

WE LOVE: UNFILTERED CIGARETTES AND BASKETBALL SHOES
LIFE AND DEATH OF CHARLES H. "CHUCK" TAYLOR

1901: June 24th, born in Azalia, Indiana. Cancer-Sagittarius, Uranus in Aquarius gives him the skills as inventor and salesman, Mars in Aries his strength as an athlete.

His father, Mr John H. Taylor, moved to Indiana from Mississippi at the end of the 19th century, to improve his business as a tobacco sellers – he got famous for inventing a very thin kind of cigarette paper, that made the tobacco burn better.

In Azalia, where he finally set his business, he met Susan M. Hopkins, who became her wife and later mother of Chuck and other three children: John Jr., Andrew and Sarah.

1908: At the age of seven little Chuck ate by chance some cigarettes from a box his father forgot on kitchen table. The intoxication caused him very high fever and hallucinations. His mother reported that in his delirious Chuck spoke about some voices that were asking him to become an athlete.

Apparently this experience was also the beginning of his engagement in the evangelist community and of his addiction to tobacco.

1913: After few years spent in training in tennis without results, Chuck was about giving up with his sport career, but unexpectedly he got so much taller that he decided to devote himself to basketball and basketball became his destiny.

1914: Caught smoking a cigarette in the school toilets he got suspended for two days.

1917: Taylor started wearing *Converse All-Stars* shoes in 1917 as a high school basketball player. His style as a player was noticed by cheerleader Verena H., who lately he was dating for two years.

1921: Chuck went to the Converse Shoes Chicago sales offices in search of a job, where S.R. "Bob" Pletz, an avid sportsman, then hired him.

In Chicago he met Olivia Russell, secretary at Converse's communication office, who became his official *fiancée*.

1922: Taylor's suggestions of changing the design of the shoe to provide enhanced flexibility and support, and also including patch to protect the ankle, were adopted. The

All-Star star logo – a five points star- was then immediately included on the patch. In the same year he began the *Converse Basketball Yearbook*, in which the best players, trainers, teams and the greatest moments of the sport were commemorated.

1923: Chuck Taylor's name was added to the patch, and the shoe became the *Chuck Taylor All-Stars*.

1924: Chuck and Olivia got married. Then divorced in 1938.

1926: Taylor's design became more and more elaborated: at first the shoe was only in earth tones with black trim, with Chuck they came in black canvas or leather styles. Another change was the switch to nonslip soles.

Although classic black is the most popular, Chuck Taylor was himself known to prefer unbleached white high-tops (known in his day as simply "white").

1935: Taylor invented the "stitchless" basketball that was easier to control.

1936: Basketball became an Olympic Sport and Chuck designed white high tops with blue and red trim for the 1936 Olympics.

1938: After his divorce from Olivia, Taylor had some nervous problems, that led him to spend a few months in a hospital. Friends report that he was always asking for cigarettes when they went to visit him.

1939: Taylor became the most exceptional representative for Converse: For years, he drove a white Cadillac across the country with a trunk full of shoes, living in motels, and with only a locker in the company's Chicago warehouse as a permanent residence. Joe Dean, who worked as a sales executive for Converse for nearly 30 years before becoming the athletic director at Louisiana State University, told Bob Ford of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, "It was impossible not to like him, and he knew everybody. If you were a coach and you wanted to find a job, you called Chuck Taylor. Athletic directors talked to him all the time when they were looking for a coach."

1941: During one of his trip as a salesman he spent a night at the *White Horse* Motel in Telluride, Colorado. Falling asleep with a cigarette in his lips he set fire to the sheets and the bed. He had no injuries, but the motel charged him with 300,00 \$ and police

reported the fact as “not accidental”.

1942: During WWII, Taylor became fitness consultant for the US military and Chuck Taylor’s sneakers had become the official sneaker of the US Armed Forces.

1946: The so-called White Horse accident was repeated, this time in Tucson, Arizona at the *White Sand*. Taylor ended-up with burned fingers and burned curtains in the room. A few pairs of shoes also got on fire. Again the motel charged Chuck. The fact again was reported as “not accidental”.

1957: The low top All Stars were created for the more casual look.

1963: Taylor is in Dallas when president Kennedy is shot.

1965-1966: Taylor spent a lot of time at the *White Diamond* motel in New Jersey City, New Jersey. His relationship with Patty Giancana, a diner waitress of Italian origins, ended up with a child, Sal, that Taylor never recognized as his. Asked about their relationship Miss Giancana simply commented: “He liked smoking after sex”

1968: Chuck Taylor went into the Basketball Hall of Fame. A few months later he retired.

1969: Just one day short of his 68th birthday in June 1969 Taylor died of a heart attack in Port Charlotte, Florida.

One of his latest notes says: “God won’t blame me for my love for basketball and cigarettes.”

Thus far, 800,000,000 pairs of Converse All Stars have been sold.

Converse is now part of Nike brand.

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