

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

Good day everyone ... it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

The plaque at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York reads: "The greatest shortstop in baseball history, known as the "Flying Dutchman", retired in 1917, having scored more runs, made more hits and stolen more bases than any other player in the history of the National League". His name was Honus Wagner, and he was born, raised, lived and died in Carnegie, Pennsylvania -- down the road apiece from Pittsburgh where he played. When baseball scout Jim Wright came to the Wagner home in Carnegie, he was looking for Al Wagner. Al insisted that Wright take his brother Honus along -- and baseball got the Flying Dutchman for five bucks a week and board. That winter, Ed Barrow, later to become a Hall of Fame baseball executive, heard about Honus Wagner in a Pittsburgh saloon, went to take a look at him, and was surprised to find an awkward-looking boy with hands like hams, gangling arms and bow-legs. Figuring he was doing something foolish, Barrow signed him up anyhow, and the next year sold his contract to Louisville of the National League. Until Stan Musial came along from Donora, Pennsylvania -- Wagner held almost every lifetime record of importance in the National League. He ground out game after game for twenty years, like a sausage maker stringing out perfect products. He batted .300 or more for 17 years; led the league in stolen bases five times, and at the time of his retirement led the all time National League list in games, times at bat, runs, hits, singles, doubles and triples. Right-handed, he hit the ball "where they weren't" -- to all fields. It is doubtful if any player in history had a better arm, and although a shortstop, Honus could play anywhere. John McGraw said about the Dutchman from Carnegie that "in completing double-plays he had no equal; he had a sixth sense about baseball

and loved the game for its pure amusement". This was often corroborated to me by the late Pennsylvania Governor Jim Duff of Carnegie. When Wagner finished a game in Pittsburgh, he'd take the trolley to Carnegie and play in the twilight league there for the sheer fun of playing. Duff played on one of the teams. Wagner's bowed legs became a national trademark; before Babe Ruth he was the games most popular player, and genuinely modest and shy about his talents. Before he was 12 he had loaded coal into cars in the pits; this son of a Prussian coal miner. When World War I broke out with Germany, Grantland Rice wrote about war and Wagner: "He leads no mighty army to the field; he storms no gory trench by hill or plain; he wears no flashing sword or shining shield; to hold his place amid the crimson rain; he sends no shrieking shapnel down the lea; he aims no blighting siege gun at the wall; but at the end his epitaph will be -- "Here rests the noblest German of them all." Honus Wagner -- rated in his day baseball's greatest player. He died in 1955 -- one of the noblest Pennsylvania sportsmen of them all.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.