

The Last Inning

By STAN MUSIAL as told to Bob Broeg

Stan Musial bows out of baseball this year, leaving behind a record certain to establish him in the Hall of Fame. As his last inning approaches, here's what he can look back on:

Seven batting championships . . . three Most Valuable Player awards . . . five home runs in one day . . . the National League career record for doubles . . . a share in the major-league record for getting five-hits-a-game four times in one season . . . being one of only eight players to collect

I KNOW IT SOUNDS unbelievable, but to me the greatest thrill in baseball has been just putting on a big-league uniform day after day. So it figures that the toughest moment for me is taking it off for the last time.

Except for reunions or special occasions, I doubt that you'll see my red No. 6 after this season because the St. Louis Cardinals have said they plan to retire it—and I know that I have no intention of returning as manager or coach.

Managing is too tough. You have to be too many things to too many people. Mostly you have to be unpleasant more than I care to be. I never disliked anyone, not even the pitchers I tried to blast out of the box every time I stepped up to the plate.

You see, the kick out of just playing baseball was even greater to me than the satisfaction of having been a poor kid from western Pennsylvania who became famous and wealthy. Imagine getting paid so much to play a boy's game, a game other men regretfully outgrow only because they have to earn a living.

I'm proud that I've become prominent. I'm happy because my mother is pleased, my wife Lil, and our children—or at least three of our four. I'm afraid little Jeannie, just 1½, came along too late to see the "old man" hit one. Come to think of it, though, my roly-poly youngest may show me a little more respect than my son Dick did the evening I burst through the door, head high, after becoming the first player to hit five home runs in a double-header.

"Gee, Dad," said Dick, then 13. "they must have been throwing you fat pitches today!"

Dick is nearly 20 now, a track man and premedical student at Notre Dame University. I learned that blood really was thicker than water the first time I saw him play prep-school football, and watched with

great pride as he broke away on a long touchdown run.

I think I was more excited then than the day the Cardinals upset the New

York Yankees to win the World Series in 1942, my first full season in the majors. They say I almost bawled like a baby when Lil and I left New York for Donora that night. We had earned more in that World-Series week—\$6,000—than I'd been paid all season.

He ranks second only to Babe Ruth in extra-base hits and behind only Ruth and Ty Cobb in total bases. He has played in more consecutive games (895) than any other National Leaguer.

Here, then, is Stan's farewell to baseball, the game he loved and the game he played as few did in the long history of the national pastime.

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My daughters Geraldine, 15, and Janet, 10, have seen to it, too, that my retirement won't come as a complete letdown—they've never let me get too high! Three years ago when the Cardinals made a surprising pennant bid, and I won my seventh batting title, I might have had my ego fattened in some homes.

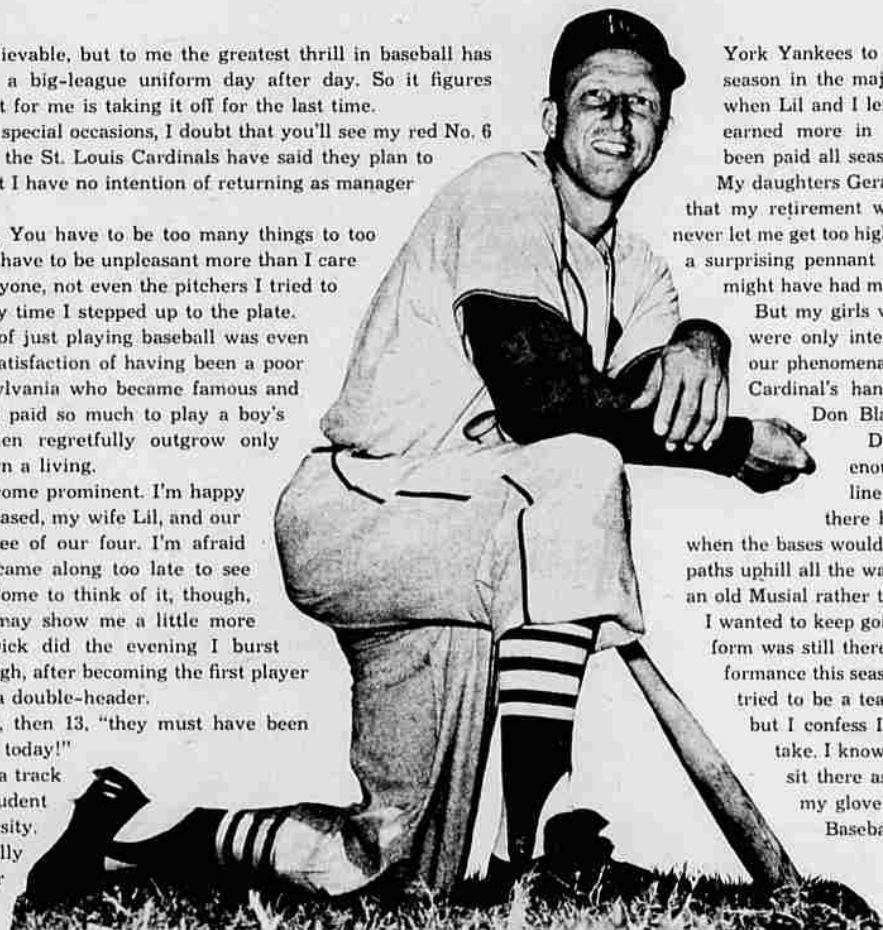
But my girls weren't interested in my .351 average. They were only interested in having me bring home to dinner our phenomenal rookie pitcher Von McDaniel, 18, and the Cardinal's handsome bachelor who played second base, Don Blasingame, another bobby-sox idol.

During those wonderful years when I was fast enough to get some "leg" hits along with the line drives against and over the fences, I knew there had to be a day when the speed would go, when the bases would seem more than 90 feet apart, and the base paths uphill all the way. But it was hard, I confess, to admit I was an old Musial rather than the Musial of old.

I wanted to keep going because the thrill of putting on that uniform was still there. I especially wanted to put together a performance this season so I could bow out gracefully. I've always tried to be a team man first and to consider myself second, but I confess I found riding the bench extremely hard to take. I know now, even more than before, that I couldn't sit there as coach or manager, powerless to help with my glove or bat. I'm just not a cheerleader.

Baseball was always fun. Not now, though—not when there's a question whether I can help or hurt a club or there's a doubt that I return value, dollar for dollar, with interest.

If this, then, is to be my last inning and the time to take off my uniform, I at least feel that the whole experience was really great while it lasted. I hope I'll be remembered just as fondly as I'll remember baseball.



COVER:

The camera of Ozzie Sweet captures the beauty of Zorada Johnson from Sarasota, Fla. She's the third Miss Somebody in our series, and her picture story is on page 10.

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