



Sports

New Bern's Bobby Perry a local baseball hero

By Jordan Honeycutt

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Around the time New Bern's best-known sports icon, Walt Bellamy, was making his name on the basketball court in high school and later in the NBA, another talented athlete was doing the same thing on the baseball diamond.

At West Street High School (a black school during segregation), Bobby Perry played outfield and put a hurting on baseballs.

Perry, born in New Bern in 1933, died July 2 at the age of 83.

After he graduated from West Street in 1953, Perry began playing baseball in the minor leagues.

This was a time that was just six years after Jackie Robinson had broken the color barrier in MLB in 1947.

Two of Perry's West Street schoolmates Robert Phillips and Scobby Midgette recall memories of their friend.

"Oh Bobby was great, he could hit the ball so well and was fast," Midgette said.

"He was playing a game here and a New York Giants' scout came to watch another guy play and ended up so impressed with Bobby."

Phillips, who lived side-by-side to Perry and their mothers were best friends, went to school together and fought in the Korean War with his buddy as well.

"He started out with the Giants and then played all over the place in the minors and then went on to the Angels," Phillips said.

"I got to see him play in Washington D.C. when the Angels came and played the Senators."

Phillips said Perry was a hero here in New Bern when he came back into town.

On the back of Perry's 1964 Topps baseball card, it lists his career as follows: 1953 - OshKosh, Wis.; 1954-55 - Military Service (Korean War); 1956 - Muskogee, Okla.; 1957 - Danville, Va.; 1958 - Charlotte, N.C. and Springfield, Mass.; 1959 - Sacramento, Calif.; 1960-62 - Tacoma, Wash.; 1963 - Tacoma and Hawaii; 1963-64 - Los Angeles Angels.

Though Perry's Major League career spanned just two years with the Angels, his baseball career is filled with noteworthy moments.

"Bobby got traded to the Angels because the Giants had Willie Mays in centerfield," Midgette said.

Perry was "stuck" behind one of the greatest statistical players of all time in Mays on a Giants team that also had Willie McCovey and Orlando Cepeda.

In addition to getting to know Mays, Perry had a home run in his career that according to those close to them, he never forgot and didn't let them either.

"(The Angels) were playing the Yankees and Hall of Famer Whitey Ford was pitching," Phillips said.

"In his first at-bat against Whitey, Bobby hit a home run."

Perry's daughter, Ivette Perry-Jones said she also remembers her father bragging about that home run off Ford.

"Oh he was so proud of that," she said.

Perry's career MLB stats include a .266 batting average, 103 hits, 17 doubles, a triple, six home runs and 35 runs scored.

Phillips said that Perry just truly loved the game and still talked about baseball and watched it after he was done playing.

"He went and played winter ball down in Panama and when the Negro Leagues would barnstorm and come through New Bern, playing games at Kafer Park, if Bobby was in town, he'd play with them," Phillips said.

Phillips recalled seeing Mays hit a ball 500-plus feet in one game.

"He hit that thing all the way out and into the frog pond," Phillips said.

A group of friends would go up to Bojangles in the mornings and share stories and gather in friendship.

Phillips said that Perry often talked about the vast difference in what players make these days versus when he played.

"Bobby made \$1,300 a month," Phillips said.

"Now that was good money back then."

Phillips said that Perry worked at Cherry Point after his baseball career was through.

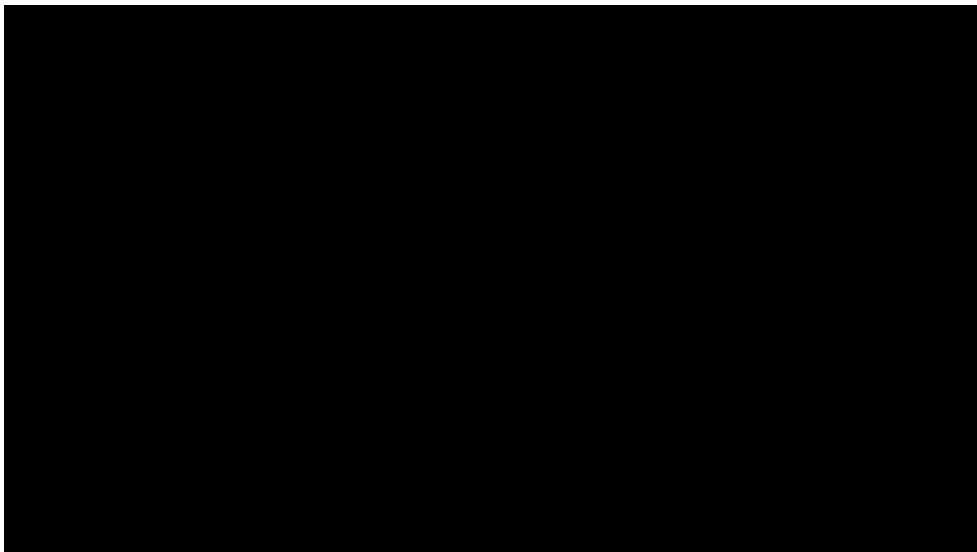
Phillips noted that he and Perry had been best friends for 75 years leading up to Perry's death July 2.



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