

Sports Opinion

Chris Heine

Sosa makes Americans proud again

He has had an experienced dignity on his face and in his quick pace while circling the diamond after hitting home runs number 61, 62 and 63.

He is showing us humble street savvy by proclaiming to hungry reporters again and again that "Mark is the man" in his Hispanic accent.

Sammy Sosa knows the ways of the world.

He knows a person of color who speaks English as a second language can only truly join a Mark McGwire in the hearts of baseball fans (a culture dominated by white people) through a sly back door called humility.

While watching him chase a historic record (not to mention a playoff spot) all summer long, I believe my generation is getting a little taste of the late Roberto Clemente.

Clemente, a fierce Pittsburgh Pirate during baseball's golden age, came to the United States from Puerto Rico. His all-out play and strong, family-man demeanor exemplified the greatness so many immigrants have contributed to our culture this century.

Successful people from not-so-terribly successful nations tend to place greater value on the opportunities that can be afforded to an individual in this country.

It is doubtful Sosa as a young boy in the Dominican Republic ever griped over whether he'd get an Atari or an Intelelevision video game system for Christmas.

In fact, I fail to believe the word "pong" sends a nostalgic sensation down too many Latin American spines.

But money changes everything.

Since their respective independence, the financial misfortunes of Central American nations have placed many of its people in a seemingly eternal Generation X.

Comparing the stories of Sosa and McGwire is like comparing early 20th century Mississippi blues to the sterile version of the style usually heard on open mic night down at the Zoo Bar.

Okay, let's give Big Mac credit not only for his inspirational season at the plate, but also for some of the other things he's shown us this summer.

McGwire has done a swell job of reiterating the fact he's a big home run hitter who, believe it or not, has feelings for his son. I guess he must have been quite the cold fish back in Oakland. Such a cross he has had to bear.

Every decent man since Adam has loved his children.

And then we have the cool chest slams he does with Kevin Jordan and Ron Gant after every homer. Awesome. Is McGwire a pillar of the tired men's movement or what?

Such hints of narcissism are traits of a person from a wealthy, television-driven society.

While the media has focused the hype on Big Mac Americana, Sosa has been having fun going to work every day.

We've watched with admiration as he's encouraged McGwire to enjoy a little playful humor at press conferences.

His eyes have stayed firmly on the real prize of carrying the Chicago Cubs to a shot at something known as the World Series.

He has charmed us a bit after every bazoooka he's sent near or to Waveland Avenue with his hand-dance tribute to his mother, his Dominican Republic and to the late Harry Caray.

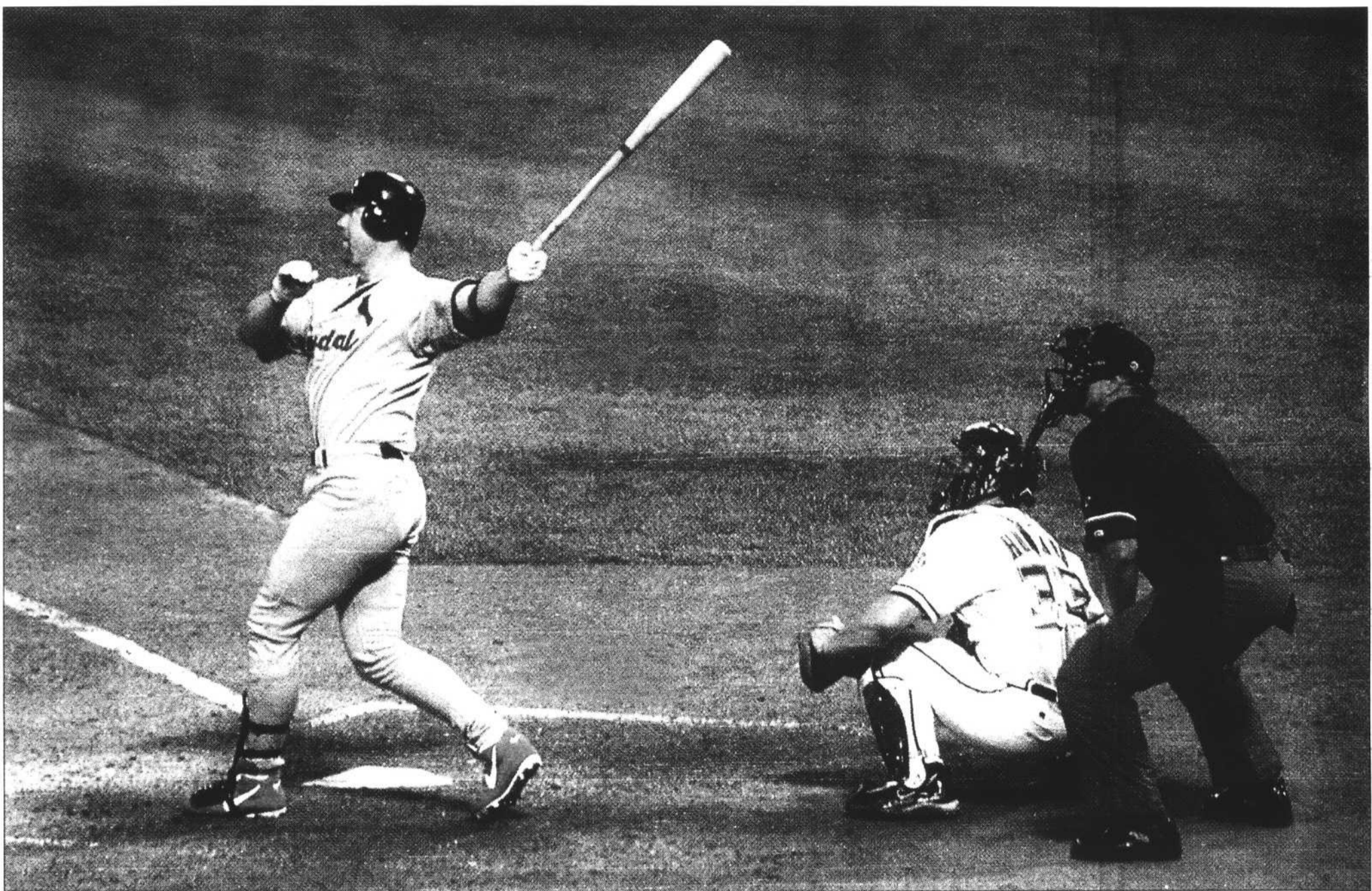
He, much deeper than McGwire ever could, has reminded us that we still might be living in a pretty darn good country.

Sammy's got soul.

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ROUND TRIP HOME RUNS AND THE PEOPLE



McGwire makes weekend special one

BY ANDREW STRNAD
Staff writer

MILWAUKEE — Three months ago when I bought these tickets, I thought I knew what I was going to see. Was I ever wrong.

A set of 12 tickets to see the St. Louis Cardinals play the Milwaukee Brewers in a meaningless series at the end of the year.

Of course I knew Mark McGwire was going to be there, but I thought he would be closing in on 61 home runs, not 64 or 65.

What really stood out in my mind this weekend in Milwaukee was the atmosphere. The stature of Mark McGwire and his mere presence at County Stadium sent chills through the 155,000 people who attended the three-game set.

Like other fans, I've watched McGwire for the past 12 years and have seen him play for the Oakland A's 25 or so times.

I've seen the power; heck, I even caught a ball he hit during batting prac-

tice back in 1987, albeit there were only 30 or so people in the bleachers. Nonetheless, I knew what he could do, but what I didn't know is what he could do to a crowd.

Friday — My friends and I had good seats — lower grandstand with a view right down the left field line.

Fortunately for us, having known the back roads of Milwaukee, we arrived on time; but at least 5,000 of the 48,000 in attendance were stuck in traffic.

Amid a rousing ovation, Big Mac came up in the first inning to face a hard-throwing lefty in Rafael Roque, and I figured tonight would be our lucky night.

Immediately Roque ran out to a 3-0 count, and the chorus of boos started coming from the stands. The flashbulbs were constant, and the anticipation was heavy. McGwire has yet to hit a homer on 3-0, and I didn't think this would be the first. It wasn't. Big Mac added to his National League record walk total.

When McGwire came up in the fourth, I knew it was homer time. With the Brewers in the lead, I knew Roque would get cocky.

McGwire, as he always seems to do, hit a rope over the 392-marker in left-center, a sign that would come back to haunt McGwire on Sunday.

The applause for the 6-foot-5 red-head was intense and concluded with an unprecedented curtain call. It was the loudest I've ever heard a County Stadium crowd cheer for a visiting opponent since Nolan Ryan won his 300th game in 1990.

I think I can say with confidence there wasn't a single person who didn't want to see McGwire go the distance.

That was just the beginning, as he would later hit the longest ball I had ever seen.

In the eighth, facing Eric Plunk, McGwire turned on a 3-0 ball and sent it over the upper-deck facade in left field and into the parking lot. No foul ball has ever created such a buzz.

Saturday — It was Fan Appreciation Night at County Stadium, a night where the Brewers give away all sorts of things, like signed jerseys, McGwire bats, Robin Yount bats and even a car. That was fun, but not the reason why 54,000-plus showed up.

Walking from the parking lot to the stadium, I couldn't believe the lack of tailgating.

Milwaukee is big on brats and beer, but there were few tailgaters in the parking lot before the game. Why? Everyone was already inside watching the show — McGwire's batting practice.

Boy, was it ever a show. Of the 17 swings McGwire took, nine of them were home runs. Five of them were outright bombs. Home runs are downplayed in batting practice, because nobody wants to be known as a five o'clock hitter. McGwire is an anytime hitter.

During the game, we were in the upper box, third row, with a great view from the third base line.

For McGwire it was his worst day of the year at the plate. Four strikeouts. That didn't take away from the largest crowd at County Stadium since Robin Yount Book Day in 1992.

The crowd's reaction reminded me of watching Reggie Jackson strike out — the way he would screw himself into the ground.

Sunday — This was the day we were

waiting for; bleacher seats on a day when the wind was actually blowing out of the park. Not like McGwire needed the help.

This time it looked like all 52,831 fans were in their seats by the time McGwire came to the plate. It's a good thing they did, because he wasted no time hitting a fastball deep to left field. Unfortunately, it was too far left for us to make a dive for it. Oh well, it was No. 65.

Fans grew restless. The guy behind me brought a pocket television so he could watch the Packers while watching history.

He would soon put it away as McGwire would look for his Major League record 66th home run.

McGwire made solid contact in the fifth and sent a ball in our direction. Again, it was heading over the 392-sign, just rows in front of us, but umpire Bob Davidson ruled a fan had interfered and awarded McGwire a double.

I couldn't see it, there was complete pandemonium, which resulted in the crowd booing an umpire for taking a home run away from the visiting team.

What a weekend.