

## **Pete Rose: The Legend (Column)**

Instant Replay

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When I spoke with a young boy not too long ago, I asked him what he thought of Pete Rose.

His answer saddened me because the only thing he knew about Peter Rose was that he went to jail and was banned from the Hall of Fame.

That's not the way my little boy or girl will remember Pete Rose.

This column is for the young man I spoke with because this is what I think of Charlie Hustle – Mr. Baseball – Mr. Cincinnati – Mr. Pete Rose.

The first thing that automatically comes to mind is that he's the all-time hit leader with 4,256 and that he played on the Big Red Machine.

But one factor that stands out to me is that he played in more winning games than any other player in baseball.

Considering the fact that the baseball season is the longest of any professional sport possibly makes him the greatest winner of any sport.

And winning is what Pete Rose did better than anyone.

"That's what I really played for – to win games," said Rose when we met Tuesday in Cincinnati. "My objectives to playing the game were, one -- get hits, two -- score runs and three – win ball games. I got more hits than anyone else, I'm first in the National League in runs scored and first in games played and won. I just tried to do things that would help my team win. I feel I was very fortunate to have been able to have done those kinds of things."

Perhaps the greatest team ever assembled on a baseball diamond was the Big Red Machine in the mid-1970's. "Oh definitely," responded Rose.

In 1975 and 1976, the Reds won back-to-back World Series rings.

“That was fun,” said Rose. “Going to the ball park and knowing you’re going to win was fun.

What made that particular team great?

“Not many teams are going to have the potential to have four or five Hall of Famers on one team,” said Rose. “We all recognized what we could do and we all respected what we could do – and we went out and did it on a consistent basis.

Could that happen today? It doesn’t seem likely.

“It’s (consistency) something that you don’t have today like we had on the Big Red Machine,” said Rose. “We had a lot of very consistent players. Not consistent over a year, but over a career.”

Rose fondly spoke of Cincinnati greats such as Joe Morgan, Johnny Bench, Tony Perez, Davey Concepcion and skipper Sparky Anderson.

“When you have great talent like that and combine it with dependable consistency, then you win,” he said.

Rose was known for his fiery play and aggressiveness. He always sprinted to first base when he drew a walk and was tabbed “Charlie Hustle” by Edward “Whitey” Ford in 1963.

“I think it came out of respect,” said Rose with a grin. “I think a better word to describe me is enthusiasm. I was very enthusiastic about the game of baseball.”

The night Rose broke Ty Cobb’s hit record was a night all of sports will never forget.

I was crammed into a dormitory at Ohio University with approximately 200 people all anticipating the break.

When the record-setting hit bounced off the left-center field turf, Rose treated it as a typical hit. He rounded first with his trademark wide turn and then came back to first to be congratulated for the milestone.

“I should have gone for second,” said Rose – and he meant it. “I think I could have made two.”

Rose treated the record-setting hit routinely.

“I was just doing what I was getting paid to do – get hits,” added Rose. “I enjoy the tension and pressure of any streak or pursuing a record like that.”

But something else was more important to Rose that night.

“I got two hits in that game and we won 2-0 and I scored both runs. I really accomplished a lot of things that night – and we won,” he added.

What’s in store for Pete Rose in the future?

“We’ve got a lot of irons in the fire,” he said. “Nothing definite, we’re just doing some card shows right now and traveling. We’re being very (a long pause) selective.”

For now, Rose has picked up his golf clubs and has been working on his game.

“I take it seriously and work hard at it,” said Rose. “I enjoy playing golf and getting out on the course.”

He also enjoys watching his son, Pete Jr., play baseball for the Sarasota White Sox.

“He’s doing alright,” said Rose. “He’s coming off an injury to his left shoulder.”

Rose said that he’s looking forward to coming to Portsmouth to watch the Intercontinental Boxing Council cruiser weight championship between IBC Champion Arthur “Stormy” Weathers and the local favorite, “Rocky” Ray Phillips, from Stockdale, Ohio.

Rose has known Rocky for approximately nine months and said that he wouldn't miss the fight for anything.

Rose also said that he hopes to be reunited with former Major League great Al Oliver, who is currently the baseball coach for Shawnee State University.

"I liked playing against Al," said Rose. "Al was a good hitter, one of the best. I used to have some good battles with him in Pittsburgh. He's one of the good guys."

Oliver had nothing but praise for the man he called "Mr. Baseball."

Oliver did not hesitate to describe the first thing that came to mind when he heard the name Pete Rose.

"Base hits," he said. "And Major League Baseball."

Oliver, who played against Rose for several years, said that he's often asked at gatherings if he ever got to *know* Rose.

"I was a first baseman, wasn't I?" he said. "Every first baseman that ever played against Pete knew him because he was always on first base. So I had no choice but to know Pete Rose. To me, he's the greatest player."

Oliver went on to describe what made Rose great.

"He played so hard," he said. "Every time we went into Riverfront Stadium, we knew we'd be in for a battle because Pete Rose was playing. He never let injuries stop him from playing because he loved the game so much. He never got hurt because of his attitude of the game and his durability."

There are a lot of people in this area and all over the nation who want Rose reinstated to baseball. But they don't want it to stop there – they want it to end in Cooperstown.

If he's not in the Hall of Fame, then, as WLW sports talk show host Andy Furman once told me, it should be called the Hall of Vain.