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Hall of Fame sportswriter Hal McCoy honored

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"Hal McCoy Day" was held Sunday from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Englewood Government Center as the city honored veteran Dayton Daily News sportswriter Hal McCoy, who resides in Englewood along with his wife Nadine.

Attendees got the chance to visit with McCoy and participate in a question and answer session in the Englewood Council Chambers.

McCoy is enshrined in the writer's wing of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and is the reigning Ohio Sportswriter of the Year, an honor bestowed upon him by a vote of the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Association. He is a 10-time winner of the award. He is also the only non-Cincinnati journalist in the Cincinnati Journalism Hall of Fame.

(Photo by Ron Nunnari) Local residents Jim and Jeanette Patton chat with Hall of Fame sportswriter Hal McCoy at the Englewood Government Center during Hal McCoy Day held Sunday from 2 to 4 p.m.

McCoy covered the Cincinnati Reds for 37 years but retired at the end of the 2009 season after the Dayton Daily announced it could no longer afford to cover the Reds on a day-to-day basis as it had in the past.

Former Mayor Ed Kemper introduced McCoy prior to the Q and A session. "Hal McCoy Day is being held in appreciation of all Hal has done for us Reds fans over the years," Kemper said.

Current Mayor Patricia Burnside also spoke. "As a former teacher I've been impressed by his writing skills. If you want your kids to become better students, have them read Hal's columns."

McCoy waxed poetic about his storied career, sharing funny anecdotes about his life on the road covering the Reds, along with some not so funny accounts about boorish behavior by some of the athletes and sports personalities that reacted badly to stories he has written over the years.

One of the first questions posed to him was whether or not he would be publishing a book.

"Yes, on my 37 years of covering the Reds. I need to get started on it before everyone forgets who I am," McCoy joked.

Another asked if he planned to keep writing his column despite his retirement.

"I will continue to write my 'Ask Hal' column every week as well as a blog two or three times a week. I plan to go to spring training for a week and to a few Reds games during the season," he said.

Asked which Reds team he thought was the greatest, McCoy responded quickly.

The 1975-76 era of the 'Big Red Machine.' That team garnered the most respect nationally. I started covering the Reds in 1973. I helped coin the phrase, The Big Red Machine. I took it for granted that the Reds would always be that good."

Another person asked if it the Reds made a mistake by moving their spring training to Arizona.

"To me it was a mistake. I love Sarasota and loved the people there. After the Reds left Sarasota, the city turned around and offered the same deal the Reds wanted to the Baltimore Orioles. I think Sarasota realized what a mistake they made after the fact, then turned around and gave Baltimore the deal the Reds wanted."

The Reds fortunes waned after the 1970s and a fan asked if Cincinnati screwed up in the late 70s by not getting involved in the free agent market.

"Yes. They didn't want to go along with it and they lost a lot of good players, and as a result they lost 101 games in 1982."

A fan asked McCoy if he thought shortening the baseball season from its current 162 game schedule would help attendance.

"No. Baseball attendance goes up every year. Even with our bad economy attendance was up again this year. Baseball loves its records and statistics, so shortening the season would screw that up."

Asked how tough it was for him to cover the Pete Rose gambling scandal in 1989, one could sense McCoy is still haunted by that point of his career.

"It was the toughest year of my life. Pete was a good friend and a great interview. You could open your notebook, ask him a question and he'd fill it. Pete and I had a falling out. It was a 'Kill the Messenger' type of deal. The management of the Daily News approached me and asked if I thought I could continue to cover the gambling story without bias because they knew I was close with Pete. That was kind of an insult. I assured them I could. Several writers at the paper were investigating the story and they would ask me to pose questions for them to Pete. I was just doing my job, but Pete took it the wrong way. We hadn't spoken since 1989, but a few years ago he was in Las Vegas signing autographs when we were there and my wife Nadine told me I should go in and say hi. I said, 'Are you crazy? He hates my guts.' But, I decided to give it a try. I walked up to the table as he was looking down signing something and said, 'How's it going old timer?' Pete looked up and his face went from white to every shade of red. He shook my hand and gave me an autographed photo and signed a jersey for me. I got \$300 worth of merchandise from Pete for free. He called the Reds trainer the next day and said, 'Guess who came to see me in Vegas? Hal McCoy. I thought he hated my guts.' We each thought the other hated the other."

Asked if Rose belongs in the Hall of Fame, McCoy answered in the affirmative.

"Pete belongs in the Hall of Fame. Absolutely. No one will ever do what he did. He got 4,256 hits. That's 200 hits a year for 20 years and then you're still 256 hits short. But I don't think you'll ever see him in the Hall of Fame."

McCoy shared many other insights about his career including his favorite managers, players and personalities as well as offers that had been extended to him to work for other publications over the years.

He left the Journal Herald, once printed by Cox as its morning paper while the Dayton Daily was the afternoon edition, to work for the Detroit Free Press in 1968.

"I came to Dayton and started working for Ritter Collett at the Journal Herald in 1962. I left to work for the Detroit Free Press in 1968, the year of the Detroit riots. I couldn't wait to leave. Si Burick called and asked if I wanted to come back to Dayton, and I said, 'Do you want me there tomorrow?' I got job offers from several afternoon papers over the

years that all have one thing in common... they're all out of business."

Asked if he would vote to put Barry Bonds in the Hall of Fame, McCoy said "no way."

"I won't vote for Barry Bonds. Same goes for Mark McGwire. Anyone that was involved in steroids won't get my vote. The way it's going these days I might not ever get to vote for anyone else."

One of the more interesting topics he discussed was how many women enjoy reading his columns.

"I've had more women than I can recall tell me they don't like sports, but they enjoy reading my column. I think that's one of the highest compliments you can ever have."

After the question and answer session, McCoy spent time signing autographs and talked one-on-one with those who attended.

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