

Remembrances

Dave Bucher looks back at some little gems of experience from his 45 years of riding and writing.

Richie

I can't believe I waited so long to visit the baseball Hall of Fame. After all, Cooperstown is just a short distance north of the Pennsylvania border and the route to it runs through some of the nicest motorcycling roads on the East Coast. But I finally went because of Richie.

That would be Richie Ashburn who, amazingly, waited more than 30 years after his 1962 retirement to be inducted into the baseball shrine. His career with my home team, the Phillies, spanned my formative years, the 1950s. And Richie was my boyhood idol. It wasn't just his stats (.308 lifetime average, 10,000 at bats, 2,500 hits and 1,200 walks) that impressed me, it was his hustle. Other than the 1950 Whiz Kids, who won the National League pennant, the Phillies were a pretty lackluster crew through that era. But Richie always showed up. Somehow, even then, I knew enough about how the world works to appreciate that.

My favorite Richie story, and I swear I was watching it on TV as it happened, is the time in 1957 when he hit a foul ball that broke the nose of

a lady in the stands. Richie wore out pitchers with his uncanny ability to get a bat on the ball and he hit a lot of fouls. Well, while they were carrying her out of the stadium on a stretcher play resumed and, on the first pitch, he hit another foul ball...and hit her again.

Hey, she lived, and one of Philly's favorite sports stories was added to the lore of one of its favorite sports heroes. Richie went on to become a revered Phillies sportscaster, and gained the enduring love and admiration of everyone in Philly, not just baseball fans. He died in 1997. No steroids. No scandals. Just a near-perfect player and a near perfect man.

Fittingly, our ride to Cooperstown that autumn weekend in 1995, to pay homage to his presence there, was nearly as perfect. Northeastern Pennsylvania is truly a treasure, doubly so in the fall. And riding in New York State always adds a touch of the obliquely exotic. By all means, don't delay as long as I did. Put Cooperstown on your short list of motorcycling destinations. And when you're there, look up Richie and tell him I still think about him almost every day.

