

The Orioles' other Ironman dies at age 86



Baltimore Orioles Photo

The Baltimore Sun is reporting that Ernie Tyler, the Orioles' longtime umpire attendant who worked 3,819 consecutive home games at Memorial Stadium and Oriole Park, has died at age 86.

A graduate of Mount St. Joseph High School in Irvington, Mr. Tyler was a dedicated O's fan from the first moment the baseball team came to Baltimore in 1954.

Donna Koros Stramella, a former writer with The Catholic Review, profiled Mr. Tyler for the newspaper in 2000. That story is reprinted below.

The Orioles have more than one Iron Man in their midst.

While Cal Ripken, Jr. recently passed the 2,500 game mark, another member of the organization just one upped him - making the 3,000 consecutive game mark. Ernie Tyler started his streak in 1960 as an umpire attendant, and has worked every game since.

Mr. Tyler's career with the ball club actually started in 1954 at Memorial Stadium during the Orioles first season. He worked part-time for several years, moving into a full-time usher slot in 1958.

Even battles with serious health concerns haven't kept him from his work. Over the last decade, he has endured two surgeries - both during the off season. His 1995 operation for liver cancer was performed by Johns Hopkins' Dr. Keith Lillemoe. The physician went on to treat two other Orioles - current outfielder Eric Davis and former player Boog Powell.

The years have certainly not tarnished Mr. Tyler's enthusiasm for the game. His only challenge, he said, "is still being able to move fast enough at the tender age

of 74.” With his proximity to the batters box, the possibility of getting struck by a wayward ball is high.

“It’s important to stay alert at all times,” he added.

Although he has been beamed by a ball 4 or 5 times, he has never taken a serious hit.

“I’ve never really gotten a full smack,” he maintains. “I can get my hands up pretty quickly.”

He’s found another protection over the years – both on and off the field. As he prepared to enter the service at age 17, his mother presented him with a Miraculous Medal – which he still wears to this day.

“It’s protected me in everything,” he insisted. “I have a lot of faith in it.”

So much faith, in fact, that he has given all of his 11 children and 22 grandchildren Miraculous Medals.

Mr. Tyler admits a long-time passion for sports. A graduate of Mount St. Joseph High School, he played on the same football backfield with former Oriole and recently retired New York Mets general manager Frank Cashen.

Over the years, he has played baseball, softball, basketball and football. He coached Little League teams for some of his children, and he still finds time to play baseball with his grandchildren.

For many years now, the Tyler family has maintained a real presence within the Orioles organization. Seven of his children, as well as his wife of 52 years, Juliane, have worked for the club at one time or another, in jobs ranging from bat boy to ticket office attendant. His son, Jim, currently serves as Orioles clubhouse manager and another son, Fred, as visiting clubhouse manager. Neither have ever missed a game. Fred has another interesting connection to an Oriole player. As a senior at Bel Air High School, his single drove in the winning run to beat an Aberdeen High School pitcher named Cal Ripken, Jr. Both were named as All-Harford County players: Fred as shortstop and Cal as pitcher.

The family's interest in professional baseball came naturally as the children enjoyed "hanging out" at the stadium with dad, often getting homework assistance from players.

Currently members of St. Ignatius, Hickory, Mr. and Mrs. Tyler named their twin sons after their former parish - Ss. Philip and James. Retired from the state's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in 1988, Mr. Tyler currently finds himself in demand as a speaker (on the subject of longevity) at nursing homes and schools.

The ultimate diplomat, Mr. Tyler declined to play favorites when it comes to umpires, managers or Orioles. "They're all my favorites." But when pressed to cite the players he has most enjoyed watching over the years, he produces some familiar names: Brooks Robinson, Frank Robinson, Jim Palmer, Cal Ripken, Jr. and Brady Anderson. And the name of another well-known member of the organization comes to mind - announcer Rex Barney, who died during last season. "He'd sit with me for two hours before the game," Mr. Tyler remembered. "We'd talk about his no hitter every day."

The Orioles recently paid tribute to their long-time employee on the occasion of his 3,000 consecutive game. A pre-game ceremony and post-game party was attended by a total of 47 Tylers. The organization presented him with two tickets to Paris - a trip tentatively scheduled for late October, early November.

"If we get in the play-offs we won't be able to go until after the World Series," Mr. Tyler noted.

More than 30 years later, not much has changed from the early days. He still gets to the ball park on time and ready to work.

"If you get there 15 minutes early, you never have to worry about being late," he quipped.

He takes care of the umpires uniforms, equipment and guest tickets (they each get six per game). He covers the new balls with mud from the Delaware River - a silky, sand-free variety that is shipped in barrels to every Major League ball club.

"The new balls are smooth and shiny," he explained. 'They're too hard to control.'

Five minutes before the game, he takes his position in what has been described as the best seat in the house – a stool located on the field next to the backstop. After the game he spends about 20 minutes with the umpires as they watch controversial plays from the game video. But one constant has changed from his earlier days with the club – the commute. While the Tyler family once lived just two blocks from Memorial Stadium, they later moved to Bel Air, a change that Mr. Tyler describes as a "40 second walk to a 40 minute drive."

Despite the added drive time, he considers himself a fortunate man.

"There's nothing I don't like about my job," he insisted. "I've been in six World Series and nine play-off series. Everytime I walk out onto the field it's a great memory. I'm just happy being a part of the whole thing."