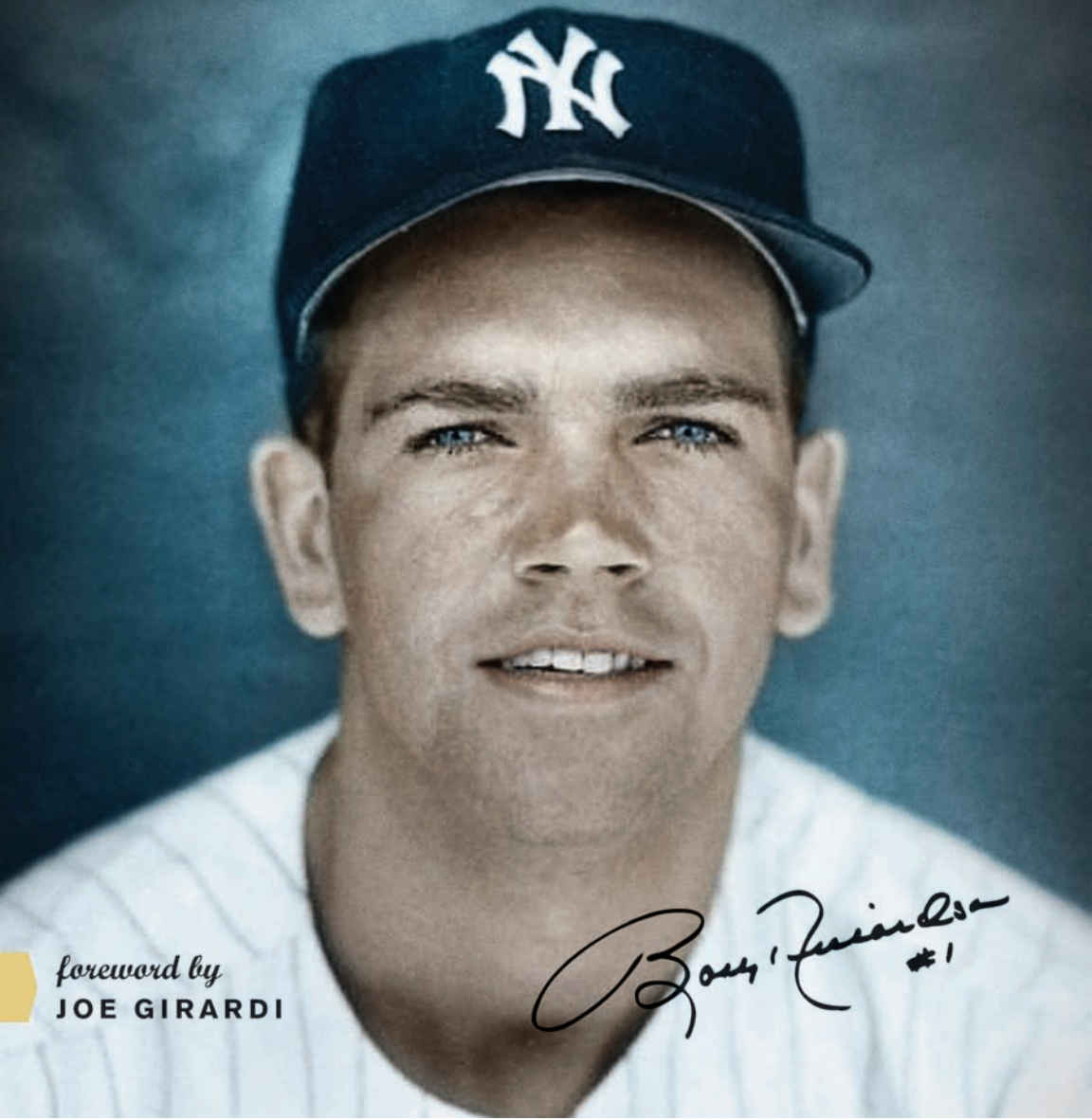
LEAVING A LASTING LEGACY
ON & OFF THE FIELD

IMPACT PLAYER

A MEMOIR

Bobby Richardson

WITH DAVID THOMAS



foreword by
JOE GIRARDI

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TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.
CAROL STREAM, ILLINOIS

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Impact Player: Leaving a Lasting Legacy On and Off the Field

Cover photograph provided by the author.

Designed by Daniel Farrell

Edited by Anne Christian Buchanan

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ISBN 978-1-4143-7273-0

Printed in the United States of America

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7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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FOREWORD

I REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME I walked out of the clubhouse at the old Yankee Stadium. All I could think was, *Wow—this is the same tunnel that guys like Yogi Berra, Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris, Bobby Richardson, and Whitey Ford walked through. I've really made it. I'm playing in New York for the New York Yankees.* It was a really special feeling—and one I'll never forget.

That great dynasty of '55–'64 is one every Yankee player looks up to. I had the privilege of winning three championships with the Yankees in '96, '98, and '99, but these guys were doing it almost every single year. They taught us that you should never be satisfied with winning one, two, or even three championships, but that you need to go out there and play your very best every day, every game, every series, and try to earn another one. They set the bar the rest of us strive to meet. There's a tremendous sense of pride that comes from being a New York Yankee, and those guys played a huge role in creating that.

There have been a lot of great Yankee players over the years and a lot of guys who have won championships. But I think the greatest players are the ones who strive to make the people around them

great. That's what Bobby Richardson did. He was a real impact player—and I don't just mean on the field.

On the field, an impact player is someone who can change the game at any time. One play—be it on offense or defense—can change the course of an entire game. An impact player is a guy who makes that play on a consistent basis. But in my mind, a real impact player is one who also makes a huge contribution to the clubhouse.

You go through so much as a team during the course of a season. When I think back to the four years I played with the Yankees, I remember how many of the guys I played with lost their fathers during the season, how many of them went through cancer battles, how many of them were dealing with rough patches in their marriages. As a manager, I can tell you that it's not just about keeping a team together *on* the field; it's also about dealing with everything that's going on *off* the field.

Every club has to have that guy players feel they can turn to when things are not going well—someone they can talk to, someone who can provide comfort during difficult times. Bobby Richardson was one of those guys—the kind who got along with everybody, who helped bring everyone in the clubhouse together, and who genuinely cared about the people around him. A true leader.

With Bobby, it all came down to his values and his Christian faith. I'm sure he had his struggles like everyone else, but you can just tell when you look at his face and see his smile that there's a peace there—peace, humility, and a lot of love. And I think other people feed off of being around a guy like that.

As a Christian athlete, you want people to look at you and think, *What's different about that guy? I want what he's got.* Of course, then you've got to be able to walk the walk. I think that's one of the biggest challenges of being a Christian athlete. You

have to live up to a lot more, and that can be extremely difficult at times. But it also takes the pressure off, because you know that God's always going to put you exactly where He wants you—not where *you* want to go, but where *He* wants you to be. That's God's plan.

Bobby knew that God had a plan for his life, both during and after baseball. And I believe that's what gave him that sense of inner peace, contentment, and humility that drew others to him and made them want to be better players, teammates, and human beings.

As a fellow Christian, I admire Bobby for never shying away from the opportunity to share his faith in Jesus with those around him. He understood that he was given a great gift and a great platform, and throughout his life he has used both to make a positive impact on those around him.

When I look at Bobby Richardson, I see someone I strive to be more like—not because of his stats, the records he holds, his World Series rings, or his place in baseball history, but because of his character, his values, his humility, and his beliefs.

There's no question: Bobby Richardson is a true impact player in every sense of the word.

Joe Girardi

PROLOGUE

THE MAJESTIC MELODY from the organ resounded throughout the packed sanctuary. The accompanying voices of the mourners were thick with emotion as they sang:

Just a closer walk with thee.
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea.

On the platform, I sang along in my head, though not mouthing the words. I alternated between looking down at my one page of notes and looking out over the crowd. I could see former New York Yankees players . . . Yogi Berra, Whitey Ford, Moose Skowron, Johnny Blanchard, Bobby Murcer, and Tony Kubek. Texas governor George W. Bush and his wife, Laura, were near the front, close to my own wife, Betsy, and Randy Maris, son of Roger. Comedian Billy Crystal stood to the right. I spotted Bobby Cox, the manager of the Atlanta Braves and a former Yankee, and took note of Yankees owner George Steinbrenner and broadcaster Pat Summerall.

My heart was moved when I looked to the family. Some dabbed tears. Others stood arm-in-arm with the loved one next to them as they lifted their voices along with the rest.

When my feeble life is o'er,
Time for me will be no more. . . .

I had been privileged to speak many times at the funerals of friends and teammates, and often to crowds much larger than this one that had gathered to bid farewell to a husband, father, grandfather, brother, friend, teammate, and baseball hero. Yet I was more nervous than usual that day. I was very nervous, actually.

Mickey Mantle's home-going had set off a dizzying two days. There had been so much to do, so much to plan, a message to prepare. But, as had happened many times during the previous week, I sensed a peace coming over me from the prayers of hundreds.

In just moments, I would be recounting the life of my friend of four decades, not only to a church crammed full with more than two thousand people, but also to a live, nationwide television audience that had to number in the tens of thousands.

I looked back to the keywords jotted on my notes and once again asked the Lord to give me the strength and ability to say the words He would have me say. I would be sharing old stories about Mickey that I had told many times before: about his fake mongoose in the locker room, about the rubber snake he hid in a teammate's pants, about his high-interest loans from Yogi, about our basketball game at West Point. But there at the bottom of my notes was a story from my final days with Mickey.

It had already become my favorite, and I couldn't wait to share it.

Chapter 1
SHARING A DREAM

"SOMEDAY HE'LL BE in the major leagues," my dad declared the day I was born. The date was August 19, 1935—not just during baseball season, but at the point in a season when pennant races begin to heat up.

I don't know whether Dad was predicting or hoping, but his words came true. I was privileged to play twelve seasons in the major leagues. And because I spent my entire career with outstanding teammates in the pinstripes of the New York Yankees, I was able to take part in more pennant races than most ballplayers could hope to experience.

Blessed with good health, I played 1,412 games in the majors, but only one with my dad in the stands. At least that one was a World Series game. Health issues and other circumstances prevented Dad from seeing me play more. He didn't even get to see all of my career. My family suffered a great loss when he passed away in 1963, three years before I retired.

My dad loved coming to my games when I was growing up. Unless it was one of our out-of-town games too far to travel to, or one scheduled during the day, before he could slip out of work, Dad was in the bleachers. He wasn't my loudest fan, but he was my biggest.

I was Robert Clinton Richardson's only son. He gave me his name—he went by Clint; I was Robert—and he passed on to me his passion for baseball. In return, I lived out his dream of playing in the majors.

I wish Dad could have been at Yankee Stadium for Bobby Richardson Day in the final weeks of the 1966 season, my last year in the majors. I know he would have been proud when my career accomplishments were listed that day: playing in seven World Series, winning three, and being chosen Most Valuable Player of one; earning five Gold Glove awards; being selected to seven All-Star teams. But what I think would have made Dad most proud was when and why I was walking away from baseball.

Age wasn't an issue, because I was only thirty-one at the time. Skills weren't a concern either, because I had just made my fifth consecutive All-Star team. Injuries, thank goodness, had never been a problem during my career. The only reason I had missed thirteen games in my final season—the most I had missed since 1959—was a request by manager Ralph Houk. He had asked if I would mind sitting out games late in the season so the Yankees could give playing time to my expected replacement at second base.

I hung up my spikes in 1966 feeling I was still in my peak years as a baseball player. But at that time I was also in what I felt should be my peak years as a father. Betsy and I had four children. Our fifth, Rich, would join us two years later. My oldest son, Robby, was nine years old, and Ron was eight. Both were playing baseball, and I was missing too many of their games. Our daughter Christie was almost six and missing her daddy, and two-year-old Jeannie often would cry when I was away.

As much as my dad valued my time in the major leagues, and as much as he enjoyed keeping up with my games on television, radio, and in the newspapers, I know he would have approved of my early retirement. His constant presence in my life was the best gift he had ever given me, and now it was time for me to give the same gift to my children. I felt confident he would have agreed with that.

Dad had been a tombstone maker, spending his lifetime inscribing the names and dates and words of hundreds of people to be remembered. Every time I visit Dad's grave, I read the words my sister Ann suggested be placed on his tombstone:

ONLY ONE LIFE,
IT WILL SOON BE PAST;
ONLY WHAT'S DONE FOR CHRIST
WILL LAST.

Those are the same words Betsy and I made "ours" at the beginning of our relationship. My dad had helped me inscribe those words on a small stone for us to share.

I was the second of three children born to Clint and Willie Richardson, the only boy, born between Inez and Ann. We were raised in Sumter, South Carolina, a small town about forty-five miles east of the state capital of Columbia. I still call Sumter home, and the folks who live here still call me Robert instead of Bobby. It was in Sumter that the foundation was laid for my baseball career and my spiritual journey.

In addition to my parents, three people stand out in my decision to accept Christ as Savior: Bill Ward, Pop Owens, and J. H. Simpson. The first two were my Sunday school teachers at Grace Baptist Church.

Mr. Ward was a farmer who loved to say, "Praise the Lord!" and made each of us boys in the class take turns teaching a lesson.

I have had the honor of speaking to tens of thousands of people at Billy Graham Crusades, but I'll tell you that it is an entirely different type of nervousness when you have to stand in front of a small Sunday school class of your peers and deliver a message.

Mr. Owens worked for the Carolina Power & Light Company, and I remember there would be Sunday mornings after a big storm had blown through when he would have to miss class to help restore power in the area. But when Mr. Owens wasn't called away by work, he was faithful in bringing God's Word to us every Sunday.

What those two teachers instilled in me as a young boy was that I needed to live my life for God and that the first step in doing so was to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Their lessons prepared the soil of my heart to the point that I knew I needed a Savior. J. H. Simpson, the pastor of our church, was the one who then came in and brought the salvation message home, so to speak.

When I was almost twelve, at the request of my mother—and, I believe, also at the urging of Mr. Ward and Mr. Owens—Rev. Simpson came by our house for a visit. To my surprise, instead of visiting with my parents, he started talking with Inez, Ann, and me. I didn't know much about Rev. Simpson, other than what I had observed of him at church. But I was impressed that he knew my name and my sisters' names and also seemed to know a little about each of us. As he talked to us, it was obvious that he wasn't just making small talk. He was sincerely interested in hearing about our lives and our activities.

At some point in that visit, Rev. Simpson shifted our conversation to God's plan of salvation. I was quite familiar with it, having heard it many times from the pulpit and also from hearing it described by Mr. Ward and Mr. Owens in Sunday school. I'm sure that I had not completely understood all that was explained to me as a young boy, but I believed I needed a Savior and that Jesus loved me enough to suffer and die in my place. That day in

our living room, though, I felt different than in times past as Rev. Simpson explained the plan once again.

Rev. Simpson recited a verse we knew well—John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Rev. Simpson told us that all of mankind had sinned and needed God's gift of salvation; then he asked the three of us whether we each knew that we, too, had sinned.

I don't recall being asked that question before. I know it had been posed by Rev. Simpson during his sermons and by Mr. Ward and Mr. Owens in Sunday school. But it definitely was the first time I remember someone looking directly at me and asking if I knew *I* had sinned. Because God was working in my heart, it caused me to confront the question personally in my life.

Of course, I knew my answer had to be yes. I knew I had done things wrong in my life. I was aware of thought patterns and actions the Lord was not pleased with. And I knew there was a consequence involved in sin and that it was separation from a holy and just God forever in a place Scripture calls hell.

I wasn't what others would call a bad boy. The most trouble I got into was for talking back to my mother or sneaking out of the house to play baseball when I was supposed to be cleaning my bedroom. Of course, there were those "shady excuses" to avoid punishment, and my habit of annoying my sisters. That's not bad considering what a young boy could have gotten into, but there are no degrees of sin. Sin is sin. I was disrespecting and disobeying my mother, and I knew that did not reflect the heart God wanted for me. He gave His commandments to reveal His righteous requirements. Lying and not honoring my mother were sins. I needed forgiveness and a new heart.

After Rev. Simpson read Romans 3:23—"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"—I admitted aloud that I

knew *I* had sinned. The pastor then aptly explained to us how the mere fact that we had been born made us sinners, because human beings have been sinners by nature since Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. Yet as John 3:16 points out, God provided a means of escape from our sinful nature through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus came to become the sacrifice for the sins of all of us. He was the Lamb of God, sent to take away the sin of the world.

I had heard all that in church services and Sunday school, but it didn't become personal to me until Rev. Simpson sat in our living room and detailed it directly to my sisters and me. For the first time, I understood that Jesus had died for *my* sins. His death on the cross and His resurrection became personal to me. It's interesting how we can hear the gospel message, as I had for years to that point, and still not really *hear* it. We can know that Jesus' death paid for all the sins of everyone in the world, yet the moment of true salvation does not come until we grasp that Jesus shed His precious blood to redeem one person in particular: me.

That is what I meant earlier when I said that Rev. Simpson was the person who took the plan of salvation and brought it all home for me.

"Do you believe that Jesus died for *your* sins?" Rev. Simpson asked.

"Yes," I answered, "Jesus died for me."

My sisters answered the same way, and Rev. Simpson prayed then and there with the three of us as we asked Jesus Christ into our hearts. Inez and I were baptized in church the following weekend, and a few weeks later Ann was too.

Starting at Home

My mother maintained a strong spiritual presence in our home. In fact, Mom's was the strongest presence in our home, period. Her

personality was powerful, and to a young boy it was at times a little overwhelming. But I knew she loved me, and boy, could she cook!

Mom attended church every Sunday. She took part in a number of activities, including her beloved women's group, and she made sure we attended too. Dad, on the other hand, wasn't much of a churchgoer, though he never objected when Mom and the three of us kids went. Sometimes he would even drive us to church and drop us off, though the church was within walking distance of our house. I felt confident that Dad knew the Lord because every night at home I saw him on his knees, praying. As I look back now with an adult's perspective, though, I wonder how much he grew spiritually.

The truth was, Dad faced some limitations. He had made it only through the third or fourth grade. I don't know whether he could read, but I do recall that he made all his purchases with cash—no writing checks—and that Mom handled the business affairs around the home.

Dad also struggled with emphysema. He was owner and manager of Richardson Marble and Granite Works, and the dust from the sandblasting associated with his work contributed to his health issues. I know that the need to rest after a long week of work was one of the reasons Dad did not attend church with us more often.

Dad didn't make a lot of money from his company, but business was good enough for him to support us. We may not have been able to buy everything we wanted growing up—and there's nothing wrong with that—but we did always have everything we needed. At Christmastime there were presents for all of us.

My sisters claimed I was spoiled because I was the only boy, and there may have been some truth to that. I remember one year receiving a Cushman motor scooter before I was old enough to drive it legally on the streets. But I took it out on the streets anyway—until the police stopped me and told me to push it back home and keep it there until I was old enough for a license.

Being the only boy did give me an advantage sportswise with Dad. Inez, my older sister, was more into baby dolls and pretty dresses than sports. My younger sister, Ann, was interested in sports, but because I came along before her, I had a head start.

Growing up, I didn't really have a favorite sport. I was most interested in whatever ball was closest to me at the moment. If I could throw it, catch it, kick it, bounce it, or shoot it, I did. Over time, though, baseball and basketball emerged as my favorite sports.

Baseball was the sport I could best play by myself during my free time. We had a two-story house with a big chimney, and I would bounce tennis balls off that chimney to practice fielding ground balls, getting down to the nitty-gritty details like working on my backhand pickups and scooping up tricky short hops.

For variety I would throw the balls up on the roof and practice catching fly balls as they rolled off. There was a gutter around the roof, though, that liked to catch the balls before they could fall to me. That would mean a trip to the upstairs bathroom, where I could stretch my arm out the window to retrieve the ball from the gutter. After a few of those trips upstairs, I'd decide that fielding grounders off the chimney was more efficient for getting in as much practice time as possible. Who knows? Perhaps that gutter is why I became an infielder instead of an outfielder.

The back of our house was nice for practicing by myself, but it wasn't perfect. If I missed the chimney with a tennis ball, the impact of my throw would knock small pieces of plaster off the inside walls. The sound of falling plaster would get Mom's attention, and she'd come to the back door to express her disapproval. I would apologize and explain that I couldn't hit the chimney every time. I was never banned from throwing balls against the chimney, but the fear of that happening could be a major reason I was an accurate thrower in my later years.

I also spent a lot of time practicing baseball in front of our house,

where we had a concrete walkway leading to stone steps. I could have bounced balls off those steps and fielded grounders on that walkway all day long. Some days, I think I did. But there was also a danger to playing in the front yard. Balls could hit the edge of the steps and ricochet into the screened front door or up against the siding. The clunk of a ball hitting the house or knocking plaster off the walls would bring Mom to the front door, too. I think my practice sessions caused my mom to wear paths to our front and back doors.

The highlight of the day came when Dad arrived home from work, because then he would go to the backyard with me to throw a ball around for a few minutes or to hit some pop-ups to me. My dad had been a pretty good ballplayer himself growing up. He never told me that—he wasn't the type to talk about himself—but his friends made sure I knew of Dad's abilities. He might even have been good enough to have his own dreams about playing pro ball. But since Dad had to work a lot to help his family, he was never able to position himself for a chance to play professionally.

I still hold wonderful memories from those times my dad and I played catch in the backyard. Even though he knew a lot about baseball, he never overcoached me. He was a man of few words to begin with, so the most he might offer would be a simple tip here or there. For the most part, he limited his speech to encouragement—"nice catch" or "good throw."

A Chip off the Old Block

Dad allowed me to spend time with him at his marble and granite company. Although he stayed busy, I was able to further hone my baseball skills at the work site. Dad's company would take quarried slabs of rock and shape, polish, and engrave them to make tombstones. The process generated lots of granite chips, and in the hands of a young boy with big league dreams, those chips became baseballs.

Unfortunately, stop signs became first basemen's mitts. I'm embarrassed to admit that I plunked a few stop signs in my day.

Dad let me earn money from his company. Sometimes I would hop into the back of the truck when one of Dad's employees, who went by the nickname of Crawfish, delivered tombstones to cemeteries. Small metal plates from the funeral home served as temporary grave markers until the tombstones arrived. I would dig up those markers and turn them in to Dad for five dollars per plate. That was good pay—no, great pay—for the work.

I think letting me help around the company was Dad's way of slipping me a little extra spending money, because the funeral homes paid him five dollars per plate as well. It also provided a chance for us to spend extra time together. Even when he was busy working and I was off nailing stop signs with granite chips, my hours at Dad's company still counted as father-son time for both of us.

Another job I had around Sumter was delivering the local newspaper, *The Item*, right after school. I had a delivery route of 128 papers, but 7 of those went to one stop—the YMCA—and a good number of them could be quickly delivered in a set of apartments. I could finish my route in less than twenty minutes, so that part of the job was easy. The part I hated was collecting. I think I had to collect a quarter per week from each customer. I would go around my route with a little pouch that I'd slip the payments into. But I didn't like having to remind people they hadn't paid. Even worse, sometimes customers wouldn't be home, and I'd have to go back later to collect. Those extra trips cut into my sports time. Still, I stuck with that job for a couple of years and made good spending money. I even tried to add an early-morning route for the morning edition, but that meant picking up my papers for delivery at 4:30 a.m. I lasted only a week or so on that route.

One job I really enjoyed was coordinating sports activities at a community center in a poorer part of town. The work was right up

my alley, and I liked knowing that the sports we offered were helping some people who probably couldn't afford to take part in some of the larger organized-sports leagues around town. The people were great too. My friends from the center and I would take a quick break to walk over to a little country store for a MoonPie and an RC Cola. I still have friendships in Sumter that I made working at the Jenkins Community Center.

This doesn't technically qualify as a job, but I did make a little money playing table tennis against Oliver Stubbs. The YMCA was one block from my house, and Oliver liked to practice table tennis there. The problem was, Oliver was very, very good. In fact, he would eventually win the national championship. Not many people at the Sumter Y wanted to play against him, so his dad would pay me one dollar a night to meet Oliver at the Y and practice with him. I spent many nights playing game after game after game against Oliver. I noticed that on nights when I used part of my dollar to buy Oliver a MoonPie and an RC, I had a slightly better chance of winning a game every now and then—but only slightly. I did, however, get something out of all those poundings I suffered at the nimble paddle of Oliver Stubbs. When I was fifteen, I was runner-up in my age group at the South Carolina state table tennis tournament.

Table tennis, of course, was never a serious threat to my two favorite sports. For me, nothing could compare with baseball and basketball—although I did have a not-so-glorious, one-day career as a football player. My sophomore year in high school, Coach "Hutch" Hutchinson, who also was my American Legion baseball coach, talked me into coming out for the football team. He said that with the good hands I had displayed on the infield, he could envision me as his quarterback.

It took a while for him to convince me to give football a try, but I finally relented. I joined the team late, during two-a-day practices. I knew nothing about football, really, but Coach Hutchinson put

me in right away at quarterback. On the first play, I was supposed to take the snap from center, turn around, and hand the ball to the halfback. Well, I took the snap and made one step. I must not have stepped where I was supposed to, because the halfback hit me from one side and our linemen hit me from the other side.

This would be a good point to inform you that I have never been a big guy. When I played for the Yankees, I was listed at five feet nine and 170 pounds, and that was a generous listing. As a sophomore in high school, of course, I wasn't close to that. Between the halfback and the linemen, I was pressed about as flat as the marshmallow filling in one of those country-store MoonPies.

I could never seem to find my way in the backfield, and after two workouts that day, I called it a career. My dad never said so, but he probably considered my early retirement from football one of the best decisions I ever made. He'd been concerned that I might get hurt.

Football, then, was never a serious threat to my future in baseball. Basketball was a different matter. During high school, in fact, I'd say it was my best sport. I was an all-state guard my junior and senior seasons and even received two scholarship offers to play basketball in college. Norm Sloan, a college coach who would win more than six hundred games at schools such as the University of Florida and North Carolina State, offered me a scholarship with the Presbyterian College Blue Hose. Georgia Tech also offered a basketball scholarship.

I loved basketball, and though I don't want to bill myself as a better player than I was, I handled the ball well. I was able to break the first line of a defense, and then, when another defender would step up to block me, I could pass the ball to the open player for him to score. I was a good free-throw shooter, too.

Ultimately, however, I was smart enough to recognize that,

largely because of my height, basketball was not the best sport for me beyond high school.

Clearly, baseball was my sport.

Musial's Lasting Influence

Dad was a St. Louis Cardinals fan because in Sumter, as in many locations in the South, the only station we could pick up that broadcast major league games was KMOX out of St. Louis. When KMOX carried Cardinals games, Dad would invite me to listen along with him. Then when I was a little older, about twelve as best as I can recall, Dad took me and a group of my friends to Columbia to watch an exhibition game between his revered Cardinals and the Cincinnati Reds. On the car ride over to Columbia, we all talked about getting to see the great "Stan the Man" Musial play for the Cardinals. Musial was one of my dad's favorite players.

I had never gotten anyone's autograph before, but after the game I went up to Musial as he walked toward the team bus, and asked for his autograph. He gladly signed for me. I don't remember how long I kept that autograph or what eventually happened to it, but I do recall that for a time I walked around Sumter saying, "Hey, I've got Stan Musial's autograph." I also remember how excited Dad was for me to have it.

Enos "Country" Slaughter was another well-known player on that St. Louis team. Although Slaughter is most remembered as a Cardinal, we were teammates on the Yankees near the end of his long career. During the 1958 season, my second son, Ron, and one of Enos's daughters were born on the same day at The Valley Hospital in Ridgewood, New Jersey.

When Enos passed away in 2002, his family asked me to be a part of his memorial service in Roxboro, North Carolina. Musial was among the teammates who came in for Enos's funeral. I had never had the opportunity to play against Stan in a World Series,

but I had gotten to know him after retirement through Old Timers' Games we participated in. At the dinner following Enos's funeral, I told Stan, "I know you don't remember this, but when I was about twelve years old, I got your autograph at an exhibition game in Columbia, South Carolina."

I have to tell you, that made Stan cringe a little bit, because I was just shy of my sixty-seventh birthday when I told him that. Stan was already in the majors when I was twelve, so you can do the math.

"Honestly," I told Stan, "yours is the only autograph I ever asked for as a kid."

"Rich," Stan said, using the name most major leaguers called me, "I can't believe that. But I sure am glad I signed and didn't turn you away."

Throughout my career, I remembered how much that one signature meant to me at that age. That is why I always made my best effort to sign as many autographs as possible. Plus, as many players from my era did, I always used my best penmanship when I signed. Nowadays, professional athletes tend to save time by making only the first letters of their names readable, followed by something that looks more like a squiggly line than part of a name.

If you see my autographs, you'll note that my complete name is readable. And let me tell you, "Bobby Richardson" isn't the shortest of names. Sometimes it would be nice to have been named something short like "Bob Lee." But I take the time to make the signature nice because Stan Musial did that for me. I have never forgotten how much something as simple as a signature could mean to a young boy with major league dreams—or even to his father.