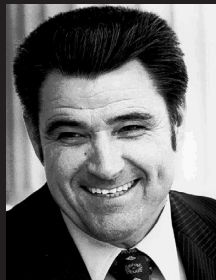
Died: Feb. 21, 1999, Kerrville, Texas

Known as: A left-handed pitcher who led the 1950 Winston-Salem Twins to the Class B Carolina League championship, followed by 10 years in the National League before becoming a U.S. Representative for N.C. Fifth District.

Southpaw Wilmer "Vinegar Bend" Mizell signed a \$500 contract with the St. Louis Cardinals the day he graduated high school in 1949. That night, he boarded a train to Albany, Ga., to play for their Class D farm team. He had a wicked, if sometimes unpredictable, fastball that attracted a lot of attention and frustrated a lot of batters.

The next season, he was sent up to the franchise's Class B team in Winston-Salem, where he took the Twins to the 1950 Carolina League championship, pitching at the old South Side Park (where UNC School of the Arts stands today). That team is listed in the Weiss/Wright Top 100 Minor League Teams of All Time, where the team is recorded as the Winston-Salem Cardinals.

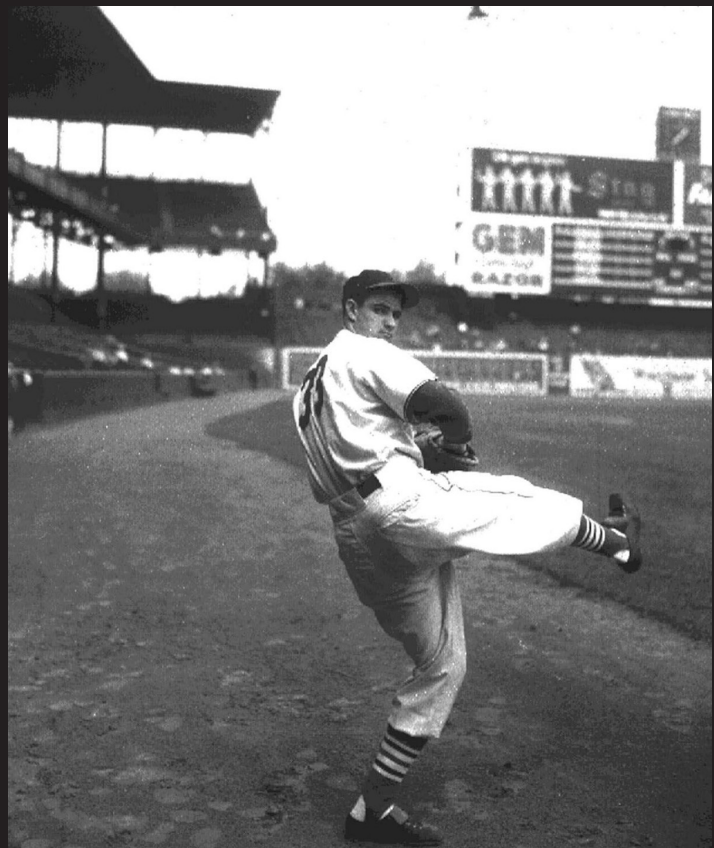
Born on the family farm in Leakesville, Miss., to Walter and Addie (Turner) Mizell, he started playing ball in Vinegar Bend, Ala., after the family moved in with his grandmother and uncle. He and his wife bought a home in Midway, Davidson County, during his stint on the Twins.



Over the next 10 years, he threw for the St. Louis Cardinals, the Pittsburgh Pirates and the New York Mets as well as the U.S. Army during a two-year enlistment. He ranked in the top 10 in strikeouts -- but also in walks -- for two years. A sportscaster called him a "left-handed Dizzy Dean" after the Baseball Hall of Famer. Mizell, known for his self-deprecating style, brushed the praise off by saying, "That's a perty heavy load for a boy to tote."

He retired in 1962 and worked as sales manager and in public relations at the Winston-Salem Pepsi-Cola Co. His affable, folksy manner made him popular on the mound and off. The local Republican leadership recruited him to run for Davidson County Commissioner.

In 1968, he won a seat in the House of Representatives serving the Fifth District, calling for stricter law and order policies, small government, a change in Washington leadership on both sides of the aisle, and an "honorable end" to the war in Vietnam. He lost the seat in 1974, as did many Republicans in the wake of Watergate, but he continued to serve in assistant



ASSOCIATED PRESS

St. Louis Cardinals Wilmer "Vinegar Bend" Mizell practices pitching May 7, 1952, for the benefit of a photographer.

secretary positions dealing with commerce, agriculture, veterans affairs and physical fitness under Presidents Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, and George H.W. Bush.

Sports Illustrated wrote in 1968, "A new face in the House of Representatives is former fire-balling Cardinal southpaw Wilmer (Vinegar Bend) Mizell, who ran as a staunchly anti-Communist, anti-federal-spending Republican in North Carolina. His arrival in Congress is doubly ominous from the Democrats' point of view. What their House baseball team, which has already lost five straight to the GOP, does not need is a taste of Vinegar."