

For one brief, shining moment . . .

by William C. Kashatus

If you are a baseball fan who lived and died with the Philadelphia Phillies during their glory years, Saturday will offer an opportunity you can't afford to miss.

On that evening, the Phillies will turn back the clock to honor their only World Championship team in what promises to be an emotional pre-game ceremony.

For many, the scenario is indelibly etched in our minds: The date was Tuesday, Oct. 21, 1980. The place was Veterans Stadium.

Our beloved Phils, who had scratched and clawed their way to a

three-to-two-game lead over the American League champion Kansas City Royals in the World Series were clinging to a 4-1 lead in the bottom of the ninth inning of Game Six.

With bases loaded and two outs, Willie Wilson, the Royals' dangerous lead-off hitter, stepped to the plate to face Frank Edwin McGraw Jr., more affectionately known as the "Tugger."

Throughout the series, the Phillies' mischievous closer manager to put us in so many nail-biting predicaments. Then, just as suddenly, he'd pitch his way out of them, exiting the mound in a glove-slapping frenzy, screaming at no one in particular. With the crowd on its feet and cheering every pitch, McGraw struck out Wilson to end the game.

For a solitary moment, time seemed to stop.

Not until Mike Schmidt, Hall-of-Famer-in-waiting and series MVP, took a head-first leap onto a pile of teammates, did reality set in.

No longer would it be, "Wait 'til next year!" Our "next year" had finally arrived. Amidst all the tears, laughter, and sheer jubilation, was the realization that we were finally world champions.

It hadn't always been that memorable.

There is a unique historical insecurity among Phillies fans. We expect disappointment, sometimes even revel in it.

Who can blame us? Before 1980, the team's only successes came in 1915 and 1950 when our heroes captured pennants. Even in 1964, when success seemed assured, the Phillies somehow managed to blow a six game lead in the last week of the season only to finish tied for second place.

They were perennial losers, who would receive the sympathy rather than loyalty of a self-respecting fan in any other city. No wonder they were alternatively loved and vilified by the fans, who have, over the years, come to be known as the "Boo-birds."

While Philadelphia may be a city of respected universities, nationally recognized museums and an ever-diminishing coterie of blue bloods, its genuine spirit can be found in the clock punchers and blue collars, who define the city's character, especially when it comes to

hitter known to launch home runs even farther than Babe Ruth — and could be just as incorrigible; Rube Waddell, who pitched the A's to two pennants and was notorious for chasing fire trucks, unruly fans and loose women; Lefty Grove, a pitching ace with 300 career victories, who tore through the clubhouse laying waste to lockers, watercoolers and, on occasion, a teammate or two, when he lost, and "Bucketfoot Al" Simmons, a legendary slugger who could be just as vicious, working himself into a homicidal rage against pitchers before going to bat.

While a modern psychologist might consider them to be poster children for Prozac, Philadelphians embraced the A's.

They were sharp-witted and strong, reckless and carefree, brutally candid and shamelessly self-indulgent — much like the early 20th century in which they played.

But more important, they were also winners, compiling nine pennants and five world championships during their half-century in the City of Brotherly Love.

In 1980, all of that changed, if only for a brief moment.

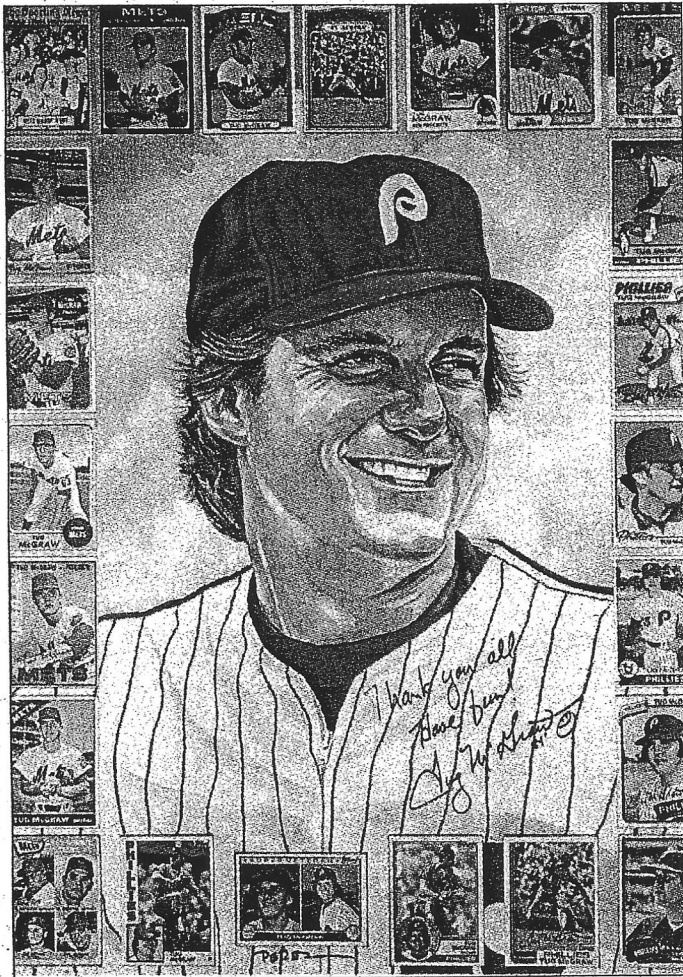
The day after the Phillies clinched the Series, more than a million fans turned out to thank the Phillies as they paraded down Broad Street to the old JFK Stadium. There, 95,000 gathered to hear speeches by their heroes, including the irreverent Tug McGraw.

"All through baseball history, Philadelphia has taken a back seat to New York City," said the popular reliever, whipping the crowd into a

wild frenzy.

"Well, New York City can take this world championship and stick it!" he roared, thrusting a copy of the Philadelphia Daily News front page, "We Win," skyward.

It was simply "Boo-tiful." For one brief, shining moment, rooting for the Phillies was like cheering for ourselves. ■



Tug McGraw saved the sixth game of the 1980 World Series, much to the relief of Phillies fans

sports.

And no team better symbolized that spirit than the Philadelphia Athletics.

Not only did the A's grace us with two championship dynasties — first in 1910-1914, and again, in 1929-31 — but they set the precedent for the kind of players we adored: swaggering, trash-talking hustle, who wear their emotions on their sleeves.

There was Mickey Cochrane, a lifetime .320 hitter who was known to respond to a close defeat by weeping, pulling his hair, and butting his head against the dugout wall; Jimmie Foxx, an intimidating power

William C. Kashatus, a historian at Chester County Historical Society, is author of "Mike Schmidt: Philadelphia's Hall of Fame Third Baseman" and "Donnie Mack's '29 Triumph: The Rise and Fall of Philadelphia Baseball."

PHILADELPHIA DAILY
NEWS
 OUR 15th ANNIVERSARY YEAR

THE DAILY VIEWS

OP/ED