

Mickey Vernon

The Gentleman First Baseman

Rich Westcott

From the Introduction

Hall of Fame broadcaster Harry Kalas often tells the story of how he developed a love for baseball. It was all because of Mickey Vernon.

Kalas, the Phillies play-by-play man since 1971, was raised in Naperville, Illinois, a small town about 30 miles outside of Chicago.

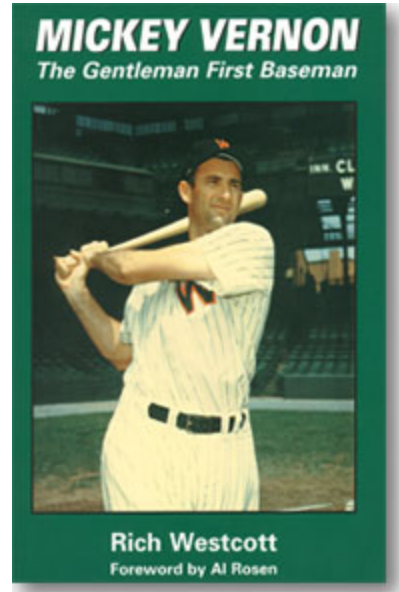
Let him tell the story:"

As a kid, I always liked baseball, and played on the sandlots. But I never had a chance to go out and see a Cubs or White Sox game," he said. "Finally, when I was 10 years old, my dad took me to my very first big league game to see the White Sox and Washington Senators at Comiskey Park. I was really excited.

"Because it was raining that day, there was only a very small crowd at the game. As a result, my dad was able to get seats right behind the Washington dugout."

There was no batting practice because of the rain. So the players had nothing to do. Now, here's this wide-eyed kid—me—sitting behind the Senators dugout with my dad, taking it all in, and some of the players came out into the dugout. Mickey Vernon was one of them.

"He popped his head out of the dugout, and saw me sitting there. Well, he reached over and picked me up, and took me into the dugout. He gave me a



ball and introduced me to some of the other players. I was just in heaven. I was there for about 10 minutes, then he put me back in my seat."

That really started my love for the game of baseball and the Washington Senators. I must have been the only one in the Chicago area who was a Senators fan. I remained one until they moved to Minnesota. My classmates always teased me about being a Senators fan, but it was all because of Mickey Vernon. And not only did that begin my love of baseball, but Mickey became my favorite player."

The influence Vernon had on Kalas' life was not unlike the effect Mickey had on many people's lives. In a quiet way, his good deeds frequently helped or made a difference to countless numbers of people. And the values by which he lived his life were an invaluable model for others.