

On Jerry Kindall
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Jerry Kindall died today, Christmas day, 2107. He was 82 years old. Kindall was a legendary college baseball coach of the University of Arizona, and before that a second baseman for the Chicago Cubs and other major league baseball teams. He was a native of my home town, Saint Paul, Minnesota. I have a personal memory of him, twenty-minutes-or-so standing next to him at an indoor practice baseball field at the University of Minnesota back in 1960—57 years ago. Kindall was playing for the Cubs at that time and I was a scrub on the University of Minnesota baseball team. I was 20 years old and, I learned from the obituary I just read, Kindall was 25, though he seemed much older than that to me, a confident, grounded, in-the-world adult, while I was a lost kid totally out of place trying to be a baseball player. I wrote about my encounter with Kindall, such as it was, in a July 2007 thought for this website called “On a Very Big Regret.” Kindall’s death today prompted me to repeat it here. The central impression I have as I write this is, my gosh, Jerry Kindall, that tall, trim athlete I can picture so clearly in my mind, no longer exists; how much longer will it be before I no longer exist. What I wrote in the 2007 thought:

Major league players with ties to the university would practice with the university team indoors in January and February prior to going to spring training in Florida or Arizona. Jerry Kindall had been a big star on the U’s team [the University of Minnesota is called the “U”] and was at that time a good-field-no-hit second baseman for the Chicago Cubs. One day for about twenty minutes, Kindall and I fielded ground balls [University of Minnesota baseball coach Dick] Siebert drilled at the two of us in turn. Kindall and I were standing next to each other. If I were older as Kindall was and standing next to a college-age person—I was

twenty at the time--I'd have felt compelled to say "Hello" or "How's it going?" or "What's your name" and, at least briefly, talk to him about what was going on in school or on the team. Not Kindall. It was as if I didn't exist, and I was standing shoulder-to-shoulder, right next to him, and it was just the two of us in that area. Thinking back on it, I admire Kindall's self-containment. I have always felt compelled to at least glance at a person standing next to me, and especially if it is just the two of us in the area. I'm not really knocking him. He didn't owe me anything. He hadn't asked for me to be standing next to him. He had no agenda with me. I was none of his business. I didn't think it was my place to start up a conversation with a major leaguer like Jerry Kindall, so I just glanced over at him regularly hoping he'd say something or at least acknowledge my presence, and he never did. I remember feeling a little bad about it at the time, but I assumed I was getting my due. I was nobody and he was Jerry Kindall. Over the years, I've found myself thinking, I wish I could be more like Jerry Kindall and be able to make people invisible— he was perfect at it, at least with me. [2017: My best guess, Jerry Kindall, the son of a truck driver, so I learned from the obituary, was simply a reticent person, just as I, the son of a barber, was, and to a great degree, still am.]