

Diamond Resorts Tournament of Champions

Friday, January 22, 2021
Lake Buena Vista, Florida, USA
Tranquilo Golf Course

John Smoltz

Quick Quotes

Q. John, we were just hoping you could give us your thoughts on the passing of Hank Aaron and what he meant to the game and you personally.

JOHN SMOLTZ: Yeah, you know, being a lifelong Braves player and seeing Hank every year at spring training or at the stadium was something special. Never took it for granted. Getting a chance to be in the Hall of Fame with him is something that, you know, I'll never forget.

Hank was the type of guy that every time you saw him he had a smile on his face. Loved the game. Obviously as far as I'm concerned, the truest homerun hitter in the game in baseball history.

Sad day. Been a sad week for baseball Hall of Famers and for the Atlanta Braves with the passing of Sutton and Niekro and now Hank Aaron.

You just knew every year was going to start out good when you got to spring training and Hank was sitting there. I just loved being around him.

Q. What is your favorite Hank story?

JOHN SMOLTZ: You know, Hank was so unassuming. There is not a superstar I've ever been around that, A, went through as much as he did, both in life and in the game, and he just was a gentle guy that was there to say hello. You felt like you were in the presence of greatness every time you walked in.

I think my memory of Hank is going to be twofold. It's going to be at the Hall of Fame it was Hank Aaron, Joe Morgan, and Frank Robinson. They all had walkers. They were coming to take a picture down at the end of the lawn like we do every year at the Hall of Fame. Somebody started announcing them coming down like a race.

You could see each one had that little desire, and I think Hank turned it on at the end and I think he ended up



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winning. So that's three iconic people obviously beat up by baseball and life, and we're just going to miss them.

The Hall of Fame, I don't know when we're going to get together, but when we do, it's going to be a long list of fallen Hall of Famers.

Q. You mentioned being a lifelong brave.

JOHN SMOLTZ: Yeah.

Q. So you saw him at the beginning; seen him at the end. How did your relationship maybe grow with him? And I'm also curious, the hitter/pitcher relationship, how did you pick his brain, if at all?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Well, you know, obviously guys like Chipper Jones and Andy Jones would have a lot more luxury at that in being able to pick his brain.

Again, Hank was just never in the forefront. He was fine just being around and seeing guys and coming up and shaking their hand, talking baseball if he wanted to talk baseball. I just kind of -- you get goosebumps when you realize who you're amongst. When you think about the Atlanta Braves it's Hank Aaron, and after that it's Phil Niekro. No questions about it.

That is a memory that I had for 21 plus years. And as I retired, again, getting to see him at the Hall of Fame every year was such a joy to go up to him and shake the hand of a guy that transformed the game of baseball.

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