



Ryne Sandberg

Baseball Hall of Fame Induction Speech

"Respect the game above all else"



Delivered 31 July 2005, Cooperstown, NY

AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio

What a beautiful day this is. I stand here today before you humbled and a grateful baseball player. I am truly honored and in awe, honored to be in the class with my fellow inductee Wade Boggs. And as I look behind me here, wow, at the greatest players in the history of the game, I am in awe. I know that if I had ever allowed myself to think this was possible, if I had ever taken one day in pro ball for granted, I'm sure I would not be here today. This will come as a shock I know, but I am almost speechless.

The reason I am here, they tell me, is that I played the game a certain way, that I played the game the way it was supposed to be played. I don't know about that, but I do know this: I had too much respect for the game to play it any other way, and if there was there is a single reason I am here today, it is because of one word, "respect." I love to play baseball. I'm a baseball player. I've always been a baseball player. I'm still a baseball player. That's who I am.

I was a baseball player when I was 10 or 12 years old pretending to be Willie Stargell or Johnny Bench or Luis Tiant, when my bat was an old fungo, my ball was a plastic golf ball, when the field was the street and my older brother Del and I would play all day. I was a baseball player at North Central High School in Spokane, Washington even though I was all-city in basketball, even when I signed a letter of intent to play quarterback at Washington State.



American Rhetoric.com

That's why Del advised me to turn down the chance to play football and sign with the Phillies out of high school. I had too much respect for the game to leave it behind or to make it my second or third sport in college.

Everything I am today, everything I have today, everything I will ever be is because of the game of baseball, not the game you see on TV or in movies; baseball, the one we all know, the one we played with whiffle ball bats pretending to be Yaz or Fisk or Rose, in dirt fields, and in allies. We all know that game. The game fit me because it was right. It was all about doing things right. If you played the game the right way, played the game for the team, good things would happen. That's what I loved most about the game, how a ground out to second with a man on second and nobody out was a great thing.

Respect.

I was taught coming up in the Phillies organization to be seen and not heard by people like Pete Rose, my hero growing up, and players like Mike Schmidt and Steve Carlton and Manny Trillo. I understood that.

My parents, Derwent and Elizabeth, who are no longer with us, understood that. My mom was at every single game I played as a kid, rain or shine. My dad always said, "Keep your nose clean, your mouth shut and your eyes and ears open because you might learn something." My sister Maryl and my late brother Lane knew this too; so did my first professional manager, Larry Rojas, a guy who was always in my corner as I climbed through the Phillies organization; guys like Bill Harper, the scout that signed me; Ken Eilmes, my high school coach; PJ Carey, a Phillies coach. They taught me to respect the game above all else.

The fourth major league game I ever saw in person, I was in uniform. Yes, I was in awe. I was in awe every time I walked on to the field.

That's respect.

I was taught you never, ever disrespect your opponent or your teammates or your organization or your manager and never, ever your uniform. Make a great play -- act like you've done it before. Get a big hit -- look for the third base coach and get ready to run the bases. Hit a home run -- put your head down, drop the bat, run around the bases, because the name on the front is more -- a lot more important than the name on the back.

That's respect.

My managers like Don Zimmer and Jim Frey, they always said I made things easy on them by showing up on time, never getting into trouble, being ready to play every day, leading by example, being unselfish. I made things easy on them? These things they talk about -- playing every day? That was my job. I had too much respect for them and for the game to let them down. I was afraid to let them down. I didn't want to let them down or let the fans down or my teammates or my family or myself. I had too much respect for them to let them down.



Dallas Green brought me to Chicago and without him, who knows? I couldn't let him down. I owed him too much. I had too much respect for him to let him down. People like Harry Caray and Don Zimmer used to compare me to Jackie Robinson. Can you think of a better tribute than that? But Harry, who was a huge supporter of mine, used to say how nice it is that a guy who can hit 40 homers or steal 50 bases or drive in a hundred runs is the best bunter on the team. Nice? That was my job. When did it become okay for someone to hit home runs and forget how to play the rest of the game?

When we went home every winter, they warned us not to lift heavy weights because they didn't want us to lose flexibility. They wanted us to be baseball players, not only home run hitters. I played high school football at a hundred and eighty-five pounds and played big league baseball at a hundred and eighty-two. I'd get up to maybe 188 in the off-season because every summer I'd lose eight to ten pounds. In my day, if a guy came to spring training 20 pounds heavier than what he left, he was considered out of shape and was probably in trouble. He'd be under a microscope and the first time he couldn't beat out a base hit or missed a fly ball, he was probably shipped out. These guys sitting up here did not pave the way for the rest of us so that players could swing for the fences every time up and forget how to move a runner over to third. It's disrespectful to them, to you, and to the game of baseball that we all played growing up.

Respect.

A lot of people say this honor validates my career, but I didn't work hard for validation. I didn't play the game right because I saw a reward at the end of the tunnel. I played it right because that's what you're supposed to do -- play it right and with respect. If this validates anything, it's that learning how to bunt and hit and run and turning two is more important than knowing where to find the little red light at the dug out camera.

If this validates anything, it's that guys who taught me the game -- coaches like Billy Williams, Chuck Cottier, John Vukovich, Jose Martinez, Billy Connors, and Ruben Amaro; teammates like Larry Bowa who took me under his wing, Rick Sutcliff who was like an older brother, Bob Dernier, the half of the daily double -- they did what they were supposed to do and I did what I was supposed to do.

There was Gary Matthews, the "Sarge." He wouldn't let me down. He was always in the on-deck circle when I was batting, and if there was a pitch that almost hit me or knocked me down, Sarge would be halfway to the mound and screaming at the pitcher to, "Get the ball over the plate or face the consequences." I saw a lot of fastballs down the middle because of Sarge and I had too much respect for how hard he played to give it any less than he did.

Sure I worked hard to get [the] most out of my God-given ability, but that's what we all did back then. That's what every one of these guys sitting here did. There were a lot of players who worked just as hard as I did and if you didn't, you didn't stay in the big leagues.



There were guys like Bill Buckner, an incredible big league hitter, the first pure hitter I spent time with in the big leagues. I saw him come through town with the Spokane Indians in Triple A with Tommy Lasorda and a whole team full of guys who went to the World Series. They all worked hard.

There was Shawon Dunston and Mark Grace, and together we were a double play combination for ten years. Shawon Dunston, who knew three weeks in advance if we were facing Nolan Ryan and always had a hamstring pull planned for the day before. Mark Grace, who made sure Shawon knew he was supposed to get every popup from foul line to foul line on the infield. We could read each other's minds on the field and off. They worked hard. How could I let them down? By not being prepared for everything that might happen in the field, at the plate, or on the bases?

Respect.

Andre Dawson -- the "Hawk." No player in baseball history worked harder, suffered more, or did it better than Andre Dawson. He's the best I've ever seen. Stand up Hawk. The Hawk. I watched him win an MVP for a last place team in 1987, and it was the most unbelievable thing I've ever seen in baseball. He did it the right way, the natural way, and he did it in the field and on the bases and in every way, and I hope he will stand up here someday. We didn't get to a World Series together but we almost got there, Hawk. That's my regret -- that we didn't get to a World Series for Cub fans. I was in the postseason twice and I'm thankful for that. Twice we came close.

It reminds me of the guy walking down the beach. He finds a bottle, pops the cork and a genie comes out to grant him one wish. The guy says "My wish is for peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. Here's a map of the Middle East." Genie takes the map, studies it for hours and hours. Finally gives it back to the guy and says, "Is there anything else you want to wish for? This is impossible." The guy says, "Well, I always wanted to see the Cubs in a World Series." The genie looks at him, reaches out and says, "Let me have another look at that map."

In baseball, there's always the next day. I always thought there would be another chance. It didn't happen, but I feel fortunate for the two chances we had and it's just a shame we didn't go to a World Series for Cub fans. You can't do it on your own.

And I want to say "thank you" to every teammate, coach, manager, and just as important my opponents, who made the game fun for me. I want to say thank you to friends like Doug Dascenzo, Yosh Kawano, Arlene Gill, Jimmy Farrell, John Fierro, my Cubs trainer for ten years, and Marty Hare, an old high school teammate. To Jimmy Turner, Kathy Lintz and Peter Bensinger, advisors, confidants and close friends, thank you. Also, Barry Rosner, great writer and good friend. It's fun talking baseball with you, Barry. Thank you.

To the Baseball Writers Association, I thank you for granting me this incredible honor. I think a large part of this is the fact that I was a great interview and gave you so many quotes you could wrap a story around.



AmericanRhetoric.com

Seriously, I know I wasn't the best interview for many of those years, but I wasn't trying to be difficult. I had other things on my mind. Baseball wasn't easy for me. I struggled many times when maybe it didn't look like I was struggling, and I had to work hard every day. I had to prepare mentally every day. I had to prepare physically every day, and I didn't leave many scraps for the writers.

I hope you also understand why I would not campaign for this or help you sell this. It's the best award in all of sports and I think if I had expected anything, if I was thinking about it too much or crunching the numbers, it would have taken away from the prestige of this incredible honor.

To the great folks here at the Hall of Fame, Jane Forbes Clark, Dale Petrosky, Jeff Idelson, Kim Bennett, Brad Horn, Ted Spencer, Evan Chase: Thanks for making this entire year a joy for me and my family, one we will certainly never forget.

I've been lucky enough to be welcomed into three new families since I arrived in Chicago. As great a public speaker as I am, I don't have the words to describe Cub fans who welcomed me as a rookie, were patient through my 1-for-32 start, and took me into their homes and into their hearts and treated me like a member of their family. You picked me up when I was down. You lifted me to heights that I didn't know I could reach. You expected a certain level of play from me and you made me play at that level for a long time.

I know there are a lot of Cub fans here today. I feel like every Cub fan in the world is here with me today. And by the way, for what it's worth, Ron Santo just gained one more vote from the veteran's committee.

Thank you to these men here, these Hall of Famers, the greatest players in the history of baseball who have welcomed me in and treated me as an equal. It's going to take some getting used to, but I thank you for your kindness and respect. This is the second best thing that's ever happened to me.

Lastly, I joined a new family when my wife Margaret, BR, Adriane and Steven took me, Lindsey and Justin into their family, and together we have made quite a happy family. I love all of you.

You are probably wondering, "What was the first?" -- when I said this honor is the second best thing that's ever happened to me. My wife Margaret is the best thing that's ever happened to me. She is my best friend. She is the love of my life. She is my salvation. She's my past, my present, my future. She is my sun, my moon, my stars. She is everything that's good about life and I thank her for entering my life at a time when I needed her most. I love you.

The feeling I've had since I got the call is a feeling I suspect will never go away. I'm told it never does. It's the highest high you can imagine. I wish you all could feel what I feel standing here.



American Rhetoric.com

This is my last big game. This is my last big at-bat. This is my last time catching the final out. I dreamed of this as a child but I had too much respect for baseball to think this was ever possible. I believe it is because I had so much respect for the game and respect for getting the most out of my ability that I stand here today. I hope others in the future will know this feeling for the same reason: Respect for the game of baseball. When we all played it, it was mandatory. It's something I hope we will one day see again.

Thank you, and go Cubs.