

Eye on Sports

THE MAN IS OUTTA HERE!

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"We lost our "Voice" today!" That was the quote from the President of the Philadelphia Phillies on the passing of long time broadcaster Harry Kalas. Kalas was loved by the "City of Brotherly Love". "The Voice" was the one thing that Phillies phans could not wait to hear, as his made calls for the Phillies over the "dog days" of summer.

Harry Kalas was born on March 26, 1936, in a little town outside of Chicago, Illinois. He learned of his love for America's past-time at a Washington Senators game at Comisky Park when young Kalas was 9 years old. He could remember Mike Vernon poking his head out of the dugout during a rain filled day, and grabbed young Harry and brought him into the dugout to meet his teammates. That was where the love that "The Voice" had for baseball started.

Harry had graduated from University of Iowa with a degree in broadcast journalism. Harry knew that he was not talented enough to play the game of baseball, but nothing was going to keep him away from the game he loved. After college, Harry started his career calling games for the University of Hawaii, but made his Major League Baseball debut on April 12, 1965 for the Houston Astros. He spent 6 years with the Astros before the move to the City of Brotherly Love. He had called the first game at the Astrodome in Houston in 1965, and was going to call the first game at the new Veterans Stadium on April 10, 1971, in Philadelphia, PA.

On a side note, even though Philadelphia and baseball fans know him for famous calls, he was a voiceover for NFL Films. When you watch highlights of a great NFL game on most DVDs, you hear the "The Voice". Back to his baseball career, he would pair up with the 1950's Phillies great Richie "Whitey" Ashburn in 1971. This pair would broadcast the Phightins' games for 27 years, until the death of Whitey in 1997.

The Phightins' of the past recall, that if they didn't hear the call that Harry made of a momentous occasion, then the event never happened. With his love of baseball, he won over the hearts of not only the Phillies players and coaches of the past, but also the fans, who let you know if there is something wrong or something that they do not like. Harry had made the most important calls in Phillies history.

The calls are numerous. There is the 500th Home Run hit by Michael Jack Schmidt. At the memorial service on Saturday April 18, 2009, Tom McCarthy said something that was true to all fans. He said that before this call no one cared about the players middle name, but after the 500th home run of Michael Jack Schmidt, everyone wanted to know the middle names of all the stars that donned the red and white pinstripes. More memorable calls in Phillies history were the inaugural call at Veterans Stadium and Citizens Bank Park, the final call at Veterans Stadium, and the 1980 National League Championship Series call that sent the Phillies into the World Series, where they won their first title in franchise history. There was an outcry that Harry did not get to call the Tug McGraw strikeout that won the title, but at that time local broadcasters were shoved wayside to national broadcasters.

"The Voice" would get his chance to call that final out some 28 years later. "The 0-2 pitch, swing and a miss, struck 'em out. The Philadelphia Phillies are 2008 World Champions of baseball." Who can forget that famous call of last season by the beloved broadcaster. Most baseball fans in the Philadelphia area can recall where they were when he made that call and most will never forget it.

"The Voice" was enshrined in the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York on July 25, 2002. He was inducted for receiving the Ford C. Frick award for contributing to the game of baseball through broadcasting. He made a poem for his induction day that was dedicated to the Philadelphia fans.

"The Voice" was silenced on Monday April 13, 2009 at around 1:20 PM in Washington D.C. Kalas was going to call the game at Nationals Park. Fitting that the great broadcaster with such a love of the sport would go out in the broadcast booth.

Harry you may be "OUTTA HERE" but you are not "OUTTA" our hearts.

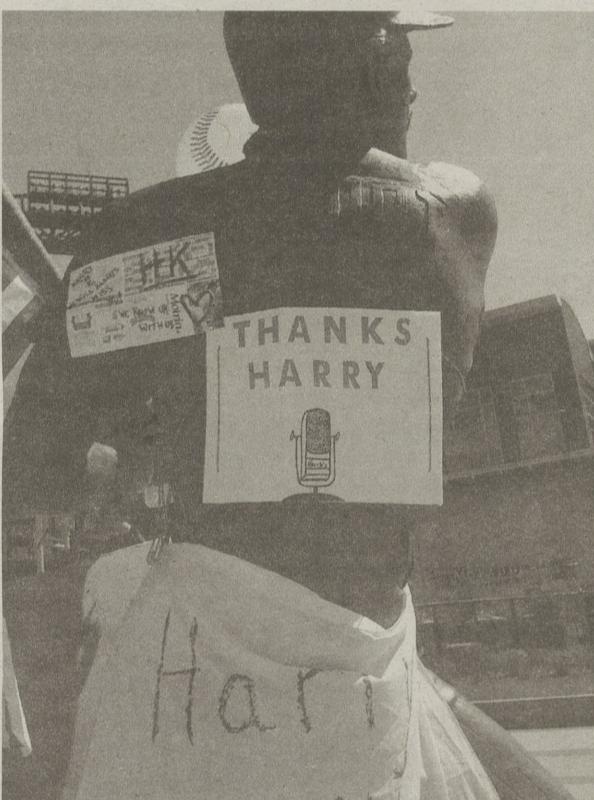
In the poem from 2002, Harry ended it with the following words:

"Your reaction to the action on the field that you impart,
 spurs us broadcasters to call the game with enthusiasm and heart.
 We feel your passion through and through. Philadelphia fans, I love you."

Harry, We Love You, too.



Sign left by fan at Citizens Bank Park memorial site. (photo by Thomas A. McGlinchey)



Sign on Mike Schmidt statue. (photo by Thomas A. McGlinchey)



(photos, from left to right) A sign for Harry Kalas hangs on gate at Citizens Bank Park, memorial site after Kalas service, casket of Kalas from memorial service. (photos by Thomas A. McGlinchey)