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Baseball world lauds Jerome Holtzman

Ex-players, managers, officials laud Holtzman

By Dave van Dyck

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Chicago lost its most celebrated chronicler of the national pastime with the passing of Jerome Holtzman, and all of baseball lost an icon who so graciously linked its generations.

Holtzman, the former Tribune and Sun-Times writer and later MLB's official historian, indeed belonged to the entire baseball world. He seemed to know everyone in the game while simultaneously knowing everything about the game.

Praise poured in from around the country for the Hall of Famer, from management and union, managers and players.

"Those of us who knew him and worked with him will always remember his good humor, his fairness and his love for baseball," Commissioner Bud Selig said. "He was a very good friend of mine throughout my career in the game and I will miss his friendship and counsel. I extend my deepest sympathies to his wife, Marilyn, to his children and to his many friends."

The men who sat across from Selig during labor negotiations—a fairly new wrinkle in the game that Holtzman became an expert at covering—remembered him just as fondly.

"I saw Jerry at Cooperstown a few years ago and we talked old times well into the night," said Marvin Miller, the first executive director of the Players Association. "We always had a good relationship. He was a careful writer and, covering a subject matter he was not familiar with, he did a remarkably good job."

"You don't develop the reputation he had by accident," said present-day union boss Donald Fehr. "He spent a good amount of time and effort to understand the circumstances [of labor issues]. He made extraordinary efforts at what the real issues were."

Holtzman was even a good friend to the umpires, perhaps the only writer to arrive at the ballpark early so he could spend time with them, mostly exchanging stories and laughs.

"He was the fairest and best writer I've ever known," said Marty Springstead, a former umpire who is now a supervisor. "He was a credit to the game and an excellent friend of the umpires. He would stop in all the time. We'll all miss him greatly."

Roland Hemond, longtime White Sox general manager under Bill Veeck, recalled Holtzman as "an outstanding newspaperman. He was really diligent in covering all aspects of the game. He covered the labor relations story



as well as anybody," Hemond said.

"He played a pretty good third base too. When I got to Chicago we used to have little games on this field out behind the left-field wall at [old] Comiskey Park. He looked good out there on the field. He must have played quite a bit as a kid. He had pretty good actions."

Holtzman was widely remembered as an old-time reporter, one who wore suits and smoked big cigars. But he also was in touch with today's figures of the game.

"He had the ultimate class as a journalist and a person," said White Sox general manager Ken Williams, who first knew Holtzman as a player. "I consider myself fortunate to have had conversations with him not only about baseball but about life.

"We [players] followed a lot of the labor stuff through Jerome in the paper. He was probably the last [allowed] in the clubhouse with a cigar, but everybody respected him enough not to say anything."

Former Cubs President Andy MacPhail, currently GM of the Orioles, comes from a family of baseball executives, all of whom knew Holtzman.

"Scouts, owners, GMs, players—he was one of the few people held in universally high respect and regard," MacPhail said. "He always had an overriding sense of fairness. He was the standard-bearer of his time.

"He broke one of the biggest stories ever. He ran the protected lists of every team prior to the first expansion draft. [Minneapolis writer] Patrick Reusse wrote that it was a good thing Major League Baseball wasn't holding the secrets to the atomic bomb."

Cubs Chairman Crane Kenney remembered Holtzman as "an accomplished writer who earned respect from both his readers and from those whom he covered. On behalf of the entire Chicago Cubs family, I send our heartfelt condolences to Jerome's wife, Marilyn, and his family."

"Baseball lost a great advocate and fan, and I lost a dear friend," White Sox Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf said. "I will miss his visits to the ballpark and his phone calls to discuss the latest baseball news. In the way baseball is covered by the media, in the creation of the save rule and in the history and tradition of this game, Jerome truly left his mark on the game he loved and followed passionately for decades.

"Perhaps no one person has done as much to promote the game of baseball to millions. There is no greater tribute or legacy a person can leave behind for future generations of baseball fans."

White Sox manager Ozzie Guillen knew Holtzman from the time he was a rookie in 1985 and described him as "an amazing baseball guy. He gave his life to baseball and we'll always remember how great he was."

St. Louis manager Tony La Russa landed his first big league managerial job when Holtzman was splitting time covering Chicago's two teams.

"He gave me my first compliment I ever had as a manager," La Russa said. "He said I had a good feel for handling pitchers. That was after 20 criticisms, but that was the first compliment."

White Sox announcer Steve Stone, a fixture in Chicago baseball for 25 years, recalled spending hours talking baseball with Holtzman.

"I still believe every closer should have sent a yearly check to Jerome for coming up with the 'save' rule," Stone said. "That contribution alone [created] decisions on how baseball teams were made up."

"Jerome was responsible for me breaking the [save] record here [in 1980] because of the save rule," said Ed

Farmer, Stone's broadcast partner and a former reliever. "He was a warm person with a great sense of humor."

"He was a Hall of Famer in every respect," said Sox television broadcaster Ken "Hawk" Harrelson. "He was a Hall of Fame writer, a Hall of Fame wit and a Hall of Fame person."

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