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**Darren Daulton** in 1996, trying for a comeback during Phillies spring training.

## So long, Dutch!

By **William C. Kashatus**

**U**ntil just two years ago, Darren Daulton buckled on his shin guards and chest protector and pulled down his mask with a soldierly tug. Armored, he settled into his squat behind home plate, punched his mitt, and surveyed the diamond — the fielders, the batter, the base runner, his pitcher — and the state of the world, which, if only here, he seemed to hold in sway.

But catching breaks a man down, inning by inning, game by game, year by year. After nine operations, Daulton was forced to play first base and the outfield. Regardless of the territory, he continued to be the quarterback of the Philadelphia Phillies, the lead dog, the team captain, and, at times when he felt he had to be, other less printable things. He will be missed now that the Phils have traded him to the Florida Marlins.

I used to think that Daulton 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 promoted to the majors three years later, where he sat and watched while first Bo Diaz and later, Lance Parrish, played ahead of

him. He might easily have become discouraged and asked for a trade. He didn't. "I had chances to leave," he admitted a few years ago, "but I wanted to win in Philadelphia. I wanted that more than anything else."

After he had suffered through a string of losing seasons and 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 went from worst to first, capturing the National League pennant, in large part because of Daulton's hitting and his expert handling of the pitching staff. Those were his best seasons in Philadelphia, when, as he put it, "I grew up from a boy here to being a man."

While logic and the Phillies' need to rebuild dictated that an aging veteran like Daulton had to be traded, I wish it weren't so. He is a power hitter, the kind you watch in anticipation of a dramatic home run. He suggests a semi-mythical era when players gave everything and made no excuses. And he is a dedicated father, who, after a painful divorce, wanted to be closer to his son than a career in the majors would allow. Now that he is back home in Florida, he will have that opportunity.

When he was traded this week, I felt the sadness that comes with endings. In Darren Daulton we had someone pretty special.

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