



CATCHING UP WITH MARC HILL

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“We’re all in this together. I think that when this is over, America and baseball will both come back stronger than ever. So will our humanity. Just like with the wars and the Great Depression, this virus has taught us all just how much life is really worth.”

Such was the extremely optimistic attitude of former St. Louis Cardinals catcher Marc Hill in April of 2020. At the time, the Covid-19 virus had forced a suspension of MLB spring training and delayed opening day. To say that the immediate future of baseball was uncertain would have been an understatement. That same time period also found me working on an article for the MHS newsletter titled "The Truth About Americans And Baseball". Hill graciously agreed to provide insight for the article.

Now, roughly seven months later and with the World Series officially in the record books, I sat down with Hill once again to get his take on the shortened schedule, the adjusted postseason, the cardboard fans, and the piped-in crowd noise that characterized America’s favorite pastime in 2020, a year that saw the postponement of more than 40 games due to the pandemic. Hill admitted that he had doubts during his interview back in April as to the wisdom of proceeding with the baseball season, but in retrospect he is now glad that the effort was made.

“I’m really proud of the players who decided to play,” said Hill. “I’m also proud of the ones who decided not to. Both groups made the best decision they could in light of their own individual circumstances. That takes courage either way.”

Hill added that he and his family have continued to remain pretty isolated, and that he understands why others would do the same thing. He also sympathizes with those who still believe that going ahead with the season was irresponsible compared to the potential risk.

"I know it may not seem like it was worth it for just 60 games or so," said Hill. "Still, I am proud of baseball and the other sports that decided to continue playing. Things are tough, but when you don't have any sports things are even tougher."

While the cardboard fans and the piped-in crowd noise may have turned some people off to the 2020 season, Hill said he looks at things differently.

"Cardboard fans forced the players to dig deeper," said Hill. "It's harder to keep motivated without real fans. I don't know how they did it. More than that, I think in 50 years people will look back on those players who braved the 2020 season in a heroic light. Baseball has always bounced back. I think the 2020 season will shine. It's going to make history."

Hill said he also foresees a day when baseball and other sports can return to something approaching business as usual. "This season I think the players were more frustrated than they were happy," said Hill. "Fortunately, I think the true fans stayed supportive and the stands will be full again one day. One thing I've learned from sports is that the people always return."

While Hill was optimistic about the future of sports, and of baseball more specifically, he pulled no punches when it came to what really concerns him. "These riots, shootings, and killings have to stop," said Hill. "It scares me. There is so much hatred, selfishness, and greed out there right now."

Hill said he believes all of those issues were lurking under the surface to begin with, but that economic conditions and the protective measures necessitated by Covid-19 exacerbated them.

"I know people are tired of this, but the virus is still out there and it's still killing people," said Hill. "People are tired and they're throwing in the towel, but we need to trust the experts and stay positive. That goes for the virus and the economy."

Hill added that he would like to see athletes make more frequent public service announcements, something he said he has seen decline since the 1980s. Since sports figures are often afforded the same status as medical and economic experts, if not more, Hill said he thinks an opportunity was missed in 2020, and that athletes were in a strong position to inform the public and to keep them calm and hopeful.

In the meantime, Hill said he is happy to have had his doubts back in April largely proven wrong, and that baseball and other sports did the best they could in such unprecedented circumstances. He added that he looks forward to what the future holds in a post-pandemic world.

"I'm choosing to stay positive," said Hill.