

Allen Says Thank You, Chicago

By Paul Ladewski

Posted on Tuesday, June 12

Thirty-eight years had passed since Dick Allen met with the Chicago media on Monday afternoon, but from the looks of him, they have been kind to the former White Sox great.

A lot grayer and a bit heavier than in his glory days, the 70-year-old Allen looked to be in good shape nonetheless. He laughed and smiled and spoke from the heart about several subjects, namely, the 1972 team that was the surprise of baseball and put a teetering franchise back on track.

“I’m very proud of the ‘72 bunch,” he said. “We learned a lot of baseball together, including me, a lot of it I’ve forgotten.”

As one of the leaders of a predominately young squad, Allen turned in a Most Valuable Player season – .308 batting average, 38 home runs and 113 RBI. Yet he spoke frequently about the unusual team chemistry and the role it had in its success.

"We were doing more with enthusiasm than we did experience, and we enjoyed having success together," he said.

The Chicago Baseball Museum approached Allen about a comeback five years ago. It wasn't until earlier this year that the Wampum, Pa., resident consented finally.

Allen made it clear that his primary intent was to express gratitude for his three seasons in Chicago, which he called the most enjoyable of his 15-year career.

“I am humbled by this,” said Allen, who was accompanied by his wife Willa and agent Howie Bedell, a former major league outfielder. “I didn’t get a chance to thank the White Sox and the fans all those years ago. I do it now from my heart. That was a great and memorable time for me.”

Allen also had a confession to make all these decades later. In fact, the first baseman had chili on his jersey before he hit one of the most dramatic home runs in franchise history, not taco sauce as legend had it for years.

On June 4, 1972, Manager Chuck Tanner had informed Allen that his services would not be needed against the New York Yankees in the second game of the doubleheader. His team on the short end of a 4-2 score, Tanner changed his mind after two batters reached base in the ninth inning.



Dick Allen holds one of his 1972 game-worn jerseys at a news conference on Monday.

“I was eating a chili dog when I heard Chuck wanted me to hit,” Allen recalled. “I had chili all over my shirt, so I put on a new one and a pair of pants with no underclothes. Sparky Lyle threw me a slider, and it wound up in the seats. We won, and it was a memorable moment.”

The game-winner came in front of nearly 52,000 fans and was one of several memorable moments for Allen that season. They included a home run on Opening Day, a monstrous blast into the center field bleachers versus the Yankees at Comiskey Park and a pair of inside-the-park homers in a game against the Minnesota Twins on the road.

Allen expressed one regret in his career, one in which he totaled 1,848 hits, 351 home runs and six All-Star Game appearances.

“I wish I could have started my career here and ended it here with Chuck Tanner,” he said. “The fans here accepted me and appreciated me for what I was, what I did.”

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