

Dale Murphy (1956-)

By Kevin Hogg

Perhaps the most accomplished baseball player born in Oregon, Dale Murphy is noted both for his award-winning skills and his positive public image. Born in Portland to Charles and Betty Murphy on March 12, 1956, Murphy excelled at baseball while playing for Portland's Woodrow Wilson High School. He was drafted fifth overall by the Atlanta Braves in 1974 and spent the next several years playing for the Braves' farm teams in Kingsport, Tennessee; Greenwood, South Carolina; Savannah, Georgia; and Richmond, Virginia. Although he began his career as a catcher noted for his throwing power, his erratic aim led the Braves to move him to first base and later to the outfield.

Murphy began playing regularly for the Atlanta Braves in 1978; he recorded 120 hits that season and led the league in strikeouts. His breakout year came in 1980, when he was selected for the All Star game and accumulated 160 hits, 33 home runs, and 89 runs batted in (RBIs). His impressive numbers continued in the strike-shortened 1981 season, and he led the league in RBIs (109) in 1982. He also had 168 hits and 36 home runs, putting together numbers that earned him the National League Most Valuable Player (MVP) award. He also made his only postseason appearance that year, although the Braves lost three games in a row to drop the National League Championship Series to the St. Louis Cardinals.

In 1983, Murphy led the league in RBIs (121) and was one of very few players to win back-to-back MVP awards. He led the National League in home runs over the next two years (36 and 37) before a less productive 1986 season. He returned to his previous form in 1987, hitting career-high 44 home runs. From 1988 on, he never again matched his peak years.

Murphy was traded to the Philadelphia Phillies in 1990. In 1992, he played in only eighteen games before being released and signing with the Colorado Rockies, for whom he played his final twenty-six major league games. He played his final game on May 21, 1993, retiring with 2,111 hits, 1,266 RBIs, and 398 home runs.

Murphy was named to the All Star team seven times, including six consecutive years from 1982 to 1987. During that time, he won four straight Silver Slugger Awards, was one of the top three offensive outfielders in the National League, and received five Gold Glove Awards.

Murphy is known as a role model off the field. He received the 1987 Sports Illustrated Sportsman of the Year Award, the 1988 Roberto Clemente Man of the Year Award, and the 1991 Bart Giamatti Community Service Award. In 1995, he was inducted into the World Sports Humanitarian Hall of Fame. As a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, he did not drink or use tobacco. Murphy founded the iWontCheat Foundation in 2005 to promote character development and fair play in young athletes.

Murphy and his wife Nancy live in Alpine, Utah, and have eight children. Although his highest Baseball Hall of Fame voting total fell short of the required 75 percent, he is remembered as one of the toughest hitters of the 1980s. The Atlanta Braves retired Murphy's number 3 in 1994, and he was inducted into the Oregon Sports Hall of Fame in 1997.

Sources

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