

LIVES WELL LIVED

Ed Keegan's field of dreams was The Phillies pitcher honed his talent in Haddonfield baseball

CHRISTINA MITCHELL
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In a 1959 Courier-Post article, Ed Keegan reflected on the contract he had accepted with the Phillies two years earlier.

The Haddonfield standout pitcher got \$4,000, not enough, the story noted, "to buy a used, slightly battered Cadillac," and paltry in comparison to the five-figure sums lesser prospects were signing for at the time.

But the scrawny right-hander who had a missile of a fastball did not want to warm the bench, even for the Phillies. So Keegan signed a non-bonus contract that would allow him to play in the minors, he told the paper.

"I didn't want to sit on the bench; that was the role for bonus babies then," said the Franklin resident, who died last Sunday at 75.

"Two months after I signed, they dropped the bonus rule. I could have had a free college education and a handful of money. It was too late.

"I can't worry about that now."

At the time, Keegan was 19, married and already a father. Life went on.

The recollection of Keegan's younger brother, Bob, was that his sibling could have earned a \$100,000 contract.

"That was like a million dollars today."

But as Ed's daughter Cheryl Quietl says: "He loved the game more than life itself, and only wished players these days would have the same burning passion."

While Keegan once used his 94 mph fastball

to strike out Yankee great Mickey Mantle, he always pointed out it was during an exhibition game. But for history's sake, here's how it went, according to an interview years later in the Reminder newspaper:

"Called strike. Strike swinging. Strike swinging. Strike swinging."

And Mantle was out. Keegan told the Philadelphia Inquirer it was his biggest thrill.

"He never wanted to brag," Quietl remembers. "We all said, 'We don't care if it was a Wiffleball game. You still struck out Mickey Mantle.'"

Keegan honed his big-league arm at Haddonfield Memorial High School, where he compiled a 26-2 record in three varsity seasons, according to the Hot Stovers Baseball Club of South Jersey.

"When his fastball hit the catcher's mitt, it sounded like a shotgun going off," Bob Keegan told the South Jersey Times.

After signing with the Phils, Ed Keegan spent time in the minors and saw major league action against the Dodgers, Pirates and Cardinals in 1958. That included striking out Pittsburgh's Roberto Clemente with a rare curveball, then giving up a homer in the future Hall of Famer's next at-bat.

A rotator-cuff injury cut short Keegan's baseball career in 1961, according to his brother, just as the pitcher was developing a changeup and curveball.

So Keegan worked for several years as a bartender at the Rainbow Inn in Clayton.

"He talked baseball with people there," Bob Keegan notes softly. "They enjoyed that."

In 1985, Ed Keegan got hit by a drunk driver as he waited to cross a street. The impact knocked him into an opposite lane, where he was struck again by another car.

He was hospitalized for six months and had 19 surgeries on his right leg. The limb was amputated in 2012.

"But that didn't stop or hinder him," Quietl remembers. "He was a determined man and would never give up. ... He had triple bypass surgery, a ruptured spleen, ruptured appendix and was always fighting a bone infection in his leg from the accident.

"He was like the Energizer bunny or a cat with nine lives ..." she adds. "He lived with constant pain most of his life. But you would never know it because his focus was NEVER on himself and always on others."

Bob Keegan says his brother's greatest reward was his grandchildren, Sam and Zack.

"They were the love of his life," agrees Ed's daughter. "That and baseball."

Besides his daughter, brother and grandchildren, Keegan is survived by his wife, Carol. Another brother, George, predeceased him.

Bob Keegan's favorite memories of his brother include one that has nothing to do with America's pastime.

When rain kept the Haddonfield High School baseball team inside, the coach would arrange dodgeball games. Instead of a baseball, Ed Keegan's

cannon-like arm launched a volleyball at his own teammates.

"He had big hands. We were scared to death of (getting hit by) him," Bob relates.

"Nobody wanted to play dodgeball against him — including me."

Reach Christina Mitchell
at chmittell@courierpostonline.com

With the Phillies, Ed Keegan struck out the Pirates' Roberto Clemente in one at-bat and surrendered a home run in his next at-bat.

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES

