



Willie Upshaw

Willie remains one of Blue Jays fans all-time favorite players. He debuted with Toronto in 1978 after being drafted from the New York Yankees organization. In 1982, he was able to push John Mayberry, the Jays' power-hitting first baseman, out of the line-up and became an everyday player. That season, he set a franchise record for most extra base hits. The following year, in 1983, Willie became the first Blue Jays player in franchise history to knock in 100+ RBI. He also scored 99 runs, hit .306, hit 27 homeruns and placed 11th in American League MVP voting. In the seasons to follow, Willie continued to post good power and production numbers until the end of the 1987 season when a young Fred McGriff moved Willie out of the line-up just as Willie had previously done to Mayberry. Upshaw then spent his final MLB season, 1988, with the Cleveland Indians and followed that by ending his playing days in Japan.

He has since been instrumental in the development of players in several organizations. He was the Major League hitting coach for the Texas Rangers in 1993, and the Blue Jays in 1996 & 1997. He was Minor League hitting coach for the Blue Jays, Cleveland Indians and San Francisco Giants. And most recently, in 2006 and 2007, Willie was the first base coach of the Giants making him the first person to congratulate Barry Bonds with a high-five seconds after he beat Hank Aaron's all-time home run record.

Willie is also from a very athletic family. Cousins Gene Upshaw and Marvin Upshaw played in the NFL with Gene going into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Willie's son Chad was once on the roster of the Carolina Panthers as a tight end.

Blue Jay players of that era speak fondly of Willie as a quiet clubhouse leader. A man of few words, he led by action. And when he spoke, they listened closely as they knew that Willie had something of value to say. This was also true of His faith in Jesus Christ. He was quiet about it, but no-one mistook that for weakness.

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