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Manuel manages to join quirky Phillies company

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By Rich Westcott, Special to the Times



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It doesn't take a math whiz to figure out where Charlie Manuel ranks on the all-time list of Phillies managers. The numbers are easily understandable.

They show that Manuel has joined the Little General, the Father of Baseball, and the guy who claimed that "even Napoleon had his Watergate," as the most successful managers in Phillies history.

When he won his 432nd game recently, Manuel moved into fourth place on the team's all-time victories list for managers, trailing only Gene Mauch (646), Harry Wright (636), and Danny Ozark (594). Manuel, in his fifth season, reached 432 faster than the other three.

By moving past Jim Fregosi, Manuel, who at 65 is the oldest man to ever manage the Phillies, put himself in line for some other milestones. He could become the team's first manager to win 85 or more games five years

in a row. Most likely, he'll also become only the second manager in club history to win three straight division titles, joining Ozark (1976-78), who is the only one to win 100 or more regular-season games (and did so in back-to-back seasons).

Of course, Manuel added his name to the most distinguished list when last season he joined Dallas Green in the exclusive World Series championship club. Only four others — Pat Moran, Eddie Sawyer, Paul Owens, and Fregosi — had so much as an opportunity to join that duo by winning National League pennants.

Manuel, however, refuses to take credit for his lofty status.

“The players are the ones who win the games for us,” he said. “When we win a championship or I reach a milestone or get an award, it’s because they made it possible.”

At times criticized for his on-field moves and occasionally ridiculed for his earthy mannerisms during his first few seasons as the Phillies’ boss, Manuel always harbored the notion that winning a championship was possible.

“When I was first hired to manage the club, I figured that we could win,” he said. “That’s because I had seen some of those guys like (Chase) Utley and (Ryan) Howard when I was traveling through the minors.”

Manuel was schooled in the organization’s personnel as a special assistant to former general manager Ed Wade. As he scouted Utley, Howard, Cole Hamels and other prospects, Manuel “could see that that they were going to be special players. I knew what the club had, and I figured if we could put the right pieces together, we could win. So when I took the job as manager, I was very excited.”

For the affable Manuel, managing the Phillies has been more than a highly successful venture. It has placed him squarely in the midst of a most unusual group.

The Phillies have had 51 managers (counting interims) since the team was established in 1883. Only 13 managers have held the job for four years or more, and the same number have had winning records with the club. Forty had no previous managerial experience when hired, and 31 never managed in the big leagues again after leaving the Phils.

Forty-two played in the majors, 21 with the Phillies.

When you go beyond the numbers, it is quite a collection of personalities.

The Phillies have been managed by a man, Bill Shettsline, who went from office boy, to ticket-taker, to manager, and ultimately to team president. Shettsline was a portly man (he weighed more than 300 pounds) who lived for many years in Glenolden.

The team has been led by a former college professor (Sawyer), an offseason vaudeville singer (Red Dooin), a practicing dentist (Doc Prothro), an alleged bigamist (Arthur Irwin), a former medical-school student (George Stallings), three future umpires (Bob Ferguson, Billy Nash, Chief Zimmer), and a guy in Hans Lobert who as a player raced against a horse around the bases, stumbling as he crossed second and ultimately losing by a nose.

Irwin also coached at Penn, where he had an outfielder and future novelist named Zane Grey. Lobert coached baseball at West Point, while Jack Coombs spent 24 years coaching at Duke, where one of his players was longtime Dick Groat, the 1960 National League Most Valuable Player while starring for Pittsburgh Pirates manager and Delco legend Danny Murtaugh.

Short-term Phillies managers Coombs and Stuffie McInnis were former stars of the Philadelphia Athletics.

Hugh Duffy, owner of the highest one-season batting average in major-league history (.440), managed the Phillies. So did the son of a former Phillies player (Terry Francona), two All-Star shortstops (Fregosi and Larry Bowa), and three future Hall of Famers (Wright, Duffy, and Bucky Harris). Two of the Phils' greatest catchers, Dooan and Jimmie Wilson, and the team's six-time N.L. home-run champion, Gavvy Cravath, also managed the club.

Three full-time managers — Shettsline, Wilson, and Lee Elia — were Philadelphia natives. Lobert and Green came from northern Delaware.

The Phillies' original owner, Al Reach, managed the team for 11 games in 1890 when Wright suffered a case of temporarily blindness. In his absence, left-handed catcher Jack Clements and rookie shortstop Bob Allen also managed the team.

Wright, whose tombstone in a Philadelphia cemetery dubs him the "Father of Baseball," had been manager in 1869 of baseball's first all-professional team, the Cincinnati Red Stockings. A former cricket player from England, he is credited with introducing flannel uniforms, knickered pants, and colored stockings.

Ferguson, the Phillies' first manager, lasted 17 games before getting fired after his team won just four times. Stallings was banished in his second season with the Phils during a player revolt. Harris was cut

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loose in his first season in Philadelphia, after which he accused club president William Cox of betting on his team's games, a charge which got Cox banned for life from baseball. And Pat Corrales was dismissed at midseason, although his team had a winning record.

He was fired by and replaced by Owens, the general manager who stepped into the dugout and led the Phils to the 1983 World Series.

Mauch, known as the Little General, was perhaps the club's best strategist, but he lost more games (684) than any Phillies' manager. Prothro, whose son Tommy was a prominent football coach, was the Phillies' bench boss when the team lost more than 100 games three years in a row.

Moran, leader of the Phillies' first pennant in 1915, also managed the Cincinnati Reds in the infamous 1919 World Series. Stallings, Harris, Steve O'Neill, Mayo Smith, and Francona won World Series with other teams. Burt Shotton, who in 1932 piloted the Phils to their only winning season during a 31-year period, was the skipper of the Brooklyn Dodgers when Jackie Robinson broke into the majors and in 1950 when the Phillies won the pennant on the last day of the season.

Sawyer, the manager of the '50 Whiz Kids, quit after the first game of the 1960 season. It was his second tenure as the pilot of some dreadful Phils teams. When asked why, he said, "I'm 49 and I want to live to be 50."

He was on to something: The '60 Phils lost 95 games and finished last in the N.L. Of course, the 1959 season might have given Sawyer a hint, since the Phils lost 90 games that year and also brought up the rear.

Phillies bench bosses have been adept at botched one-liners. Ozark, a Napoleon expert, once claimed that a player's "limitations were limitless." Frank Lucchesi said, "nobody's going to make a scrapgoat out of me." And one time Owens asked his driver to "turn down the disciples" on the car radio.

Such comments, along with many other unusual characteristics, loudly amplify the kind of colorful group that over the years has managed the Phillies. With his new ranking, Manuel has earned the right to become one of the group's foremost members.

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Rich Westcott, a former Daily Times staff writer, is a leading authority on Phillies history, and the author of 20 books, many of which deal with the Phillies and Philadelphia sports. He is author of 'Mickey Vernon: The Gentleman First Baseman.'

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