

MSBL Player A Witness to Phillies History

by Jeff McGaw

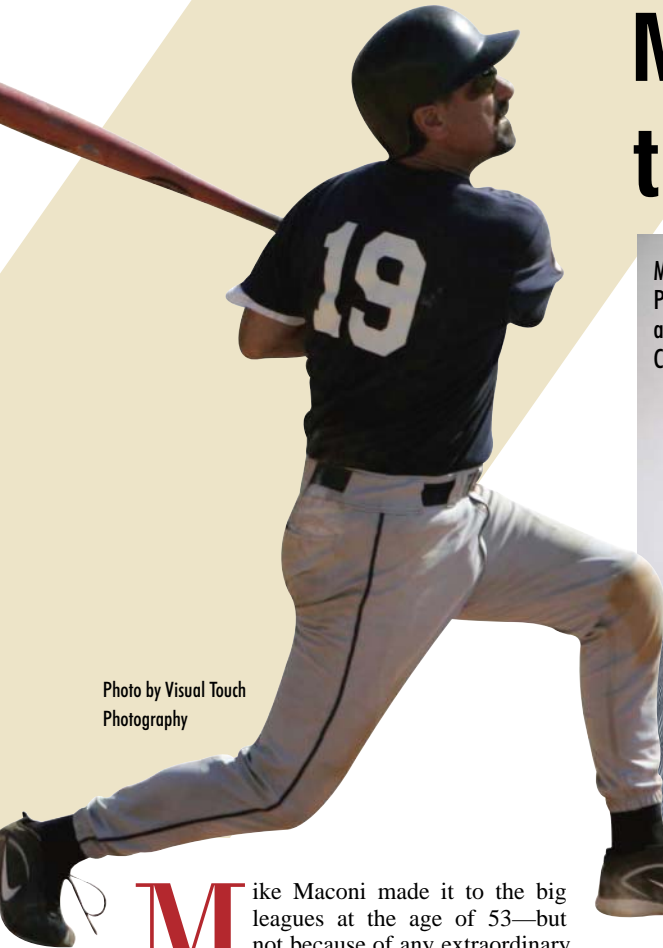
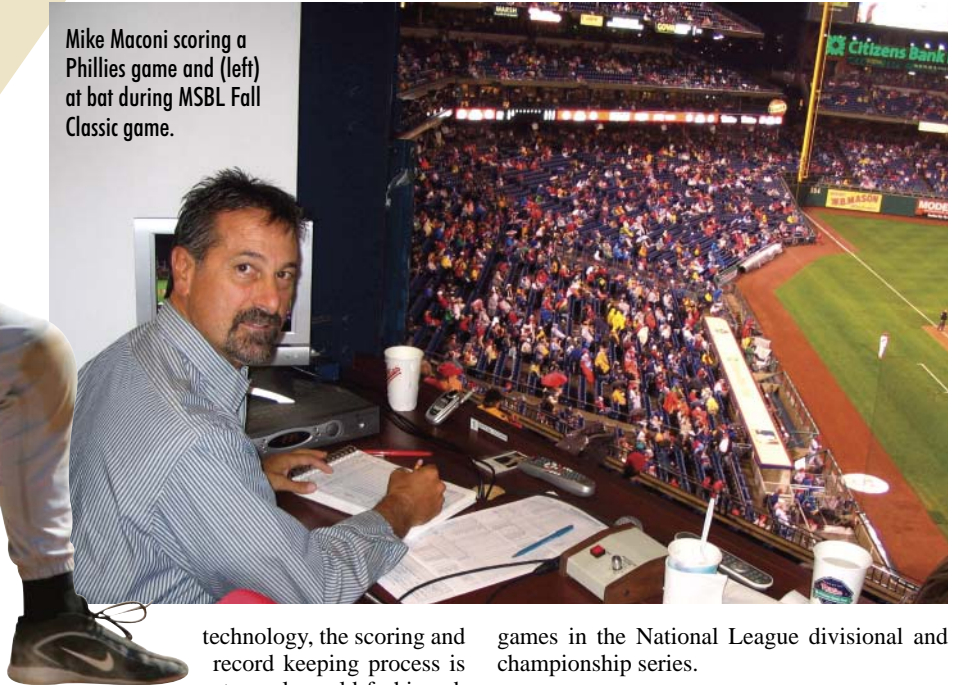


Photo by Visual Touch Photography

Mike Maconi scoring a Phillies game and (left) at bat during MSBL Fall Classic game.



Mike Maconi made it to the big leagues at the age of 53—but not because of any extraordinary ability to hit, catch or throw.

A longtime player in both the South Jersey and Tri-State MSBL, and a catcher with admirable baseball skills, Mike Maconi was hired by Major League Baseball in 2005 to be the official scorer for the Philadelphia Phillies.

Like most kids growing up in New Jersey, Maconi dreamed of stadium lights and the crack of a wood bat, not ceiling lights and the scritch-scratch of a wood pencil, but he's not complaining.

He works in Citizens Bank Park in Philadelphia. He occupies seat number one in press row, arguably the best seat in the house. He has witnessed some of the greatest moments in the history of the Phillies franchise, and every time he punches the clock he makes baseball history—literally.

The scorekeeper's job is to chronicle exactly what happens on the field, down to the last put-out, assist, ball, strike, hit batter and balk. He decides if the ball off the glove is a hit or an error, whether a run is earned or unearned, and sometimes whom to credit with the win.

On a handful of occasions, when a pitcher has taken a no-hitter into the fourth or fifth inning, reporters and others will slink by and ask Maconi if he's getting nervous. A scorekeeper's decision about a hit or an error could make or break a no-no. "Hey," Maconi responds. "I'm not out there throwing the pitches. I'm nervous at all."

Scoring symbols and markings, the scorers stock and trade, become the official record of baseball history. Oddly, in this age of advanced

technology, the scoring and record keeping process is strangely old-fashioned.

Pencils, pens, paper score sheets, and Bic White-Out correction are standard tools of the profession.

At game's end, Maconi totals every offensive, defensive and pitching statistic, records attendance, elapsed game time, temperature and weather conditions, and notes the umpires' names.

That information is then hand copied onto to a special sheet and faxed to the Elias Sports Bureau where, some speculate, a dedicated team of monks chisels them into granite.

Ironically, Maconi must squelch his genetic predisposition to clap and yell in support of the Phillies, at least while he's working. "You're not supposed to show too much emotion up there," he said. It's easy to do, he added. "I call 'em like I see 'em."

Maconi spent 10 years in the minors as a head scorekeeper for the Trenton Thunder (formerly a Boston Red Sox AA affiliate and now a New York Yankee affiliate). He left in 2006. He heard about the Phillies' opening through his friend and current television "voice of the Phillies," Tom McCarthy.

One of four scorers when he was hired originally, Maconi was promoted to head scorekeeper in 2008, prompting more than one reporter to suggest that Maconi is the Phillies' good luck charm. "I don't believe that," Maconi said. "It's all about what happens on the field."

Maconi, who works a regular job as the Director of Facilities Operations for Rider University in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, scored 44 of the Phillies' 81 regular season home games in 2009, and all of the home

games in the National League divisional and championship series.

Behind the Scenes

Mike Maconi doesn't advertise the fact that he's the head scorekeeper for the Philadelphia Phillies, but occasionally friends will mention it during an introduction. "Then they're all over me," Maconi said. "They'll say 'I'd love to have your job,'" he said.

It's not hard to understand why.

There are tens of thousands of Phillies fans who work in windowless cube farms and whose only connection to the team—aside from a lifetime of rooting for them—is a Phillies pennant and a Chase Utley bobble head.

When Maconi steps out of the Press elevator on his way to work, he literally walks through a Phillies baseball museum. Famous jerseys are under glass, including Harry Kalas's dress shirt. Posters and photographs of great Phillies moments abound. Maconi's favorite piece of nostalgia is the old wood sign from Connie Mack Stadium that hangs in the current press box that states "No Cans or Bottles Allowed in Press Box."

Never mind the memorabilia. Baseball royalty is all around Maconi. He routinely bumps into "Sarge," (TV color commentator Gary Matthews). Former manager Dallas Green, Larry Anderson, former GM Pat Gillick, various Phillies executives, baseball journalist Peter Gammons, announcers Dave Campbell and Ron Darling, former Yankee and Mariner relief pitcher-turned-broadcaster Jeff Nelson and former Dodger manager Tom Lasorda have all been spotted. Maconi knew Harry Kalas, a saintly figure in Philadelphia.

Maconi, who umpires amateur ball, enjoys

talking with former big league umpire Rich Garcia when he's around. Garcia is an umpiring supervisor for Major League Baseball umpires, but most know him as a footnote in baseball history: Garcia was the umpire who ruled Derek Jeter's fly ball a home run despite interference from a 12-year-old boy named Jeffrey Maier during game one of the 1996 ALCS against Baltimore.

Just before the press room door on the left is a long folding table stacked with media handouts. Reporters, commentators and columnists in search of fodder use these handouts to find out everything from a team's batting average on artificial turf to a simple update on Chan Ho Park's hamstring.

Without breaking stride, Maconi grabs two crucial handouts: the day's starting lineups and the teams stat sheet.

Maconi's office has just one window, but it provides a direct line of sight to every blade of

grass in Citizen's Bank Park, and a breathtaking view of the Philadelphia skyline beyond the outfield.

It's a cool job, Maconi said. "They pay me to watch baseball."

Scorekeeping

"Sometimes I'm happy with a quick, 2-0 game," Maconi said, adding that some games are more challenging than others.

By contrast, there are games like the one on September 30, 2009, when the Phillies beat the Astros 10-3 and clinched a third, consecutive division title. That game provided more than its share of scorekeeping Pepto-Bismol moments.

The first booth review of a homer at Citizen's Bank Park occurred that night on a home run—one of two—by normally meek-hitting Astro catcher J.R. Towles.

An errant throw to second base by Astro pitcher Brian Moehler in the Phillies'

fourth inning posed what for some would be a scorekeeping conundrum: Chase Utley scored on the errant throw, but Maconi soon determined the run to be earned because, as it turned out, Utley would have scored by natural means later in the inning.

In the seventh inning, Pedro Feliz charged a Carlos Lee bouncer, but his throw pulled Ryan Howard off the bag. Error, Maconi ruled. Later, a Houston Astros representative, addressing Maconi as "sir," politely asked if a review of the play might result in it being scored a hit rather than an error. Maconi assured him it was reviewed and that it was an error.

The Astros used five pitchers that night and so did the Phillies, but because starter Pedro Martinez only threw four innings, Maconi had to figure out whom to credit with the win. Kyle Kendrick, with three innings of two-hit, no-run ball, got the win.

That night ended when Phillies reliever Brad Lidge, confidence shaken by a string of blown saves, induced Lance Berkman to ground out to end the game. The place was nuts with fireworks and the screaming, but Maconi hardly noticed. He was nose down in the scorebook grinding out totals and announcing them over the press box loudspeaker.

As Phillies players poured bubbly on the Harry Kalas memorial sign in left field that night, Maconi managed only a glance as he busily transferred game totals to the Elias Sports Bureau fax sheet.

"When a guy hits a home run, I have to announce the hit, what pitch they hit the homer off of, and I'm writing this all down in my book. By the time I look up, the guy is usually in the dugout; I've missed the whole play. That's what's so odd about my job—I don't get to see that stuff. I hear the fans cheering, but I'll miss the whole running of the bases."

Working On His Birthday

Many people in many jobs would take their birthday off, but not Maconi. He was there in seat number one on his 56th birthday. The date was October 27, 2008—the night the Phillies became world champions.

"When Lidge struck out Eric Hinske to end the game, the place went nuts," Maconi said. "It was deafening." Five minutes passed before Maconi could deliver his official post game totals to the assembled media over the press room loudspeaker. As usual, Maconi missed the celebration.

Much later that night, he headed out to his car. "People were still partying in the parking lot," Maconi said. The revelers correctly deduced, from the presence of his briefcase and casual business attire, that Maconi was somebody official.

They asked, and he confessed.

So, on the night of his 56th birthday, euphoria in the air, revelers who did not want the night to end hoisted the official Phillies scorekeeper upon their shoulders, and for a few minutes a kid named Mike Maconi was on top of the world. ■

Maconi scores a Phillies game at Citizen's Bank Park.

