

A tale of two 14s

by William C. Kashatus

Of all the players to wear No. 14 for the Phillies, only Jim Bunning and Pete Rose have left an indelible mark on the club's history. While Bunning will be honored tomorrow with the retirement of that number, many fans will no doubt ask, "Why not Rose?"

The Phillies insist that only those former players inducted into the Hall of Fame are eligible for the honor, in spite of the fact that Rich Ashburn's number was retired by the Phils decades before his election. Others will point to the character issue, but there is no evidence that Rose bet on baseball while he played for the Phillies.

Forget about the Hall of Fame credential for a moment. If the retirement of a player's uniform number is based on his contributions to the team, then both Bunning and Rose deserve the honor.

Consider the similarities:

ON-FIELD PERFORMANCE: Both players were instrumental in their team's fortunes. During his six-year career with the Phils, Bunning compiled 89 victories. 1964 was a career year for him. Not only did he post a 19-8 record with 219 strikeouts and a 2.63 ERA for a pennant-contending team, but he threw a perfect game against the New York Mets. From 1965 through 1967, he averaged more than 300 innings, won 55 more games and watched his ERA drop from 2.60 to 2.29.

Rose's five years with the Phillies were more impressive. Playing in all but a dozen games, Rose hit .290 and collected 826 hits and 255 RBI. In the post-season he was a clutch player. In 1980, Rose not only hit .400 in the league championship series but preserved the Phillies' 4-1 World Series-clinching victory with a last-second catch of a foul pop that glanced off catcher Bob Boone's mitt. Three years later, he hit .375 in the LCS and .333 in the World Series.

LEADERSHIP: Both Bunning and Rose were seasoned veterans, who provided much-needed leadership for young Phillies' teams. Bunning, who had already collected more than 100 victories for the Detroit Tigers, knew how to win. Demanding the ball every fourth day, the no-nonsense competitor positioned his younger teammates in



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION / DAVID WILLIAMS

the infield, offered pointers in the dugout and never hesitated to throw a knockdown pitch to protect them. He was also a dedicated player rep who fought for more equitable treatment in salary, negotiations and benefits.

Similarly, Rose had been a mainstay with the Cincinnati Reds when they won back-to-back world championships in '75 and '76. In Philadelphia, he came to define the game of baseball for a team of self-centered individuals that had repeatedly clinched the Eastern Division only to lose in the playoffs. Rose took the Phillies to a higher level with his unyielding competitiveness, a willingness to sacrifice himself for the

team and his ability to take pressure off players like Mike Schmidt and Steve Carlton. Rose's leadership was the intangible that gave the Phillies their only world championship.

WORK ETHIC: Neither Bunning nor Rose was blessed with exceptional abilities. Both players worked extremely hard to make themselves into successful major leaguers. Bunning did not have an overpowering, 90-mph fastball. He was told early in his career that he would never be successful in the majors because of his awkward side-arm delivery. But he worked longer and harder on conditioning than any of his teammates and, ultimately, defied the ex-

perts.

Rose, too, did not make it to the majors on God-given ability. He wasn't fast by big league standards, but he demonstrated superb instincts as a baserunner. He didn't have great range or a strong arm, but he rarely made a mistake in the infield. Nor was he a great natural hitter. Rather, he disciplined himself to become a contact hitter in order to move the runner or simply to get on base. In the process, "Charlie Hustle" made himself the all-time hit king.

So why not include Pete Rose when his uniform number is being retired?

Apart from the fact that his exile from baseball prohibits such an honor, Rose has been his own worst enemy. His ongoing battle over reinstatement with the commissioner's office and his refusal to show any remorse has not won him much sympathy with either the baseball world or the fans. Perhaps he should learn a lesson from Jim Bunning, who was also a pariah to the baseball world because of his early leadership of the players' union.

After his retirement in 1971, Bunning tried to stay in the game as a manager in the Phils' farm system. He was fired after five years "for not developing and communicating with the players" and became eligible for the Hall of Fame in 1976. He repeatedly fell short, until his name was removed from the writers' ballot. Only then did Bunning decide to move on with his

life.

Turning to politics in his home state of Kentucky, he won election first to the U.S. House of Representatives and later to the U.S. Senate, becoming one of the more distinguished members of Congress. Finally, in 1996, the Veterans Committee voted him into Cooperstown.

Tomorrow, when the Phillies retire his number, Jim Bunning will realize one of the sweetest victories of his life because he was able to put the game behind him.

Will Pete Rose ever do the same? ■