

## Bird soars while Schmidt is scorned

"For all sad words of tongue and pen," once wrote a Quaker poet, "the saddest are these — 'It might have been.'"

Philadelphia Quakers have always been disturbed by unrealized potential, particularly when the seeds for success were already planted in local tradition. They respected the past and the individuals who helped to shape it, relying on their sound judgment for continued success in the days ahead. That is why they would have applauded the Celtics' recent decision to retain the services of Larry Bird as a member of their front office. It might have even taken some of the sting out of the embarrassment of Mike Schmidt's treatment by the Phillies.

The comparison is an inevitable one. Larry Bird and Mike Schmidt can be counted among the greatest players in their respective sports. Both were stellar performers whose mastery of the game made it appear as second nature to them. Despite that fact both men were hard workers who drove themselves to perfection and could be relied upon to deliver, game in and game out, season after season, for well over a decade, their basic sense of integrity wouldn't allow for anything less.

"Mastery of the sport," "desire for perfection," "hard work" and "reliability" — that was all the Celtics needed to know about Larry to make him a part of their braintrust. Then, again, tradition has always meant something in that organization, or at least more than it counts for with the Phillies. And so instead of being

promoted to the front office, Mike Schmidt was criticized as too intimidating, lacking the patience and the personable disposition that it takes to successfully handle the future of a young team. Apparently the Phillies' ownership believes that those qualities belong to more able men like Lee Thomas and Jim Fregosi, the leaders of a perennial loser.

The rejection has hurt Mike perhaps more than the boos he suffered during his playing days. At times he expressed his pain to the media and was soundly criticized for it. But who could blame him? Where else but in Philadelphia can a future Hall of Famer have his number retired and be given everything else but the job he may very well deserve? Certainly not in Boston.

So, Mike Schmidt and the Phillies have gone their separate ways: Mike to Florida in search of peace of mind, and the Phillies to the cellar of the National League East. And despite the organization's conscious effort to distance itself from its greatest player there are too many reminders of the inextricable bond between them. After all, there is a reason his retired number 20 hangs next to a placard inscribed with the words "1980 World Champions."

Mike Schmidt is outta here, like one of his 548 home runs, while Larry Bird soars to the top of the Celtics' organization. Once again, Boston has outclassed Philadelphia.

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