

## **A Legend and a Legacy**

For many baseball fans, the name of Willie Horton has a bit of magic attached to it. A Detroit native, he played as an outfielder for the Tigers from 1963 – 1977. He signed with them at the young age of eighteen following an outstanding baseball career at Detroit’s Northwestern High School. This “hometown hero” and former Tigers’ great was named special assistant to the President of the Tigers’ organization in 2002.

Willie Horton’s legendary status is also derived from his commitment to others. He has received numerous awards for significant contributions to young people, education and the United States Infantry. Mr. Horton was awarded the prestigious Order of St. Maurice, from the United States Army Infantry. Nominees for the Order of St. Maurice must represent the highest standards of integrity, moral character, professional competency and dedication to duty.

He was recognized for his significant contributions, such as hosting baseball clinics for families of deployed soldiers over seas, through the Legends of Baseball USO tour. Mr. Horton has been a speaker at Fort Benning for Martin Luther King Jr. Day and at graduation services for soldiers upon completion of basic training. He has also set up scholarship funds to assist young men and women with their education.

Last summer, my husband and I had the chance to sit next to the legendary Willie Horton at Comerica Park during a Tigers game. As you might imagine, he was an encyclopedia of baseball lore

and information. He makes the game of baseball come alive through his anecdotes and batting tips (which were a thrill for my husband).

I watched as Mr. Horton cheerfully autographed numerous baseball cards, hats, shirts and any other items brought to his attention. He was especially patient and kind to the numerous children vying for his attention. He displayed an engaging personality and a warm smile while interacting with the public. After observing this, I remarked that I was extremely impressed by his public demeanor.

In contrast, I told him the story of an experience we had at a spring training camp when Jose Canseco refused to autograph his home run ball for our son. Mr. Horton replied that his father had always taught him to be appreciative of and thankful for the support and interest of his fans. His wife always believed in that philosophy and has always been very understanding when fans have approached them while out to dinner or at events.

So, in addition to being a legend, Willie Horton is also a legacy created by his parents . . . a legacy of being a first class human being and a tribute to his family and his profession. He is another great example of how we can reinvent ourselves throughout different phases of our life. So, on a beautiful Michigan summer day we experienced a little bit of magic which surrounds that great American past time called baseball. And we met a Legend and a Legacy all wrapped up in one person!

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