

Baltimore sculptor honors Brooksie



A statue of Brooks Robinson is unveiled Oct. 22 outside Oriole Park at Camden Yards in Baltimore. (CR/George P. Matysek Jr.)

Before the new statue of Baltimore's beloved Brooks Robinson was unveiled last weekend beneath a blast of black, orange and white confetti outside Oriole Park, the bronze behemoth rested in a foundry in Pietrasanta, Italy. Standing right next to the likeness of the Hall of Fame third baseman was a replica of Michelangelo's David.

Joseph Sheppard, the Baltimore sculptor who crafted the Robinson statue, remembered that a friend noticed the neighboring artwork and made a prescient observation:

"Florence has their David," the friend said. "Now, Baltimore has their Brooks."

Baltimore does indeed have its Brooks - a 1,500-pound, nine-foot homage to a man many consider to be the greatest third baseman of all time and one of Charm City's most beloved adopted citizens.

Sheppard, the man who sculpted the statue of Blessed Pope John Paul II in Baltimore and who painted a portrait of Pope Benedict XVI, called it an honor to be chosen to work on the figure. He examined nearly 100 photos of Robinson in action - choosing to depict Number Five standing at third base with ball in hand, ready to gun down a runner at first. The statue is aligned with the actual third base of Oriole Park, with Robinson facing first.

In recognition of Robinson's 16 Gold Gloves, a glittering glove of that hue is fitted over the figure's hand.

Sheppard told me that the baseball statue was "much more difficult" than the statue of Blessed John Paul II because it was so much bigger. By contrast, the papal figure is 850 pounds and stands seven feet tall.

On seeing the statue for the first time after its unveiling, an emotional Robinson declared it “beautiful” and called Sheppard “truly a genius.”

A convert to Catholicism who has supported the work of the Little Sisters of the Poor and other Baltimore charities, Robinson thanked a long string of supporters that included civic leaders, his wife and fans he described as “friends.”

“God has blessed me abundantly,” Robinson said.

And God has blessed us with Brooks.

Check out these photos and excerpts from Robinson’s speech:

[youtube=<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FF7DVDwO3Cw>]