

## LANCE PARRISH

### A New Parrish Member in Town

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New Parrish in Gladwin

On your adventures through the streets of Gladwin you may run across a gentleman who looks familiar. This tall good-looking man with a body that still appears to be in game-shape is Lance Parrish. Yes, *THAT* Lance Parrish, the All-Star catcher of Detroit Tigers fame. But don't expect to see him in a Tiger baseball cap. These days the cap carries the Great Lakes Loon logo.

Lance and his wife Arlyne recently moved to the area from Midland where Lance is serving as Manager of the L.A. Dodger organization's Class A baseball team. The Loons are in the Midwest League and play their home games at beautiful Dow Diamond.

Although he has spent a majority of his adult life tromping around the baseball world, the largest portions of time have been spent in either California or Michigan. Lance was born in Clairton, PA near Pittsburgh into a solid military family, both his mother and father served in the Marine Corp. "You didn't get away with much when your dad was away if your mother was a Marine Sergeant," Lance chuckled.

The move to southern California took place when his father took a job with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Dept. They headed west on Lance's sixth birthday. His youth was dominated by sports as his athletic ability came from both parents. His first love was baseball but he also played football and basketball for Walnut High School.

Soon the choice became a football/baseball scholarship at UCLA or the prospects of professional baseball. One look at those college-sized lineman convinced Lance that maybe baseball would suit him better. It didn't hurt to be the Detroit Tigers first round draft pick as a senior in 1974 either.

He had previously attended workouts with the California Angels and been told by a reliable source he would be their number one pick. It came as quite a surprise when his baseball coach pulled him out of Algebra II class to congratulate him on becoming the newest DETROIT TIGER. "To be honest, I really wasn't sure where Detroit was," laughed Lance. "All I remember thinking was it's cold in Michigan."

However, throughout his brief minor league career he stuck to warm spots like Lakeland, FL; Bristol, TN; Montgomery, AL and the instructional league in Puerto Rico. That's where he married his wife. Well, actually it was on the island of St. Thomas where Lance says, "it's cheaper to get a marriage license than a dog license." He asked a teammate and his girlfriend to be witnesses and they not only agreed but also decided to make it a two-fer. Both couples are still married and get together whenever possible.

Lance was called up to the big leagues in September of 1977 and during his career as a Tiger through 1986 they won the World Series in 1984, he was the American League All-Star catcher six times (8 career total), six times a Silver Slugger (best hitter at position) and won three Golden Gloves. He current is ranked 92<sup>nd</sup> on the all-time home run list with 324.

Since his playing career came to an end in 1995, Lance has returned twice to coach for the Tigers. His first stint was from 1999 thru 2001 with Larry Parrish (no relation) and Phil Garner managing. Then he served again as the third base coach during former teammate Alan Trammell's tenure as Manager from 2003 thru 2005. After a stint managing the Ogden Raptors last year, on Nov. 6, 2006 the Dodgers and Great Lakes Loons announced Lance Parrish as manager for the 2007 season.

**ROR: Most people don't know the Tigers drafted you as a 3<sup>rd</sup> baseman. How did you end up catcher?**

**Lance:** I've been a catcher since Little League when the coach asked for a volunteer. No one raised their hand and I wanted to play, dummy me – up went my hand (laughing). But I've played virtually every position including pitching but the Tiger must have scouted me when I was playing 3<sup>rd</sup> base. I switched to just playing catcher my 2<sup>nd</sup> year in the minors.

**ROR: Do you remember your first major league home run?**

**Lance:** My second game in the majors, Tiger Stadium, I singled my first at bat. My second at bat, I homered; third time up I doubled and I'm 3 for 3 possibly hitting for the cycle when I came up in the 8<sup>th</sup> inning. The crowd behind home plate gave me a standing ovation. That was nice. I lined it up the gap but the centerfielder ran it down. Three for four's not bad though.

**ROR: Who was the toughest pitcher you faced?**

**Lance:** A guy named .....really had my number for a long time. He threw a vicious slider that I kept bailing out on. One time I was determined to hang in there and of course he chose that time to throw a fastball. At the last second I realized the pitch wasn't gonna slide and I tried to duck but it nailed me right between the eyes. I went down like a rock. A couple at bats later I homered off him and I wanted to just walk around the bases to savor the moment and show him up a little but I didn't.

**ROR: Speaking of numbers, most of your career you wore number 13, which I assume means you aren't very superstitious but most ballplayers are. What are some of the unusual superstitions you ran across?**

**Lance:** One of the weirdest I ever heard of was Wade Boggs who played most of his career with the Boston. He always had to eat chicken the day of a game. It didn't matter what kind: broiled, fried, roasted, a bucket or nuggets but it had to be chicken. It must have worked for him because he was elected to the Hall of Fame in 2005.

**ROR: What is your favorite baseball movie?**

**Lance:** I guess it would be *Bull Durham*. Whoever wrote that movie script got it right because that's pretty much the way minor league baseball still is like. You'd think the long hours and games would get boring but there's always something happening, something going on that makes it an adventure. Crash Davis (Kevin Costner), the catcher for the Durham Bulls, that was me.

**ROR: I understand they finally decided to tear down old Tiger Stadium. Do you have any special memories?**

**Lance:** When they called me up to the majors in 1977 I got in late and went straight to the hotel. The next morning I took a cab to the stadium. I'm used to seeing Angels Stadium in Anaheim and Dodgers Stadium, big modern showcase stadiums with huge parking areas around them. Finally the cabbie says 'there it is', I kept asking where? Well, I thought it looked like an old warehouse with lights. But I walked up that tunnel and out into the sunlight. There was the beautiful groomed field, double deck with all those green seats; the hot dog vendors were just starting up. I'll never forget that sight or those smells – I'd made it to the big leagues.

**ROR: What was Sparky Anderson like as a Manager?**

**Lance:** He was a no-nonsense leader. The first day in the clubhouse Sparky says, "Boys, I've got a certain way I want things done. If you're not with my program you won't be here very long." And not too long after, there were some new faces around. Could he get away with that today? To a certain degree, I would say yes. But Sparky was very smart also and would adapt. Jim Leyland, the current Tigers Manager is a no-nonsense guy and it worked for him.

**ROR: So let's set the story straight. Why DID you leave the Tigers?**

**Lance:** I honestly wanted to retire a Detroit Tiger. I was the AL All-Star catcher in my last year of a six-year contact (1986) making \$850,000. Gary Carter, a contemporary in the National League was making \$2.16 million. The Tigers offered me a one-year deal for \$1 million and I was seriously considering signing that contract when I hurt my back. After I was cleared by the team doctors and in great shape, they pulled the original offer and came back with a \$850,000 contract. I thought my loyalty and dedication to the organization warranted at least a \$1 raise and I said so. After being declared a free agent, I signed with the Phillies for Detroit's original offer, \$1 million. Later it was proven that the owners were in collusion with orders from the Commissioner's Office

(Peter Uberoff) not to sign free agents. Detroit had six losing seasons in the next ten years and twice lost over 100 games.

**ROR: If you had stayed in Detroit you might be in the Hall of Fame. True?**

**Lance:** Well, let's use Gary Carter as an example again. We each have exactly the same number of career home runs (324) and he has 155 more RBI's. But he played in 308 more games and had 904 at bats. He's in the Hall of Fame. So it certainly was possible but I had a great career playing and am enjoying my managing career with no regrets.

**ROR: Should Pete Rose be in the Hall of Fame?**

**Lance:** Should they keep him out of baseball for gambling? Yes. But gambling had nothing to do with him getting more hits than anyone in the history of the game. So yes, Pete should be in Cooperstown.

**ROR: You've got two sons that played baseball. What are they up to now?**

**Lance:** David is still playing catcher with the AAA Indianapolis team. Matt played for the West Michigan Whitecaps but now is soon to graduate from the Sheriff's Academy in Los Angeles, following in his grandfather's footsteps.

**ROR: Baseball life must be tough on wives, what does Arlyne do?**

**Lance:** It is tough and she's done a great job juggling everything throughout my career. But this past two years have especially hectic. Both my sons got married and for the first time we're moving and building our off-season home in Tennessee this year. We are both committed to our faith and she loves to teach bible study classes. Hopefully she can resume that soon. Right now just coordinating my schedule and planning family gatherings is keeping her pretty busy.

**ROR: Speaking of moving, why Gladwin?**

**Lance:** We saw many places in Midland that were nice but also very expensive and unfurnished. We came up here and fell in love with the surroundings. I'm real big on the outdoors, hunting and fishing. The people are very friendly and the commute after games gives me a chance to unwind.

**ROR: If not baseball, what?**

**Lance:** Good question, I'm not sure. I've often thought I could bring a lot to the table in the corporate world but quite frankly outside of my family, baseball has been the focus for my entire adult life.

**ROR: So where is Lance Parrish in 10 years?**

**Lance:** He's managing in the majors, hopefully with the Dodgers winning the World Series on his own field of dreams.

**ROR: Ok, finally, how did you get the nickname "The Big Wheel?"**

**Lance:** Back in the days when there weren't sports channels, 24/7 on televisions the only show was *This Week In Baseball with Mel Allen*. Somewhere around 1985, we were in the clubhouse and Mel started the show with 'the wheels of the Motor City are turning.' Then he said 'and the big wheel this week is Lance Parrish...' From then on, Gibby (Kirk Gibson) wouldn't let it go. It was always 'how's the Big Wheel today or boy, the Big Wheel's hot tonight.' So that's me, the Big Wheel (laughing).

**ROR: Well, Big Wheel it's been a pleasure. Good of luck with the Loons and thanks.**



Lance Parrish and fan - 1985