

# FOR PHILS, A BLAST (OR 2) FROM THE PAST

By WILLIAM C. KASHATUS

**T**HE LAST time the Phillies were in a pennant race, the players were a swaggering, trash-talking bunch of outcasts.

Those woefully wonderful Phillies went from worst to first in 1993, a year in which there were absolutely no expectations. But the fans still turned out for them because they were die-hards who functioned in the black-and-white world of heroes and bums.

They showed their humanness, warts and all, and we admired them because they were throwbacks to the days when baseball was played for little more than the love of the game. Cheering for them was like cheering for ourselves.

Having witnessed the season-long stalemate between the current Phillies and the fans, I am concerned not only about the future of Philadelphia baseball, but also about being embarrassed by the sight of a near-empty stadium if the Phillies make the playoffs. So, I was curious to find out what a few of the "old-timers" from '93 felt about this team, and what the Phils can do to rejuvenate Philadelphia's interest in them.

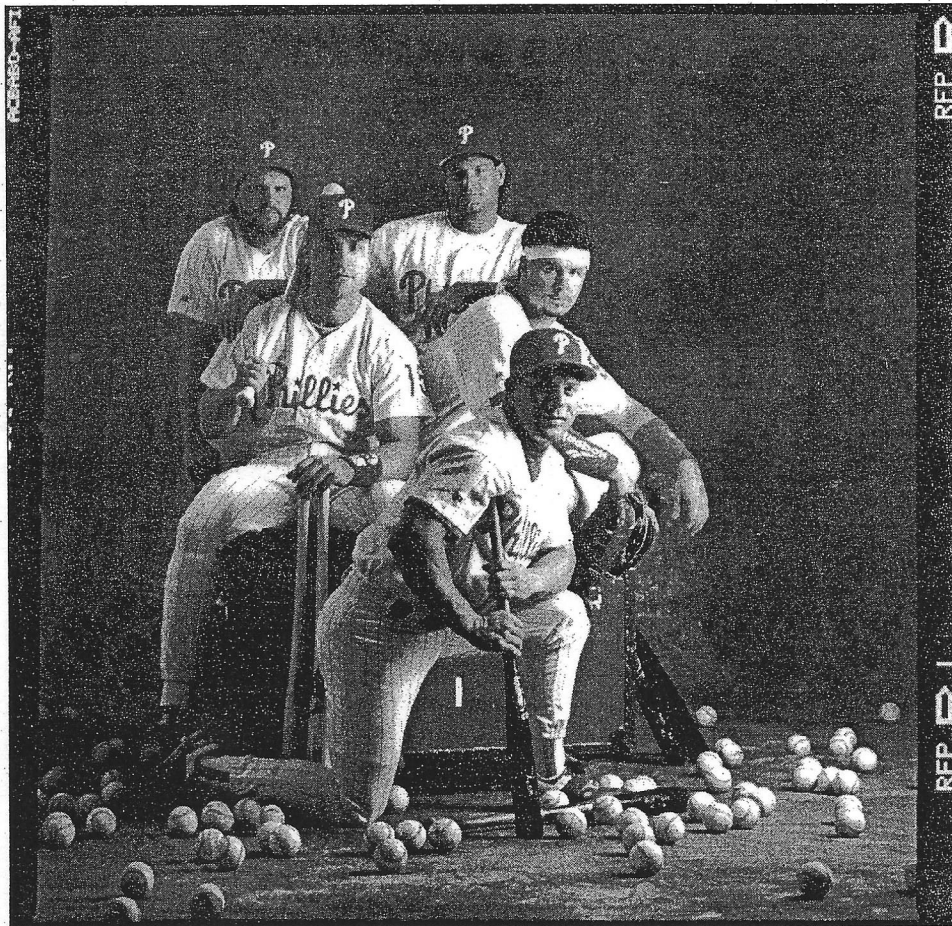
Lenny Dykstra, the offensive sparkplug of the '93 pennant winners, put it most succinctly: "You can't compare these guys to us. We were a one-in-a-million shot. Not only did we have personality, we had fan appeal, team chemistry and an unbelievable work ethic. If every general manager knew how to put a team together like that, they'd all be doing it."

"Don't forget," he added, "ours was a one-year hit. These Phillies have been put together so that they can contend for a few years."

OK, Dude, agreed. But then why aren't the fans turning out for them?

"The fans haven't had anything to get excited about in the last few years, and you can't expect things to change overnight," said Dykstra, who now lives in Simi Valley, Calif., where he owns a chain of carwashes. "The fact that the Phils are still playing in a cement pit doesn't help matters, either . . . But with the new stadium on the horizon and some exciting young players like Scott Rolen, Pat Burrell and Jimmy Rollins, they can turn it around with the fans."

John Kruk, now employed by Fox Sports in California, was more critical.



Some of the Boys of '93: (Clockwise from left rear): John Kruk, Darren Daulton, Mitch Williams, Lenny Dykstra and Dave Hollins.

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cause the Phillies were in first — or a game or two out — for most of the season, the fans and the media want to tear them apart."

Daulton is rooting for the Phillies. But he knows that the team still has more to learn if they hope to be regular contenders — and win back the fans.

"In 1993, nobody on our club really cared about the things that younger players want," he said. "We had already made the big money. Some guys had already played in the post-season with other teams. Individual achievement was not as important as wanting to win for each other. We were comfortable enough with ourselves

and our abilities to show our personalities. That kind of spirit caught fire with the media, the fans and the entire city. Everyone was on the same page."

Daulton believes that these Phils will eventually prove to be a more talented team than the '93 club. But until the players feel comfortable enough to assert their personalities, they will have trouble attracting the crowds. The danger, in these days of free agency, is that the team may not be able to retain its young stars long enough for that to happen.

"If Lenny, Kruk and Williams were still playing, the fans would turn out," Daulton said.

"Baseball is a business, and the fans come out to see the personalities. The Phillies need to do a much better job of selling their players . . . and the players need to do a better job of marketing themselves. Whether they know it or not, they need the fans and the media." ★

William C. Kashatus attended 28 Phils games this season, most with his son, Peter.

"The Phillies don't know what it takes to win consistently," he said. "Once you're used to losing, you don't know how to grind out a win." Kruk, who played for Larry Bowa in San Diego before coming to Philadelphia, credits his former manager for teaching him that skill.

"Bowa knows how to get the most out of the players. He's put the Phils in a position to win. Those guys need to take that and run with it in the last week of this season. They have to realize that they may never get this chance again."

Mitch Williams, now a pitching coach for the Independent League's Atlantic City Surf, never backed down from a hitter or a beat writer, even after the infamous gopher ball that ended the Phils' magical quest for a world championship in '93. "We played nine good hard innings every night," he said. "Didn't matter if we were ahead or behind, because we knew good things would happen if we played hard. We were also a good fit for Philadelphia. We were a blue-collar team in a blue-collar city. The fans appreciated that and

turned out for us."

Kruk said that the '93 team also made itself more accessible to the fans than the current Phils. "The fans could relate to us better because they could find us at the bars shooting the bull and signing autographs . . . But these guys seemed to be inconvenienced by all the other responsibilities that go with signing a big league contract. They want to be left alone, so they hide from the fans. They don't want to sign autographs. But they want to be paid their \$8 million a year. You can't have it both ways."

**D**ARREN DAULTON, lead dog of the '93 club, was more philosophical. "You have to remember that the Phillies have a young team," he said. "They're just discovering what it means to stay the course over a 162-game season."

"No one picked them to win this year. The experts predicted that Bowa would come in and change the attitude of the team, preparing them to win in the future. That's been accomplished. But be-