

# JAMES ANTHONY PIERSALL

*"I am not a blind follower of rules and regulations. I tell the truth, even if it hurts."*

— Jimmy Piersall

James Anthony Piersall, born in Waterbury on November 14, 1929, is one of the most colorful personalities to emerge from the Brass City. He was an all-state selection in both basketball and baseball and, in 1947, led the Leavenworth High School basketball team to the New England Championship.

Shortly after graduation, he was signed as an outfielder by the Boston Red Sox, played briefly for the parent club in 1950, and in 1952, was tried as a shortstop. After this experiment failed, Piersall returned to the outfield. He played two years in right field and then played centerfield next to Ted Williams from 1954-1958.

In 1955, Piersall wrote a book, *Fear Strikes Out*. The book details his life, including his success at overcoming a mental problem that occurred in 1952. A television drama and a movie with the same title, were also produced. He disliked the movie, labeling it as fiction.

Piersall had a lifetime batting average of .272 while playing for the Red Sox, Indians, Senators, Mets and Angels. In 1961, while playing for Cleveland, he led the league in doubles and finished third in average, hitting .322. In 1961, he finished fifth in stolen bases. He won two Gold Gloves, 1958 and 1961, for fielding excellence and would have won more if the award was in existence during his early years. Piersall played in both the 1954 and 1956 All-Star games. When he retired in 1967 his career fielding average of .990 was the highest in history.

Casey Stengel called him "the best defensive right fielder I have ever seen" and an article in *Look Magazine* was entitled, "Jimmy Piersall, Baseball's Greatest Outfielder." Sportswriter Arthur Daly said "The kid from Waterbury, Connecticut packs 'em in just so they can watch him catch and throw a ball."

Piersall was a celebrity and at the height of his popularity he appeared on the television shows of Lucille Ball, Milton Berle, Johnny Carson, Merv Griffin, Mike Douglas, and Don Rickles. He also filmed commercials, had his own radio show and even recorded a song.

At times, known for his eccentric behavior on the field, he remained flamboyant to the end when he ran around the bases backwards after hitting his one hundredth career home run.

After his playing days Piersall became a controversial baseball announcer, working with Harry Caray, and a sports talk show host. For the last twelve years, he has been the outfield coach for the Chicago Cubs minor league system.

