

LI's Edward Stack ran Baseball's Hall of Fame for years and he has stories to tell from Babe Ruth to Pete Rose

By John Valentijohn.valenti@newsday.com July 9, 2022 5:00 am

Chances are even the most ardent baseball fan doesn't know his name.

But, though his coach at old Sea Cliff High School joked he couldn't catch a baseball with a bushel basket, for decades Edward W. Stack was a household name in the homes of the biggest figures in baseball history.

Babe Ruth's widow, Claire, considered him a friend. So did Casey Stengel. Stan Musial and his wife Lillian knew him by voice alone whenever he'd call. Yogi Berra and his wife, Carmen, called him "Blue Eyes."

He even mingled with U.S. presidents and visited them many times in the Oval Office, on the A-list for bill signings with Ronald Reagan after the two hit it off during a 1981 presidential luncheon with a bevy of baseball stars — including the "Say Hey Kid," Willie Mays.



Edward W. Stack at home in Port Washington on Thursday, July 7, 2022 Credit: Danielle Silverman

The former longtime chairman of the board of directors at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown — not to be confused with Edward W. Stack, the billionaire former CEO of Dick's Sporting Goods — recalled this week how, while working with legendary Boston Red Sox outfielder Ted Williams on the Hall of Fame Veterans Committee, he once stayed overnight at Williams' home in Citrus Hill, Fla.

"I wake the next morning to find Ted making breakfast for me," Stack said.

A native of Sea Cliff and longtime resident of Glen Head, Stack, 87, who now resides with wife Christina at The Harborside retirement community in Port Washington, began working with the Hall of Fame as an officer in 1961, serving as chairman of the board from 1977 to 2000. He played a role in multi-million-dollar expansions of the museum and its exhibits and archives, as well as some of its most controversial and groundbreaking moments —

among them the inclusion of former Negro League stars, beginning with Satchel Paige in 1971, and the permanent ban of Pete Rose in 1991.



Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig, left, and National Baseball Hall of Fame Chairman Edward Stack, right, present a plaque to Orlando Cepeda during the 1999 National Baseball Hall of Fame induction ceremony. Credit: AFP via Getty Images/DON EMMERT

Strange then that Stack never envisioned a life in baseball, let alone one so instrumental in safeguarding its legacy.

He survived a bout with polio, then, following graduation from Sea Cliff, attended Pace University in Manhattan, studying to be an accountant. He graduated on a Friday and began work for the Clark family, heirs to the Singer sewing machine fortune, on Monday.

It was Stephen C. Clark who helped establish the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1936 and the Clarks also founded other museums in Cooperstown, including the Farmer's Museum, the Fenimore Art Museum and the prestigious Otesaga Hotel. It wasn't long before Stack, who later became director of accounting for the Clark Estates, Inc., began spending summers in Cooperstown working with those museums — even meeting his wife, who worked summers at the Otesaga on her time off from classes at William & Mary.

“I have worked with Ed for many years, and he has always been a wonderful mentor to me,” Jane Forbes Clark, current Chairman of the Board of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, said in a statement. “In more than 60 years with the Hall of Fame, Ed has been deeply committed to maintaining its excellence and its relevance, and to protecting its integrity. His impact will remain with us for generations to come.”

Though retired, Stack still serves as a director or officer for 19 charitable and cultural organizations, among them the New York State Trooper Foundation, Salvation Army, Bassett Medical Center and the Mental Health Association of Nassau County.

Of lasting pride, he said, is that he was there when the Hall of Fame first opened its doors to Negro League players, who were kept out of Major League Baseball before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier with the Brooklyn Dodgers on April 15, 1947.

"It took a lot of years to get that corrected," he said of Negro League inclusion in the Hall, noting it was extensive

research that uncovered proof of the accomplishments of inductees like Paige, Josh Gibson, Judy Johnson, Cool Papa Bell, Buck Leonard, Martin Dihigo, and scores of others.



Ed Stack at Doubleday Field in Cooperstown with Willie Mays, and daughters Amy and Kim. Credit: Baseball Hall of Fame and Librar/Milo Stewart, Jr.

Still, Stack remains against the role of the Veterans Committee — now, the Era Committees — in many other elections to the Hall. He sees no need to overrule the Baseball Writers' Association of America to include players who failed to previously meet their 75-percent approval vote for inclusion. That list includes Yankees catcher Thurman Munson, who died in a 1979 in-season plane crash, or Yankees first-baseman Don Mattingly, whose career was cut short by injuries -- neither of whom are in the Hall.

"I'll probably get in trouble for saying this, but it [the selection process] ought to stay with the baseball writers and not go too far behind that . . . Why? Because it cheapens the process. I believe the Hall of Fame should be reserved for the best of the best."

Though Stack finds it hard to define who broke the rules during the performance-enhancing drug era — "It's hard to put your arms around it," he said. "I wish there was an easy way to deal with it. There isn't" — he believes stars like Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens, Mark McGwire, Sammy Sosa and Alex Rodriguez also should never be inducted into the Hall of Fame.

"These were guys who were superstars, we know they were superstars," he said. "But there are rules of the game of baseball and they're on every clubhouse door . . . and you've got to abide by them and once you start not abiding where do you draw the line?"

That reasoning is why Stack, as board chair, was behind the 1991 rule change in the Hall of Fame bylaws to bar inclusion in the Hall to any player banned from baseball.

Though back in February 1991, The New York Times reported Stack said the rule change was not aimed at Pete Rose, Stack said this week he saw the need to implement a new rule after Rose was banned by Major League Baseball in 1989, following allegations he'd bet on games.

Known as "Charlie Hustle" for his no-holds-barred playing style, Rose once had a 44-game hitting streak, starring with the Cincinnati Reds, Philadelphia Phillies and Montreal Expos in a 24-year career that saw him amass an all-

time record 4,256 career hits, breaking the record held by Ty Cobb, who was in the first Hall induction class with Walter Johnson, Christy Mathewson, Honus Wagner and Ruth.

"I knew Pete," Stack said. "And, I liked him. But Pete was rough and tough. He played the game rough and tough and he played his life rough and tough -- and that's why he got in trouble."

Should Rose ever get inducted into the Hall of Fame?

"Never," Stack said. "No, never . . . He broke baseball's rules."



John Valenti, a reporter at Newsday since 1981, has been honored nationally by the Associated Press and Society of the Silurians for investigative, enterprise and breaking news reporting, as well as column writing, and is the author of "Swee'pea," a book about former New York playground basketball star Lloyd Daniels. Valenti is featured in the Emmy Award-winning ESPN 30-for-30 film "Big Shot."