



Time for new show on Hubbs' life

*By Dr. David J. Fletcher, President and Founder, Chicago Baseball Museum
Posted Tuesday, February 11th, 2014*

The concept of honoring the memory of Ken Hubbs is a slam dunk. He was the original Roy Hobbs' "The Natural," who is the still slick-fielding 22 year-old second baseman baseball playing on heaven's Fields of Dreams.

On the Cubs' radar as part of the historical aspect of the forthcoming renovation of Wrigley Field should be two features. First would be a plaque with his uniform No. 16 and image. Next is the revival of the Ken Hubbs Award, previously presented through the 1980s by the Chicago BBWAA chapter that honored the city's outstanding player on and off the field.

One more leg of remembering Hubbs is in order: a documentary on his short, but eventful life. And we know just the folks in town to do it: Comcast SportsNet Chicago.

Our regional sports network is rapidly developing a reputation for historical documentaries. First came the Emmy Awards-worthy "5 Outs" remembrance of the 2003 Cubs that earned producers Dave Kaplan, Sarah Lauch and Ryan McGuffey the Jerome Holtzman Award from the Chicago Baseball Museum. Next on the list is the ongoing "Bears Classics" series. We particularly enjoyed the Gale Sayers show in which the Kansas Comet choked up recalling his seeming other-worldly ability in his six-touchdown game in 1965.

The Hubbs story, as detailed with the George Castle feature and podcast here, is inspiring beyond the "what if" angle of a life cut short by tragedy. The second baseman truly was everything advertised – a gifted three-sport athlete and a gentleman off the field.

He was Ron Santo's roommate in 1962 and 1963 and Santo would say for the rest of his life that he thought of Ken Hubbs nearly every day.

In fact Santo flew in the Cessna plane with Hubbs the day before the latter left for Utah. Hubbs never returned, losing his life in the Feb. 13, 1964 crash amid a snowstorm.

That tragedy dampened hope for the Cubs that was propelled by two back to back NL Rookies of the Year in Hubbs and Billy Williams. Along with Santo, Lou Brock and 22-game-winner Dick Ellsworth, the collection of young talent seemed poised to help Ernie "Mr. Cub" Banks in the effort to move up in the standings that began in 1963.

So many people involved with Hubbs are still alive, starting with Hall of Famers Banks, Brock and Williams, who preceded Hubbs as NL Rookie of the Year in 1961. Other teammates like Ellsworth, George Altman, Bob Anderson and Lindy McDaniel are still with us. CSN Chicago can contract with a crew in California to catch up with Hubbs' older brother Keith and others who knew him in his hometown of Colton.

Hubbs was poised for greatness and many observers thought he was the best fielding second baseman of his generation.

An important feature of the Jerome Holtzman Library, now part of the Chicago Baseball Museum, are volumes of notes that Holtzman, MLB's first historian, took with his various interviews with Hubbs. Holtzman covered Hubbs' fielding records in 1962, when he became the first-ever player to win both the Rookie of the Year and Gold Glove awards in the same year.

Before his death, Holtzman told me that Hubbs was on the fast track for Cooperstown and was the best he ever seen.

Like President John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated on Nov. 22, 1963, our memory of Hubbs is that of a youthful and vigorous star. Hubbs remains in our collective minds as a 22-year-old wonder who may have become the slickest-fielding second baseman in big-league history. If he had lived, No. 16 would have been huge in Cubs history with Hobbs'...er, Hubbs' movie-star good looks and solid character.

And then he was gone. It's a story that needs to be told again as only skilled documentarians can do.