

A GENTLEMAN ON AND OFF THE FIELD

During my time at Seneca High School it was common practice for the yearbook to contain quotations beside the pictures of each of the graduating seniors. Beside my picture was the quote “great leaders are men that know their fates before other men do” While I question how well that quote described me I can certainly say that my classmate Bill Earls ’69 had a quote beside his picture that truly fit. It reads as follows:

“The flowering of civilization is the finished man, the man of sense, of grace, of accomplishment, of social power—the gentleman.”

I have known Bill Earls since the first grade and we have interacted in a variety of ways over the years. Having been given a strong moral and spiritual upbringing, Bill has always been the gentleman as described in the quote. And at no time did I see his social grace more in evidence than in a Senior Division Little League baseball game that we both were playing in. My team (the Reds) was at bat and Bill was playing shortstop for his team (the Mets). I had just gotten on base via a walk and was happy to be on first base given that my hitting ability was almost nonexistent. However, I did have good speed and as such was given the sign by my coach to steal second base. As the pitcher delivered his pitch I took off for second base and stole it successfully. While sliding in I saw that the catcher had thrown the ball into centerfield and so I got up and ran to third base. By then in an exuberant frame of mind now that I was at third base (again, a destination I seldom reached due to my lack of hitting ability) I took a big turn thinking I might be able to score. It was at that point that I had a rude awakening.

As I made the big turn between third base and home plate, Bill quietly walked behind me and tagged me out. He had had the ball in his possession for some time and by using the “hidden ball trick” was just waiting for me to lose focus as to what was going on in the game. Needless to say I was humiliated. I went to the bench not sure how my coaches and teammates would react to me. It was then that Bill set the tone so as not to embarrass me. Upon tagging me out he simply turned, threw the ball back to the pitcher, and ran back to his shortstop position. He did not taunt me or embarrass me in any way. And because of the example he set I found that my coaches and teammates accepted my mistake and were ready to help support me in moving forward .

In an era when taunting and trash talking seem to be on the rise in all sports, perhaps athletes regardless of age should follow the example that was modeled by Bill Earls that day. For in many ways athletics are a teacher as to how to lead a productive life. Regardless of what the sports world often wants us to believe “life is not a zero sum game.’ May each of you be a winner in the game of life.

Sam Denny ’69