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Honoring: Mike Schmidt, Richie Ashburn and Leon Day

Richard C. Crepeau
University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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On Sunday at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown New York that yearly ritual of induction will take place for the 56th time. Once again those players who have been chosen by the Baseball Writer's Association of America or by the Veterans Committee will have their great day of recognition as being among the elite players of the National Pastime.

This time around three players, two Phillies, Mike Schmidt and Richie Ashburn, and one Eagle, Leon Day, will be honored.

Mike Schmidt the extraordinary third-baseman of the Phillies from 1972 to '89 was chosen in his first year of eligibility, the only player chosen this year by the writers. Schmidt's credentials are impeccable with eight home run titles, ten gold gloves, three Most Valuable Player Awards, and one World Series MVP. Schmidt's 509 career home runs are most ever by a third-baseman, and he is one of only 12 players to hit four home runs in succession in one game.

Schmidt is another of those stars who somehow eluded the watchful eye of the scouts. Coming out of Ohio University where he was a shortstop with bad knees, Schmidt was only the 35th pick in the draft that year, and many felt the Phillies had made a major mistake. He struggled at the plate in his first two seasons. But Schmidt was a man with an extremely powerful work ethic who by his own admission may have taken things a bit too seriously. He turned out to be a player of tremendous achievement and was much admired in a city that does not always warmly embrace its athletes.

On Sunday Michael Jack Schmidt will become the 220th member of the Hall, the tenth third-baseman, and only the fourth third-baseman voted in by the writers.

Joining him will be another Phillie Star from an earlier time, Richie Ashburn, the star center-fielder of the Phillies from 1948 through '59 finishing his career with the Cubs for two seasons and the expansion Mets in 1962. Ashburn went on to a career as Phillies broadcaster where he saw the entire career of his fellow inductee, Mike Schmidt. This is Ashburn's 50th year in baseball.

Ashburn was a .308 lifetime hitter without power, but the reason he has been elected to the Hall of Fame is that he was considered by many to be the greatest defensive center-fielder

of all-time. Those of us who saw Willie Mays may want to object here, but nonetheless Ashburn was among the very best. He led the National League in hitting twice, and triples twice, hits three times, walks four times, on-base percentage four times.

He was a member of the famous Whiz Kids' Team of 1950 which won the National League pennant and then was swept by the Yankees in the World Series. The Yankee pitching staff of Raschi, Reynolds, Lopat and a rookie named Ford held the Phillies to less than two runs per game. Trivia buffs may also note that this was the last World Series in which all the players were white.

The third inductee to the Hall of Fame on Sunday will be Leon Day of the Newark Eagles, voted in by the Veterans Committee just six days before his death. This has been the result of a long campaign by many baseball fans and historians, including Jim Riley of Cocoa who is one of Leon Day's biographers.

As a member of the Newark Eagles Day earned a reputation as one of the best pitchers in baseball, outdueling Satchel Page in three of their four meetings. Unfortunately for Day the major leagues opened a bit too late for his career. Like many stars of the old Negro Leagues and barnstorming circuits, Day was not well known to white American fandom, but he was well known to his fellow players and to major leaguers who competed against him.

Monte Irvin, himself a Hall of Famer, considers Day as good a pitcher as ever lived. He had a no-windup style with a great fastball and curve. Perhaps his greatest game came on opening day in 1946 when he faced the Philadelphia Stars and pitched a no-hitter and struck out 18, including Roy Campanella three times. Larry Doby says he never saw a better pitcher and compares Day to Allie Reynolds of the Yankees.

The morning of his selection to the Hall of Fame, Leon Day was in a Baltimore Hospital fighting for his life. He woke that morning to tell his wife that he had been elected to the Hall of Fame. She told him, no you were dreaming, the election will be later today, and later that day his dream came true.

Leon Day joins twelve other players from the black leagues, many of whom like Day were too old for the majors by the time they were no longer too black. Change came a bit too late. Six days after his election Leon Day died and so he will miss his induction ceremonies as his election came a bit too late as well.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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