

Roberto Clemente

Roberto Clemente was a great athlete and humanitarian. He played his entire 18-year major league baseball career with the Pittsburgh Pirates. Clemente was born in Barrio San Anton in Carolina, Puerto Rico, on August 18, 1934. He was the youngest of four children. As a child, Clemente found success in track and field events, winning medals in the javelin throw and short-distance races. But he enjoyed baseball more than track and field.

Clemente started his career playing amateur baseball and soon moved up to play with the Santurce Grabbers in the Puerto Rican Winter League. From this league, he signed with Montreal's Triple A team. In 1955, Clemente joined the Pirates. He hit .317 over his 18 seasons with the team and collected 3,000 hits. Clemente played in two World Series, in 1960 and 1971. In the 1971 Series, he was named the Most Valuable Player.

Clemente married Vera Zabala in 1964. The couple had three sons, all of whom were born in Puerto Rico because their father was so proud of his homeland. Clemente was killed in a plane crash off the coast of Puerto Rico on New Year's Eve 1972 while on his way to deliver relief supplies to earthquake victims in Nicaragua. The plane with Clemente and four other men was carrying eight tons of supplies to Nicaragua when it crashed into the ocean near San Juan. Vera and others had begged him not to get on the plane, an aging DC-7, because it was overloaded and the weather was bad. Clemente insisted on making the trip because he had heard that other earthquake supplies had been stolen.

The summer after the plane crash, Clemente was elected posthumously into the Baseball Hall of Fame. He was the first Latin American player to receive the honor. Clemente's memory is alive today in many projects. One of these projects is the Roberto Clemente Sports City, a 1,500-acre sports complex in Carolina, Puerto Rico.

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Clemente remains a hero to the residents of Pittsburgh as well, who admired his brilliant playing, his devotion to family, his patriotism, and his charity toward others.

- Roberto Clemente sacrificed his life for charity. Name some other athletes who have been generous.

- Do you feel athletes are obligated to engage in charitable activities? Explain.

- Sports figures are often viewed as role models by our culture. Do you feel this affects their independence?