



PRESS RELEASE

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## **1960s ace hurler Wally O'Neil among four new inductees to British Baseball Hall of Fame**

The 2016 elections for the British Baseball Hall of Fame saw the number of inductees increase to 29. Alex Malihoudis, Oscar Marcelino, and John Thomas were all inducted from the modern ballot, while Wally O'Neil became the first person enshrined via the newly formed historical vetting panel (comprising Josh Chetwynd, Joe Gray, and Anthony Taylor). A common thread is that all four of the latest inductees represented the Great Britain national team during their playing careers. And as a bit of trivia, John Thomas was the starting catcher and Wally O'Neil the starting pitcher in an international against the Dutch in 1965.

### **Alex Malihoudis**

The first British player to ever win medals in two different European Championship events, Alex Malihoudis was not only a regular fixture domestically at the top of many offensive categories in the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s but was also a trailblazer as a British player willing to go to the US to develop his craft. Malihoudis learned his first baseball in British Baseball Hall of Famer Margaret Borley's Tonbridge Bobcats Youth Baseball Club. Devoted to the sport from the start (and showing great ability), he solicited support to go to the US to play baseball first at Archbishop Mitty High School in California and then at the NCAA Division III Menlo College. Back in the UK, he earned a gold medal in his very first senior appearance with the Great Britain National Team in 1996. The GB squad won gold in the European B-Pool Championships, starting Malihoudis' run of membership on five European Championship squads and a World Cup-participating team. Among his international highlights, Malihoudis drove in the game-winning run with an infield single in a pivotal victory over France in the 2007 championships. That squad would win the silver medal at the event, giving Malihoudis his second piece of European hardware. Domestically, Malihoudis was consistently a difference-making player. In eight seasons and over 398 at-bats, he tallied a .410 batting average with 10 home runs and 34 doubles. He led the National Baseball League in hits and runs scored in 2008 and stolen bases in 2005. In 1998, he won the batting crown in the National Premier League South, posting a .564 batting average. A key defender up the middle at either shortstop or centre-field, he was named the National Baseball League's best defensive shortstop in 2008. Every bit as notable as his personal statistics was his team's success. Malihoudis was a member of five national championship-winning squads (three at the Brighton Buccaneers and two at

the London Mets). He contributed mightily to all those clubs. For example, in 2000, he drove in the game-winning run of the finals to push the Brighton Buccaneers past the Windsor Bears. He also played as a professional in both France's and Germany's top leagues. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that in a poll among his peers on the best player during the first 10 years of the National Baseball League, only one player gained more votes than Malihoudis.

### **Oscar Marcelino**

Oscar Marcelino took to his adopted country of Great Britain and settled into a long and respected baseball career before moving to the United States to progress the baseball talents of his son, Bradley. Marcelino's club career was with the Enfield Spartans, where he played in the infield and occasionally pitched. He was part of the highly successful Spartans team that won three national championships and four Knock-out Cups. Marcelino made his international debut on the 1988 European Championship B-Pool-winning side, at third base. The following year, during Great Britain's first Euros after promotion to the elite A-Pool, he pitched a full 9.0 innings against a Belgian side ranked third in Europe and won the game, which set the side up to beat West Germany twice and consequently retain A-Pool status. Marcelino also hit two triples in the tournament. In the 1991 European Championship A-Pool, he went 4-for-4 against Sweden and gained a series batting average of .500. He also pitched 13.1 innings, with an earned-run average of 4.73. In addition, he served as an assistant coach for the Great Britain squad. Following his spell in the United States, Marcelino returned to the UK as an envoy coach for Major League Baseball International Partners.

### **Wally O'Neil**

An all-round performer who shined on the pitcher's mound, at the plate, and as a manager, Wally O'Neil was a leader for both the Stretford Saints and Great Britain in the 1960s. Born in Ontario, Canada, O'Neil played baseball in his home region before coming to the Manchester area in the early 1960s to work as an engineer. He soon took up playing baseball with the Stretford Saints and was a stand-out. In 1963, O'Neil was a top two-way player, going 9-3 on the mound and registering a .388 batting average. In an all-star game against the Southern Baseball Association, he was lauded in the press for hitting a 350-foot home run for the National Baseball League. He had four RBI in that game. Not surprisingly, he was picked as a hurler for a select Lancashire team that took on Yorkshire in 1964 and was Great Britain's star in a match against The Netherlands in 1965. Although GB lost that '65 contest, 3-1, O'Neil threw a complete game, yielding just seven hits and two walks, while striking out 11. His international performance was typical for O'Neil that season, a year in which he led Stretford in European Cup competition (this was a first for an English team). In the tournament, he took the loss against a strong Rotterdam team, bringing an end to a remarkable run of 18 victories in Saints colours without a defeat dating back to July 1963. O'Neil's pitching in 1965 also took Stretford to the national final (they lost to the Hull Aces 4-2, after O'Neil had steered them through the semi-final with 15 strike-outs in seven shut-out frames against Thames Board Mills). He tied for the circuit lead in home

runs, as well, illustrating the two-way quality of his contribution to the team's success. During the following campaign, O'Neil was described as 'an outstanding performer either as a pitcher, infielder or hitter' in the programme for the 1966 North of England versus South of England All-Star game. He led the Northern Major League in home runs and runs batted in that year and accomplished what he missed out on in 1965: his Stretford team won the national championship. O'Neil continued to star throughout the 1960s, representing Great Britain again in 1968 against The Netherlands. Finally, beyond his contributions on the field, O'Neil was also an adroit manager. He took the helm for the Saints for three seasons (1962-64), leading the club to a 56-13 record and numerous trophy wins during that tenure.

### **John Thomas**

John Thomas enjoyed a playing career in Britain that, remarkably, lasted 70 years. During that time he was a national champion on three occasions, represented Great Britain, and developed a reputation as one of the truly great clubmen. John Thomas was born on 26 September 1928 in Birkenhead, across the Mersey from Liverpool. In the early 1930s, Sir John Moores began his plan to make baseball a major sport on Merseyside and further afield. While the coming of war reversed much of the progress that had been made, one of the surviving remnants was a junior circuit in Birkenhead. An 11-year-old John Thomas signed up with the Birkenhead YMCA team as an outfielder and also competed for Cammell Laird, where he learned the position of catcher and thus began to wear the protective gear that he would put on countless times over the next seven decades. Until he left to work overseas in the mid-1960s, just a year after making his debut for Great Britain, Thomas was a staple of the Merseyside scene. He caught the Liverpool Tigers' victory in the 1962 national finals and claimed multiple regional all-star honours. In one such team list he was described as 'the finest catcher in Lancashire' with 'very few to beat him in this country.' Shortly after his return to Liverpool, and the Tigers, he claimed a second national title in 1975. In the early 1980s he headed south and found a role as back-up catcher on the squad for the Croydon Blue Jays, who won the a national title in the year Thomas turned 55. He soon supplemented his playing contributions with successful management roles in South London. In his first full six seasons as a skipper, he navigated his teams to three first-place finishes, one tie for first, and two second places. A spot on the Old Timer's roster allowed Thomas to amass yet more playing days. He claimed the club's 'top fielder' award in 2000. In 2005, at the age of 76, Thomas caught five games for the veterans. In 2008, still with the Old Timers, Thomas completed his final season, bringing to an end a playing career spanning 70 years. Fittingly, in the last game of his age-defying career, he stole a base. He was a few months shy of his 80th birthday. Thomas passed away in 2012. George Price, a playing colleague from the post-war Merseyside scene, wrote in tribute: 'very much respected on Merseyside [and] a great competitive player, [I] never heard him have a bad word for anyone.'

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**About Project COBB**

The Project for the Chronicling of British Baseball (Project COBB) is an online collaboration aimed at restoring the record of British baseball's past and preserving its present. Its website is located at: <http://www.projectcobb.org.uk/>.