

Witness to Phillies greatness

By William C. Kashatus

Roy Halladay's retirement this week brought back memories of another great Phillies pitcher, Steve "Lefty" Carlton.

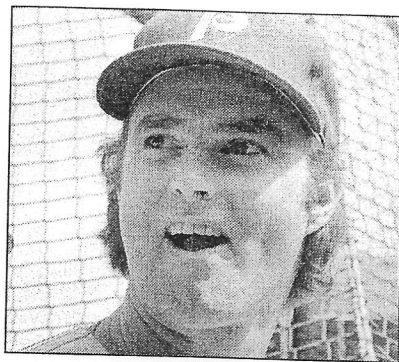
Neither was the kind of athlete Philadelphia fans tend to embrace — those who perform with reckless abandon, wear their emotions on their sleeves, and show their humanness, warts and all. But the two pitchers still endeared themselves to the fans, who quickly appreciated each pitcher's greatness.

Halladay and Carlton had very different personalities. Lefty, who pitched for the Phillies from 1972 to 1986, distanced himself from the media and the fans. He refused to speak to the press after 1973, feeling unduly criticized by them, and he believed that the only thing he owed the fans was winning.

Carlton was also known for his quirkiness: stuffing cotton in his ears to drown out the crowd; isolating himself in a "mood room" for motivation before a start; and strengthening his pitching arm by submerging it in a barrel of rice.

On the other hand, Halladay, who pitched for the Phils from 2010 to 2013, was always willing to talk with the press and respected the fans. He understood that the media were an important conduit between players and fans, and gave thoughtful responses to questions.

"Doc" was active in a variety of charities, took out a full-page advertisement in the newspaper to thank fans for their support after winning



Steve Carlton Associated Press

his second Cy Young award in 2010, and tried to pitch through injuries the last two seasons, saying that he "owed it to the fans."

What endeared Doc and Lefty to the faithful was their exceptional approach to the game. Whenever he was on the baseball diamond, each man exhibited a competitive drive and mental discipline that often propelled him to victory. They knew every hitter's weakness and catered to it.

Both men were power pitchers who threw in the mid-90s and took the ball every scheduled start without complaint, often completing the game. It was their common trademark. Carlton hurled 254 complete games during a 24-year career. Halladay completed 67 games in his 16 years, in an era when the overwhelming majority of starters went six or seven innings.

Behind the scenes, each man spent endless hours in physical and mental preparation to improve his craft, both in and out of season. That demanding regimen, and the work ethic that inspired it, produced spectacular results.

Carlton, who pitched for the St. Louis Cardinals from 1965 to 1971, compiled career totals of 329 wins, 4,136 strikeouts, a 3.22 earned run average, four Cy Young awards, and two World Series titles, his last with Philadelphia in 1980. Those numbers made him a first-ballot Hall of Famer.



Roy Halladay Associated Press

Halladay also pitched brilliantly. His career totals for both the Toronto Blue Jays (1998-2009) and Phillies include 203 wins, 2,117 strikeouts, a 3.38 earned run average, two Cy Young awards, a perfect game, and the second postseason no-hitter in baseball history. Sadly, Doc never achieved the World Series title he so richly deserved. But his statistics suggest that he will eventually join Carlton in Cooperstown.

When Doc retired, he left the game on his own terms. Plagued by injuries at 36, he realized he could no longer "compete at the same high standard" he set for himself. Perhaps he took a cue from Lefty, who tried to reinvent himself as a control pitcher after the Phillies released him in 1986. After four unsuccessful comeback bids, Carlton, unwanted at 44, called it quits.

Greatness is rare in any profession. In baseball, it's also fleeting. In Roy Halladay and Steve Carlton, the Phillies, their fans, and the city of Philadelphia were extremely fortunate to witness the greatness that comes with baseball immortality.

William Kashatus' most recent book is "Jackie & Campy: The Untold Story of Their Rocky Relationship and the Quest to Break Baseball's Color Line" (University of Nebraska).
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