

ATTACK ON ROLEN IS SAME OLD SCHMIDT

by WILLIAM C. KASHATUS

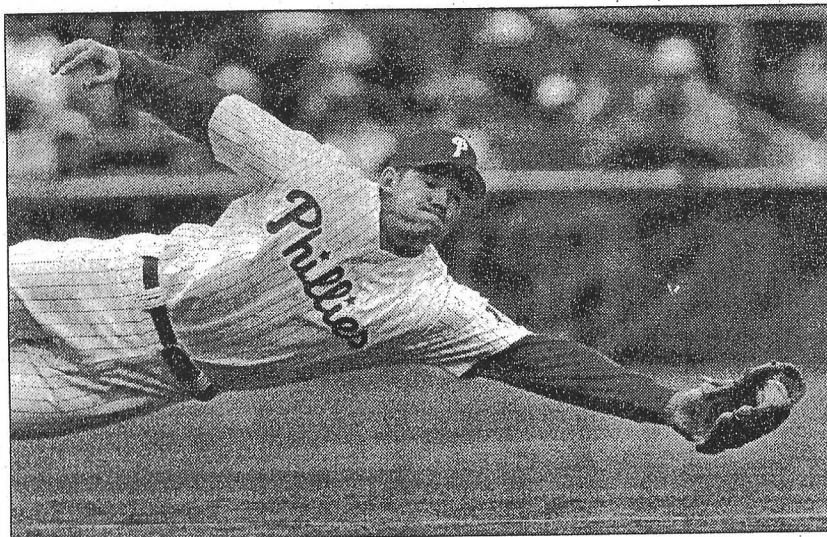
YEARS AGO, when the Philadelphia Sports Writers Association presented Mike Schmidt with a major achievement award, the Hall of Fame third baseman surprised everyone with a memorable quip: "Philadelphia is the only place where you can experience the thrill of victory and the agony of reading about it the next day."

Schmidt, known as much for his introspective personality and moral code as his tape-measure home runs, took a lot of abuse from the city's sportswriters.

They wanted him to emote when things didn't go his way, to throw his batting helmet after a strikeout, to get tossed out of the game when he disagreed with a call. It wasn't his way.

Instead, his way was good enough to lead the Phillies to five league championship series, two World Series and the only world championship in club history.

In the process, he became the greatest third baseman in



JIM MacMILLAN/Daily News

baseball history.

Now the sportswriters are at it again. This time their target is another introspective, highly principled third baseman, Scott Rolen.

Bill Conlin started the controversy in his June 13 column, reporting that Phils' manager Larry Bowa had singled out Rolen

as being the primary cause of the team's recent slump.

The issue snowballed when Rolen confronted his manager in a heated exchange. Now, the "dump Rolen" campaign seems to have become a bandwagon.

Among the accusations against him: He gets his "nose bent out of shape" whenever

he's made accountable. He's already "turned down a 10-year, \$140 million offer from the Phillies." His "quiet controlled approach to baseball" will never complement Bowa's "fiery style." He's "overrated" as a player, never really fulfilling the expectations that swelled after his impressive rookie season.

By attacking Scott Rolen, the sportswriters have taken a Phillies' season that has so far exceeded everybody's wildest dreams and turned it into a grind. Where else but Philadelphia can first place seem so miserable?

Like Schmidt before him, Rolen doesn't deserve the abuse. He has been one of the most accountable players in Phillies' history, both on and off the field.

His rookie-of-the-year season was followed by three others in which he averaged 28 homers and 92 RBIs as well as collected two Gold Gloves.

As a person, he's the kind of class act that we all keep hoping our kids will adopt as role models: a clean-living, principled young man with an uncompromising sense of integrity.

What is so tragic is that in their ongoing attempt to play God with the pro athletes in this city, the sportswriters have done nothing less than prevented championship seasons. They do it by baiting and bashing players and coaches. And by their use of quotes in order to sensationalize a story. And by driving superstars out of town with their petty attacks.

I was fortunate to grow up with Mike Schmidt as a hero. I thank God that he somehow managed to survive the 17 years of abuse he took from the press. Sadly, my three young sons probably won't have a similar role model because of the same kind of irresponsible journalism. ★

William C. Kashatus is the author of "Mike Schmidt: Philadelphia's Hall of Fame Third Baseman" (McFarland, 2000).