



END OF THE RAT RACE

DESPITE A MAZE OF LOGISTICAL DIFFICULTIES EN ROUTE TO COOPERSTOWN, WHITEY HERZOG MANAGED TO FINISH HIS PATH TO HALL OF FAME INDUCTION IN GRAND STYLE
BY TOM KLEIN

It was a long, winding journey to Cooperstown for Whitey Herzog – both before and *after* he was selected for the Hall of Fame.

Of course, Cardinals fans are generally familiar with the chronology of dates and events, and the number of elections, it took for the winner of three NL pennants and one World Series to earn a plaque at the Hall. But that long march ended up being something of a prelude to what became a genuine odyssey – simply making the trip to upstate New York for his induction on July 25.

Four days before the ceremony, Herzog had to spend 2½ hours in St. Louis waiting for his flight to get airborne because of a defective part that needed to be replaced on the plane.

The result was part travelogue, part three-ring circus. The delay in St. Louis caused Whitey to miss his connecting flight in Charlotte, N.C., where he endured another three-hour wait before being rerouted to Boston. Once there, it was another two hours on the ground before taking a “puddle-jumper” for the final flight into Albany, N.Y. Then, there was still a

70-mile ride to Cooperstown.

Add it all up, and it was roughly a 12-hour trip, with Herzog arriving 7½ hours later than planned.

It wasn't exactly the perfect tonic for a 78-year-old guy who'd been battling back problems, and who had been grappling with the demands that go with being the 19th major league manager selected for the Hall of Fame.

In the weeks before sharing the marquee with Andre Dawson and umpire Doug Harvey in Cooperstown, Herzog confessed to being “tired and aggravated. Everybody wants a piece of you,” he said.

In the eight-month interval between his December election and July induction, Herzog had been continually asked to compress a lifetime's worth of stories into an unending series of sound bites, speeches and interviews with reporters calling from across the country. Whitey calculated, with only mild exaggeration, that he'd given more interviews during that stretch than during his entire managing career.

By the time he arrived in Cooperstown, Herzog felt like he'd walked every step of

the way. And five busy days still were ahead, with obligations and activities that would extend one day beyond Induction Sunday.

But he gradually warmed to the task, rising to the occasion in a week of festivities that was more about accomplishment than aggravation. It culminated with the end of his induction address, when Herzog signed off with, “Being elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., is like going to heaven before you die,” an observation that renowned baseball writer Peter Gammons predicts will be replayed 20 years from now.

Whitey's Cooperstown agenda began with a private dinner including Ozzie Smith and Bob Costas on Thursday night and reached a quick emotional peak during a reception thrown by the Cardinals on Friday evening. When club chairman Bill DeWitt Jr. announced that the team officially would retire his number 24, a surprised Herzog was moved to tears.

As Hall of Famers Bob Gibson, Lou Brock, Ozzie Smith and Bruce Sutter looked on, Herzog noted that “going into the Hall of Fame's great. Getting your





He built his legend with competitive intensity, but Bob Gibson (left) knew how to put the focus on fun at a Friday-evening reception hosted by the Cardinals to celebrate Herzog's impending induction. Proving that accessories can be interchangeable among Hall of Famers, Gibby modeled Ozzie Smith's chic eyewear to warm up for a photo that put Herzog center-deck among Cooperstown Cards: (from left) a stopper in Gibby, a Wizard (Smith), a closer (Bruce Sutter) and a leadoff man (Lou Brock).

number retired in the St. Louis ballpark, alongside Stan Musial, Red Schoendienst, Bob Gibson, Lou Brock, Ozzie Smith, Bruce Sutter – that's one hell of an honor. I'm very appreciative, very happy. I'm choked up. ..."

Whitey then sliced through the emotional intensity with some vintage Herzog humor, referencing a more recent wearer of his jersey number: "I'm gonna

call Rick Ankiel. There's a lot of damned uniforms in St. Louis awful cheap. Take his name off it – you can buy it for 30 bucks – and put my name on it."

Herzog choked up again as he commended the current Cardinals ownership for treating him like a Hall of Famer long before he got to Cooperstown. "I was always invited to all the functions. A lot of times I felt embarrassed, because

I didn't think I belonged there. ... But those five or six guys that were Hall of Famers, they took me in like I was one of their brothers, and it took a little bit of the heat off me. But I really didn't think a lot of times I should be there. Well, starting Monday, I'll be there."

Herzog openly wondered whether he'd make it through the induction speech without breaking down. At the end of his remarks Friday night, educated odds would have been about 4-1 – against.

But the man who once teased Pete Rose with the pithy words, "you wanna bet?" proved again that there are no educated odds when it comes to predicting The White Rat. At his induction, Herzog crossed up the guessers, just as he'd done to so many opposing managers who might have vainly attempted to play a hunch against him.

He delivered a tear-free address – although his voice twice cracked slightly – that he trimmed to 11 minutes. "Some of these guys have been long-winded, and



Though Herzog went into the Hall for his managing, his Hall of Fame induction exhibit displayed a number of mementos from his playing career, including a jersey he wore as an outfielder with the 1961-62 Baltimore Orioles.