

Stan Musial Eulogy February 16, 2013 Our Lady of the Valley Roman Catholic Church Donora, PA

An Appreciation

“Today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth.” We all remember hearing in some point in our lives that famous phrase echoed through Yankee Stadium by Stan Musial’s older brother in baseball bristles Lou Gehrig. Stan Musial would have said that every day was a lucky one when he put on a baseball uniform. Gehrig is known for many baseball accomplishments and most of all for his American League 2,130 consecutive games played. Musial also accomplished the National League record at the time for most consecutive games played at 823 (4-15-52 / 8-22-57) One record of Stan’s that is not mentioned often is that in 2,907 games he was never ejected from a game. Probably the biggest reason why he never got tossed concerned his attitude of how lucky he was to play our national pastime. Musial’s faith was deep—his love of Christ and the Church was deeply ingrained in his childhood in this Donora community. Playing in what, in retrospect, became the glorious era of baseball he maintained that beaming smile, natural buoyancy spreading his cheer to hungry fans in need of a legitimate hero. He lived in that era that rewarded good work over celebrity hood. Rare talent such as his is best cloaked in humility and constancy. His accomplishments were covered by where he played - in the Midwestern decency of St. Louis. He enjoyed the attention not the glimmer. And after his playing career he became baseball’s greatest ambassador. Even God cooperated with this genial guy giving him - gift of years.

His career was consistent over 22-seasons sparkled with excellence throughout. And he played every one of his games with the St Louis Cardinals. In his first, on September 17, 1941, the 20-year-old Musial got two base hits in a 3-2 Cards win. In his last, on September 29, 1963, the 42-year-old Musial got two base hits in a 3-2 Cards win. Of his 3,630 career hits, exactly half came at home, half on the road. Constancy could have been Stan’s motto-amazing fidelity – he batted .326 on the road and .336 at home during his career.

His was a life of record-setting baseball accomplishments and incomparable sustained dignity. George Will wrote of him, “Baseball’s rich in wonderful statistics, but it’s hard to find one more beautiful than Stan Musial’s hitting record. He didn’t care where he was, he just hit.” When his playing career ended in 1963, fifty-years ago, Musial held 17 major-league, 29 National League and nine All-Star records. Perhaps none of these records will stand forever; his legacy will. He was only the fourth player in history to make the Hall of Fame on the first ballot—even the “Yankee Clipper” Joe DiMaggio didn’t make it the first year of eligibility. Dan O’Neill in his introduction to the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* 90th birthday book tribute to Stan wrote, “We still see him digging in, front shoulder dipped, knees bent, hands cuddling a 33-once bat, the calm before the storm. We still hear announcer Harry Caray, pronouncing the ‘s’ in the name like the ‘c’ in reverence, ‘Now Musial steps in...and here’s the pitch.’ Then number 6 uncoils, driving a double to left, a single to center or a deep fly toward the right field pavilion. ‘There she goes...way...back...it might be...it could be...it is!’ After all this time, we still get goose bumps. Those of us fortunate enough to see Stan Musial play, or listen to those broadcasts on simmering summer nights,

can still picture him, like we picture no other. The times in which we live now leave nothing to the imagination. Musial inspired imagination. The times in which we live have redefined the term 'hero,' yet it still applies to Musial. Until his passing last month he was America's greatest living hero, a declaration based on more than statistics, an affirmation endorsed by those who have played with him, known him, met him."

His counterpart in the American League Ted Williams liked to say, "I wish I could hit like Stan Musial" - tall praise coming from the only .400 hitter in the modern era. Musial's workaday manner, untroubled by any obligations of stardom and playing in St. Louis not Boston like Williams, he was never held in heroic terms just revered as consistently good. Williams was complicated and tempestuous whereas Musial was uncomplicated and at ease in whatever he did. Although both men were their equals in baseball, Williams was tortured by his demons whereas Stan had good-nature and mentors to teach him the ingredients of living a content life accepting life's ups and downs.

If one recalls all those superb Donora and Mon Valley mentors he had as a lad is there any wonder that he kept his effervescent personality as sunny. Donora nurtured this youngster and throughout his life the town continued to honor Stan's roots. In fact, he became the soundtrack of Donora since he first put on an athletic uniform. Today's service is testimony to this community's faithfulness to Musial's influence. Everyone one of us in this church have some special personal memory of Stan. Think about those individuals who guided him-"Ki" Duda educator, coach and college president, James K. Russell, premier coach of athletes, Frank Pizzica respected entrepreneur and community-minded citizen. Is it any wonder that he became the thoughtful, subtle, good-mannered professional? It's worth remembering that so many of the photos we have of Musial show him smiling or laughing. When asked once why he always seemed happy, he replied, with a fine balance of diffidence and self-assurance, "If you had a .331 lifetime batting average, you'd be happy all the time too."

Stan conducted his life in moderation-his life is a study in moderation- in all things except in his exceptional records in professional baseball. He would say, "Get eight hours of sleep regularly, keep your weight down, run a mile a day, get the right nutrition, settle down in your home life and keep your body as sharp as a fine tuned automobile."

How do you describe a man like Musial in other cultural menus? He became the embodiment of post-war America - the Horatio Alger story -the Polish ethnic kid who came from poverty in a small mill-town who personified the American dream. He was the Perry Como of song, the Gary Cooper of film, the James Michener of literature, the Dwight D. Eisenhower of presidents, the Norman Rockwell of art. "When you first hear about this guy, you say, it can't be true," remarked colorful St. Louis announcer Jack Buck. "When you first meet him you say, it must be an act. But as you watch him and watch him, and see how he performs and how he comports himself you say- he's truly one of a kind. There will never be another like him."

Someone has said that your eyes are your window to your soul. And through his eyes you saw a man unfailingly loyal to his organization-the Cardinals, to his craft, to his religion, to his wife, to his fans, to his hometown.

And so what is the “lesson in life” Stan leaves with us: “He taught us it was better to be appreciated than glorified, better to be respected than celebrated, better to be understood and loved than to be idolized, and that friendship is more important than fame.” (Bob Costas)As announcer Harry Caray said at Stan’s final at bat, “Take a look fans, remember the swing, the stance-we won’t see his likes again.”

Baseball has only one “perfect warrior,” one “perfect knight” - The one and only Stan “the Man” Musial.

Stephen V. Russell 10 A.M.