



Generosity Carries Young Fan to World Series, Hall of Fame

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WASHINGTON _ When he handed Mark McGwire back his 56th home run ball last season, then-11-year-old Jason Duncan of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., recalls, McGwire looked like he was about to cry.



But all McGwire told him, Jason said, was "it was a good idea to give it back."

Now, Duncan is being honored for his unselfishness with tickets to this season's first World Series game, courtesy of a new television show. Duncan was the first of eight fans to return home-run balls to McGwire during the record-breaking 1998 season. Duncan's generosity also won him a chance to help other kids in his hometown, the overwhelming pride of his parents and his picture in the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

"I got more out of it," Duncan said, "than I would have if I had kept it."

Duncan and his family won the tickets to the World Series game after his mother, Melissa Beaudry, wrote an essay to the television show "More Than A Game" telling of her son's generosity and its ripple effects. The show is a new cable television series from Raycom Sports. It highlights examples of role models, good sportsmanship and other human-interest topics. Duncan will be featured the weekend of Nov. 13.

Duncan, who describes himself as a "pretty good" Little League player, is looking forward to going to the first World Series game. He's rooting for the Red Sox, "I just like them," he said.

But the thing he'll remember the most, he said, was getting to meet McGwire. Added his mother: "Jason was just in awe."

Duncan caught his historic baseball at the Marlins v. Cardinals game at Pro Player Stadium in Miami, Fla., Sept. 1, 1998. McGwire had knocked his 56th home run, tying Hack Wilson's 1930 record, into the tarp-covered stands near Duncan and his family. A slew of fans scrambled across the tarp to get the ball. But Duncan dove underneath, crawled below the stand and grabbed the ball as it rolled off the tarp.

In her essay that won the trip to the World Series, Beaudry tells how the family was quickly ushered to the Cardinals' locker room. On their way, wrote Beaudry, "a man in a suit" flashed \$5,000 at Duncan, offering to buy the ball on the spot. Team executives told Duncan that McGwire would like to have the ball. His parents left the choice to Duncan.

"We believe that the naivety of being 11 and his love of baseball," Beaudry wrote, contributed to a trend of other people returning other home run baseballs to Mark McGwire."

As his first reward, the Cardinals gave Duncan an autographed baseball, team jersey and bat. But Duncan was already thinking of how to use his good fortune to help others. He asked for a second autographed ball. In a family tradition, he has donated it to a Fort Lauderdale charity auction. The ball was the highest selling item at the auction, raising \$5,000 for the Ann Storck Center for mentally and physically handicapped children, Beaudry said.

Duncan also became a minor celebrity, appearing in the news nationwide. The Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., honored him and other fans who returned balls by putting their pictures in a special exhibit. Duncan and his family went to see the exhibit in August.

"It was really exciting," Duncan said.

Eric Stroll, assistant curator at the Hall of Fame library, describes the exhibit as a celebration of unselfishness of fans. "We felt that people like Jason and the other fans that returned the balls showed the best part of the sport," he said.

Duncan, now 12, expresses no regrets about returning the ball. His classmates, he said, teased him about giving it up. But to Duncan, the ball simply belonged to McGwire. Said Duncan: "He earned it."

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