

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, January 21, 2013

Stan the Man: I was sorry to read in Sunday's paper of the death of Stan Musial (1920–2013). During a lifetime of following major league baseball (off and on), I regarded him as my all-time favorite player. It was not his lifetime batting average of .331, his 475 home runs, his 3,630 hits, or his record 24 all-star game appearances (for a few years, there were two all-star games) that captured my imagination, but rather *who he was*. Of course there were hometown Phillies stars like Robin Roberts, Mike Schmidt, and Jimmy Rollins who caught my fancy, but I still liked Stan Musial and his Cardinals.

Throughout his life, much of it after he was an active player, Musial was in the Cardinals organization; he never worked for anyone else. During most of his playing years, St. Louis was the only major league city west of the Mississippi (until about 1950 there was also the St. Louis Browns in the American League), so baseball fans all over the Midwest liked the Cardinals, especially when they could beat the feared New York Yankees in the World Series. Musial loved the Cardinals, and their many fans loved him.

Before he was 20, an accident damaged his pitching arm, so he became an outfielder before he was brought to the major league level late in the 1941 season. He was fast proving himself, as he hit .426 for the rest of that season. Before he retired in 1963, he had led the National League in almost every category, and in 1948, his 39 home runs was one short of providing him with the triple crown. I saw the World Champion Cardinals play an exhibition game in Providence in 1943, but Musial was not with the team; I think he served two years in the military during World War II, and I never saw him in person. His Number 6 was the first ever to be retired by the Cardinals, and President Obama awarded him the Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, in 2011.

I recall well the 1942 World Series against the nearly invincible New York Yankees. In the first game at Sportsmen's Park in St. Louis, the Yankees compiled 7 runs in the early part of the game, and as the 9th inning began, they were leading the Cardinals 7-0. The Cardinals came alive in the 9th and scored 4 runs, losing the game 7-4. St. Louis went on to win the next 4, and the 1942 Series. In 1946, the Series was between the Cardinals and the powerful Boston Red Sox, with Ted Williams at the height of his career. Boston was favored to win the Series 12 to 5. With the feared duo of Enos "Country" Slaughter and Stan Musial hitting back-to-back in the line-up, all the games were hard-fought, until each team had won three games. Boston led in the 7th game until the chips were down and Musial and Slaughter came through. Harry "the Cat" Brecheen won three games for St. Louis, and Ted Williams was held to one hit in the Series.

I liked Stan Musial's odd batting stance. He didn't hold his bat high and wave it around but rather held it still about waist level. When the right pitch came along, look out! Toward the end of his playing career and well over 40 years of age, many thought he was being kept on by the Cardinals because of past performance and that he was really "over the hill." About a month into the season, either in 1962 or 1963, the leading batting averages in the National League were published. Stan Musial was batting .530. When he appeared in the All-Star Game about that time, he hit a home run and the National League won.

My favorite observations of Stan Musial were when he made his final round of the ballparks immediately before his retirement in 1963. I was watching one day, and it was announced he was coming to the plate. The umpires stopped the game, and each of them walked to home plate and shook his hand. That was the ultimate tribute to a great ballplayer. His very last trip to the plate was against Cincinnati, and he hit a single past the rookie second baseman Pete Rose.