

Daulton was beloved in Philly

By William C. Kashatus

In that magical 1993 season when the Philadelphia Phillies won the National League pennant, Darren "Dutch" Daulton, who died from brain cancer yesterday at the age of 55, buckled on his shin guards and chest protector, pulled down his mask and settled into his squat behind home plate.

Surveying the diamond, Daulton seemed to hold the world in sway. It didn't matter if he was hurting or not. For 147 games that season the hard-edged catcher made his teammates accountable. In the process, Dutch provided uncontested leadership for a colorful and irreverent band of throwbacks who went from worst to first in the National League East and restored some respectability to a franchise that had become a perennial loser.

Daulton's tragic death from brain cancer yesterday reminds us about the precariousness of life and how beloved he was in the City of Brotherly Love.

I used to think that Dutch was all promise and no results, a 25th-round draft pick with a batting average (over his first decade as a player) of .220. He seemed to spend more time on rehabilitation assignment than behind the plate. What I failed to see was his strength of character.

Daulton got a late start. Drafted by the Phillies in 1980, he was promot-

ed to the majors three years later, where he sat and watched while veteran receivers Bo Diaz and later, Lance Parrish, played ahead of him. Dutch might easily have become discouraged and asked for a trade. He didn't. "I had chances to leave," he admitted, "but I wanted to win in Philadelphia. I wanted that more than anything else."

After he had suffered through a string of knee operations, the payoff finally began in 1992, when Daulton knocked in a league-leading 109 runs and made the All-Star team. A year later, the Phillies captured the pennant, in large part because of Daulton's expert handling of the pitching staff and his 24 homers and 105 RBI. Those were his best seasons in Philadelphia, when, as he put it, "I grew up from a boy here to being a man."

To be sure, Daulton was certainly not a choirboy during his playing days. Dutch's chiseled physique and impressive power-hitting raised questions about the possibility of steroid use. His movie-star good looks made him the object of desire for many of the females with whom he partied, resulting in two divorces.

After his career ended in 1997, Daulton was a troubled, unsettled soul. He struggled with alcohol, was



Kashatus

estranged from his four children and stirred controversy with remarks about metaphysics, occultism and the end of the world. But Darren learned from his mistakes.

In 2007 Comcast Sports Network brought him back to Philadelphia as a baseball analyst. Daulton found personal happiness in a new relationship with his current wife and as a pitcher for Yuengling Beer. His community service activities, public appearances and friendly, genuine disposition made him one of the most beloved former athletes in the city.

By 2013, when he was diagnosed with glioblastoma, Dutch had turned his life around. He not only acknowledged his shortcomings, but had made up for them.

"Anything I did in the past is my fault," he admitted. "Not my ex-wives' fault, not any of my kids' faults, not baseball, not the media. I did the damage, but I've also learned from it." That kind of humility is rare among pro athletes. The ability to reform one's life is rarer still. It's why his death is so tragic.

Rest in peace, Darren. You will always be beloved in Philadelphia.

William Kashatus is author of Macho Row: The 1993 Phillies and Baseball's Unwritten Code (University Press of Nebraska). Email him at bill@historylive.net.