



Hall of Fame broadcaster Hamilton no stranger to Pitch and Hit Club banquet

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Snaring an award never gets old for Milo Hamilton at 85.

“When the Hall of Fame calls come, those are fabulous,” said the 1992 winner of the Hall of Fame’s Ford Frick Award for baseball announcers. “I’ve been fortunate to have five of those (from Cooperstown and other institutions). When you get the others, you cannot nonchalant them. The people who selected you for those honors thought it was important to do. Not all fall in the Top Ten of what you’ve gotten in your life, but still it’s an honor to be recognized by a lot of different organizations around the country.”

The latest honor for Hamilton, who had two stints as a Cubs announcer and one with the White Sox, is the Pitch and Hit Club’s Lifetime Achievement for Contributions to Baseball. Traveling back from Houston to a kind of second home in Chicago, Hamilton was scheduled to receive the award at the Pitch and Hit Club’s 67th Annual Banquet Sunday, Jan. 27, at the Carlisle Banquet Hall in Lombard, Ill.

And receiving the honor at this event is special for Hamilton because of his history with both the city and the Pitch and Hit Club.

“When I was in Chicago, I went to that banquet many, many times,” he said. “The last time I was in Chicago, I emceed that banquet and we honored Mary Frances Veeck. I



Milo Hamilton interviews Cubs pitcher Mike Krukow in 1981.

have great memories of the Pitch and Hit Club. They didn't just come around when they had a banquet on a Sunday night in the cold of the winter in Chicago. They were always greeting you at the ballpark and other banquets. I'm really honored to be there this time."

The honor is certainly two-way. Appearing on the same dais as Hall of Famer Goose Gossage and future Cooperstown enshrinee Tony La Russa, Hamilton has baseball broadcast longevity only one other man alive can match. He and Vin Scully are the only announcers to have gotten behind the mic for a big-league game as far back as the year 1950. Scully was a rookie sidekick of the legendary Red Barber in Brooklyn. Hamilton was visiting the WIND-Radio booth at Wrigley Field after doing minor-league baseball in Davenport, Iowa, when Cubs voice Bert Wilson turned the mic over to Hamilton in the sixth inning.

Hamilton went on to his first full-time big-league job with the Bill Veeck-owned St. Louis Browns in 1953 after losing out to Don Wells for the gig as Bob Elson's partner on Sox broadcasts on the old WCFL-Radio the same year. Except for a four-year hiatus from 1958 to 1961, Hamilton has worked big-league games ever since. He eventually was second man to Elson with the Sox from 1962 to 1965. His two stints with the Cubs ran from 1955 to 1957 and 1980 to 1984.

Although just retired from regular duty as the Astros radio announcer, a job he held since 1985, Hamilton will do a smattering of home games at Minute Maid Park. He also plans to accompany the Astros May 13-15 to Comerica Park in Detroit to mark the 60th ballpark in which he has broadcast games. Hamilton missed a 2006 Astros' trip to Comerica due to his late daughter Patricia's serious illness.

The Pitch and Hit dinner won't afford attendees enough time to let Hamilton fully empty his vault of stories and memoirs. But the top award given out, the Lou Boudreau Hall of Fame honor, to Goose Gossage and Tony La Russa, will get him talking about a man whose memory he cherishes above almost everybody else with whom he has ever worked.

Boudreau his best-ever broadcast partner

"He was absolutely the best partner I've ever had," Hamilton said of Boudreau, with whom he teamed on WGN-Radio Cubs broadcasts from 1982 to 1984. "I've had some good ones -- Ernie Johnson in Atlanta, Alan Ashby here (in Houston) and before him, (Larry) Dierker. I think the one I enjoyed the most, with the camaraderie (was Boudreau). He gave you what he had. Maybe he butchered the English (language) once in a while, but that's all right. Everybody knew what he meant."

Hamilton's journey to the majors paralleled that of a minor-league ballplayer. A product of the University of Iowa, he cut his teeth doing minor-league baseball in Moline and Davenport. He met Cubs announcer Wilson when he came to Des Moines to broadcast the Iowa high-school boys basketball tournament for a network of stations that was owned by Chicago's Atlass family, which also owned WIND. Working for

KSTT in Davenport, a Sox network station, Hamilton tried to jump to the Sox to join Elson with the recommendation of a member of the Sox's ruling family.

"John Rigney (husband of Dorothy Comiskey, Charles Comiskey's grand-daughter) recommended me after being GM in Waterloo," he recalled. "I told him I was going to apply. Maybe it was a little too soon. I think about 50 applied to that job. It got down to the final five. Don Wells got it and he should have. He had more experience and he was on the old Liberty Network."

Instead, Hamilton landed in St. Louis for two years, working one season each with the Browns and Cardinals. He split Redbird road-game duties with St. Louis newcomer Jack Buck in 1954, but was pushed out of that job when just-retired catcher Joe Garagiola became available. Hamilton's career-long tiff with Harry Caray, whom he still calls "The Canary," can be traced back to the Garagiola hiring.

But he then landed at WIND assisting Wilson with Cubs broadcasts.

"To work with him was fabulous," Hamilton said. "He kind of changed from being just balls and strikes to be a little more enthusiastic. He'd say: 'It doesn't matter what the score was in the ninth, this game is not over 'till the final out.' Also: 'It doesn't matter who wins so long as it's the Cubs.' He added an enthusiasm we didn't have from other major-league announcers.

"The main reason I was hired, Bert had traveled alone all those years. They needed someone to travel with him. I was with him on the road. At home I'd do a couple of innings. I did 'The Leadoff Man' behind the screen. We had (Wrigley Field PA announcer) Pat Pieper on for the opening lineups. I left in the seventh to get on the L, and do the scoreboard show from studios in the Wrigley Building. People don't realize, especially young broadcasters, I was doing everything. I was up at 6 a.m. doing commercials on the Howard Miller Show. After the scoreboard, I'd do the drive-home show from 5 to 6. I started at 6 a.m. and worked through 6 in the evening."

Hamilton still did triple- or quadruple-duty years later when he succeeded future Hall of Famer Ralph Kiner as Elson's sidekick on Sox broadcasts.

"I'd come to WCFL at 11 a.m. to do a tease show for Anheuser Busch," he said. "Then I'd hang around to do a ticker (re-creation by Western Union) baseball game. I'd do a 5 p.m. sports show, then I'd go to Comiskey. I'd do 30 or 40 re-creations each year. On days you didn't do a game, you did a two-hour record show for the General Finance network. I also did Northwestern football and DePaul basketball, for talent fees."

The brutal hours never stopped. As No. 2 Cubs TV announcer in 1980, he'd often come back into the station to handle the 10 p.m. sports, particularly on Saturday nights, on WGN-TV. In his Astros years, he'd do a morning sports show in addition to night games. That became wearying when he'd fly in with the team to the West Coast in the wee-hours, then have to do his drive-time segment shortly afterward back home. For many major-league players, managers and broadcasters, the punishing travel is the factor that drives them from full-time big-league duty. Hamilton was no exception.

But when a baseball announcer is younger, he puts up with the endurance tests of the job.

Brutal fact – more work, more pay

“The salaries weren’t that big,” he recalled. “Bert Wilson, look at the number of years he did the games. He did the Cubs, a 6 p.m. sports show, Iowa boys tourney, the Chicago Bears. The most Bert ever made in any year was \$25,000. When there came an opportunity to go to Cincinnati to do 30 TV games, they wanted him for that job and were going to pay him \$30,000. He thought he was on Easy Street -- \$30,000 for 30 instead of \$25,000 for everything under the sun.”

Wilson never got the bigger payday and reduced work schedule. He died of a heart attack in the off-season of 1955-56. That left the Cubs broadcasts to Hamilton, Jack Quinlan and future Hamilton Astros radio partner Gene Elston. When the Cubs radio rights shifted to WGN for the 1958 season, team owner P.K. Wrigley favored Quinlan. A disappointed Hamilton went back to his deejay duties at WIND until the Sox opportunity finally opened up four years later.

He’ll never forget watching Ernie Banks in his break-out big-league season of 1955, when Mr. Cub slugged 44 homers, including a record five grand-slamers.

“You knew he was someone special,” Hamilton recalled. “Wrigley Field was tailored for his swing. How many of those homers went over that (368-foot) sign? Some people don’t realize how close he came to be a member of the White Sox.”

“Gene Baker, who was from Davenport, joined him, and he should have been promoted two or three years earlier because he was having those big years in Los Angeles. That was quite a combination of Banks at short and Baker at second. He had a good-enough arm to make all the plays. Even if you’re not flashy, if he could make the routine plays, and he did, he got the job done. The fact he was hitting all those home runs and driving in those runs and winning the MVP awards, I don’t think anyone noticed he wasn’t the best defensive shortstop in the league.”

Moving to the South Side, Hamilton became a valuable helper to Elson, who had sketchy preparation for his broadcasts. Hamilton would feed Elson information as he went along. In one July 26, 1965 broadcast from Tiger Stadium, Hamilton can be heard barely within mic range dispensing facts and scores to Elson. The Commander is then heard repeating Hamilton almost verbatim.

Off the air, Elson was renowned as a gin-rummy shark. He’d lure card players into a false sense of security, then pull the misdirection play when they’d sit down to cut the cards.

Stayed away from Elson gin games

“Never played gin with Elson,” Hamilton said. “He had a patsy in every town. A lot of people loved to play him. He knew he had a gin game all lined up. He never stopped

talking. He'd destroy your concentration and you'd lose track of your cards.

"You know who got his goat? Al Lopez, who was a pretty good card player. Bob could never beat The Senior in gin."

The Sox near-misses of 1964 and 1965 remain some of the most frustrating times of Hamilton's career. In '64, the Sox won their final nine games in a row to finish with 98 victories, second only to the 2005 World Series champion's regular-season total in modern annals. But the Yankees, just barely ahead of them, countered with a 13-1 streak that provided just enough cushion to win the American League pennant.

"They did it with pitching, but they just couldn't match the Yankees' power," Hamilton said. "Old Comiskey was a very tough park to hit home runs in. I think they thought Pete Ward was going to help them, and he did. He just wasn't a big home-run hitter."

Hamilton went on to broadcast the Braves and Henry Aaron's record-breaking 715th homer. His radio call is one of the most famous in baseball history. Three Ford Frick Award winners did the Aaron homer – Hamilton, Scully on Dodgers radio and Curt Gowdy on the national NBC telecast.

Scully is rated by Hamilton the greatest baseball announcer ever. He calls Elson the best interviewer. Jack Brickhouse, who recommended Hamilton as his successor on WGN's Cubs telecasts, is designated the game's greatest broadcast ambassador by his old pal.

Hamilton's final departure from Chicago was greased by a Tribune Broadcasting management change after he was hired from the Pirates late in 1979 and slotted in to take over from Brickhouse in 1982. In the interim, Jim Dowdle became president of Tribune Broadcasting, which now had a satellite-borne superstation in WGN on its hands. Caray became available, bailing out from the White Sox after one year of the Jerry Reinsdorf-Eddie Einhorn regime. Seeing the opportunity to inject some of Caray's colorful "Mayor of Rush Street" persona in the games, Dowdle went out on a limb from the usual conservative Tribune Broadcasting mindset to hire him. He and new Cubs GM Dallas Green, however, had to counsel Caray to tone it down from his guerilla-theater-of-the-air Sox style. Hamilton was pushed over to radio and his pairing with Boudreau, but he was not the No. 1 Cubs announcer as had been projected back in '79. Eventually, he parted ways at WGN, after broadcasting the historical 1984 National League East title season.

Milo broadcast Sox title – as Astros voice

Hamilton more than landed on his feet at the Astrodome. His 28 seasons at the mic wove him into the fabric of the Astros franchise. Interestingly, he finally got the chance to broadcast a Chicago team's World Series clincher – from the other side. Hamilton was there when Juan Uribe's laser-beam throw to Paul Konerko nailed down the Sox's 2005 title at Minute Maid Park.

During his long Houston tenure, he got to not only broadcast Jim Deshaies' pitching

performances, but also work with him on the Astros broadcast team. Thus he has an insider's scouting report on incoming Cubs TV color analyst Deshaies, which in Hamilton's candid style speaks more toward the internal politics of the team and its video broadcast partners.

"He's knowledgeable. He'll make contributions," Hamilton said of Deshaies. "I was very surprised they didn't hire somebody with a Cubs background. He'll do a fine job, but it absolutely will be a transition. A play-by-play guy can do it (move to a new market) easier, but it's more difficult for an analyst to do it. Here in Houston, he was appreciated because he was a fan favorite when he played.

"When you go to a market like Chicago, people will notice if you're not doing some of the things they expect you to do. That's why when (Ron) Santo was no longer there, I was happy Keith Moreland got the job. People remember him from the '84 Cubs team. Pat Hughes likes him a lot and I like him a lot. He was a catcher starting out. I like catchers in the booth, like Alan Ashby when he was working with me here. You can't be an analyst now just by showing up. You have to be prepared." "When you go to a market like Chicago, people will notice if you're not doing some of the things they expect you to do. That's why when (Ron) Santo was no longer there, I was happy Keith Moreland got the job. People remember him from the '84 Cubs team. Pat Hughes likes him a lot and I like him a lot. He was a catcher starting out. I like catchers in the booth, like Alan Ashby when he was working with me here. You can't be an analyst now just by showing up. You have to be prepared." If Hamilton favors Moreland, he likes Hughes even more.

"Pat Hughes is a real pro," he said. "I'm hoping at my age that I'm still around (for Hughes being honored by the Hall of Fame). He's got to be a candidate soon for the Ford Frick Award."

In the meantime, Hamilton simply has to make more room on his crowded mantle for one more award of his own.