

From St. Louis, Missouri

Stan “The Man” Musial—*the greatest Cardinal of them all!*

Stan Musial was a professional baseball player who played with the St. Louis Cardinals from 1941 until 1963. Nicknamed “Stan the Man” because of the way he dominated the game, Musial was an outfielder, a first baseman, and a powerful hitter. In fact, he once held the National League record for the most hits in a single career. Musial was the first St. Louis Cardinal to have his official jersey number retired and is often referred to as “The Greatest Cardinal of them all.”

Early Years

As a young adult, Stan worked various odd jobs to help support the family. He spent his free time playing baseball, his lifelong passion, and maintained a C average in school. He was the only member of his family to graduate from high school.

Musial dreamed of a future as a professional baseball player. He later said, “I wanted to be a big league ball player from the time I was eight years old.” At age 17, he signed a pitching contract with the St. Louis Cardinals for \$65 a month and left for spring training.

Musial wrote in his autobiography, “What made me sign with the Cardinals? Because they used salesmanship, the personal touch. Where others wrote, they talked. Where others waited, they acted. That early bird that got the worm must have been a Redbird.”

Musial missed the 1945 season because he was drafted into the military during the final months of World War II. He joined the Navy and remained stateside during his fourteen months in the service. In 1946 Musial was honorably discharged and returned to St. Louis to play for the Cardinals. It was during the 1946 season that Brooklyn Dodgers fans gave Musial the famous nickname “Stan the Man.”

In 1947, when Jackie Robinson became the first African American to play in the major leagues in the twentieth century, many white professional baseball players were upset. Robinson was taunted and spiked by players on opposing teams. Musial, unlike some of his teammates who jeered Robinson, showed true sportsmanship and refrained from such ill-mannered behavior. Musial later remarked that he “had no trouble with integration,” largely because he had played sports with African Americans back in his high school days.

Over the course of his twenty-two-year career, Musial played in 24 All-Star games (a record shared with Willie Mays and Hank Aaron) and won three National League Most Valuable Player awards. He also hit a total of 475 home runs. Musial achieved his 3,000th career hit on May 13, 1958, in a game against the Chicago Cubs. He finished his career with 3,630 hits, the most in National League history until Pete Rose passed him in 1981. Exactly one-half of Musial's hits occurred at home and the other half on the road.

On September 29, 1963, Musial played in the final professional baseball game of his career against the Cincinnati Reds, the same day his No. 6 jersey was retired. During the ceremony, Major League Baseball Commissioner Ford Frick said, "Here stands baseball's perfect warrior. Here stands baseball's perfect knight."

While he grew up in Pennsylvania, Musial considered St. Louis his home. After he retired from playing baseball, Musial stayed in St. Louis and became co-owner of a popular restaurant and a bowling alley. He also remained active with the Cardinals, serving as vice president from 1963 to 1966 and as general manager during the 1967 season. In his one season as general manager, the Cardinals won another World Series championship over the Boston Red Sox.

A statue of Stan Musial was placed outside of Busch Memorial Stadium on August 4, 1968. Today it stands in front of the new Busch Stadium. Musial was overcome with emotion by the honor, thanking his mother and family for "making me a Cardinal forever."

Honors and Awards

Musial received many honors and awards for his time with the St. Louis Cardinals. Chief among them was his induction into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1969, his first year of eligibility, and his induction into the St. Louis Walk of Fame in 1989. A baseball field was also named for him in his hometown of Donora, Pennsylvania. In 1999 he was named a member of the Major League Baseball All-Century Team. The following year a bronze bust of Musial was added to the Hall of Famous Missourians located in the State Capitol Building in Jefferson City. On February 15, 2011, President Barack Obama awarded Musial the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor a U.S. civilian can receive.

Death and Legacy

Stan Musial died of natural causes at his home in St. Louis County on January 19, 2013, at the age of 92 after battling Alzheimer's disease for several years. He is buried in Resurrection Cemetery in Affton, Missouri.

Musial is remembered as both an amazing athlete and a true gentleman. Widely admired for his kindness, professionalism, sportsmanship, and dedication to his craft, Musial set standards of excellence for later generations both within and outside of baseball. Famed sportscaster Bob Costas summed it up best when he said, “All Musial represents is more than two decades of sustained excellence and complete decency as a human being.”

Article Source: Historical Society of Missouri

Photos: Wikimedia and Wikipedia

Quotes

“Everybody's a Musial fan.” - Former Cardinals Manager Whitey Herzog

“You’re standing there, and you’re trying not to notice that it’s Stan Musial coming up to get Holy Communion,” Dolan said. “And here comes one of the greatest ball players ever — he had the world by the tail — and yet the reverence with which he approached this sincere act of faith, this union with the Lord in church. That’s what it’s all about.” –Bishop Timothy Dolan on administering Holy Communion to Stan Musial