

Pete Rose & Reds contribute signed bat



Outdoors

By Bud Leavitt



NEWS Photo by Jack Loftus

Signed by the Cincinnati Reds, it's the property of the Veazie Salmon Club until Saturday night

Last spring in Tampa, Pete Rose was asked the secret to his longevity as a ball player. He looked me in the eye and responded: "I avoid only four things: cigarettes, drinks, fried food, and desserts. Otherwise, I try to live as normally as possible. The less neurotic you get, the longer you last."

This comes to mind this morning because after the baseball season now into its glory days, the name Pete Rose will come into prominent play when the Veazie Salmon Club holds its third annual Atlantic Salmon Dinner Saturday night at Bill Zoidis's home pool, The Pilots Grill.

Now you may be wondering where in God's name does baseball's Pete Rose figure in a dinner where nothing is spoken unless it comes wrapped in salmon skin? I shall attempt an explanation.

Last March, Sally and Cliff Page suddenly became sick and tired of waiting for the first solid signs of spring. Cliff set the thermostat, told the deliverer of his favorite newspaper to take a month's breather, and the Pages left Orono and headed south.

Arriving at Clearwater, Fla., the Pages chose a tidy-looking motel and pitched camp. It so happened that the motel was billeting members of the Philadelphia Phillies baseball club and the Pages' next door neighbors were Carolina and Bo Diaz.

DIAZ is a catcher, a good one, too, and a man I've always called A Red Sox Mistake. Other modern day Red Sox Mistakes and still doing very well include the St. Louis Cardinals' John Tudor and a 6-foot-8 righthander who increases his dollar value

each time he pitches against his old Red Sox mates, Mike Smithson of the Minnesota Twins. Smithson's another genuine Red Sox Mistake.

Anyway, the Diazes, Carolina and Bo, became friends with their new motel neighbors, Sally and Cliff Page. The friendship is real and remains so.

Baseball being the big and sometimes crazy business that it is, often takes expected and unexpected turns. Pete Rose got his release from Philadelphia and became a free agent after the '81 season. He signed with the Montreal Expos, but was named manager of the Cincinnati Reds midway through the '84 year. After being named player-manager, one of Rose's first moves was to shore up his catching staff. Rose thrives on hustle. Bo Diaz, good arm, good bat, like Rose, never stops hustling. He's a born gamer and gives his employer 100 percent on the ball field.

Two or three days before Rose was at the threshold of breaking Ty Cobb's 57-year old mark of 4,192 lifetime hits, Page happened to be at the Veazie Salmon Club and said something about a telephone call between himself and Diaz.

A bystander listened while Page was talking and when he was through said, "Too bad you can't get him to have Rose sign one of his bats and make it part of the dinner auction."

"I'll call Bo tonight and see if he can help us," Page answered.

That night he telephoned Diaz in Cincinnati and the answer was "let me see what I can do, Clifford."

Three weeks ago one of Pete Rose's bats arrived at the Page residence in Orono.

The very night Rose broke Ty Cobb's record, Diaz had members of the Cincinnati Reds who played in that one historic baseball game sign the bat.

Bo Diaz had the bat carefully packaged, insured, and it now belongs to the Veazie Salmon Club.

A well-known collector of baseball memorabilia already has made an offer of \$1,000 to obtain the bat. It will not be sold, nor will it go to the highest bidder. The bat will become the possession of someone in attendance at Saturday night's dinner.

TICKET sale is limited to 180 persons,

and that's capacity at Zoidis's Pool. If every dinner ticket-holder purchases one \$5 ticket, it'll be a 180-to-1 chance of owning the bat.

Included with the bat will be a customized plexi-glass case. It sits mounted with the autographs showing on all sides, including Pete Rose's on the night he set a baseball record likely never again to be matched.

That's the kind of stuff that made Cooperstown a destination stop on the American scene.

Saturday's season-ending dinner puts a splendid finish on the Atlantic salmon angling season ending today on the Penobscot River.

When Buddy Lane entered his grille in the club's record book two days ago, it was the 191st salmon to be recorded at Veazie. It's modestly guessed Veazie member-anglers took more than 400 fish, killed and released, this season. This being Oct. 15, the law comes down on fishing with today's calendar change.

There is cause to celebrate come Saturday night, and if the dinner holds to the last two, it will be a fast-moving one, though sadly, marking the end of another fishing year.

President Claude Westfall, Cliff Page & Co. have a good one in the making, including among its treasures the offering of a Baseball Hall of Fame piece of bric-a-brac many an American would delight having as a household showpiece.

Dinner tickets are \$15, and they are available from Ticket Chairman Richard (Dick) Storeh, 15 Mainwood Rd., Orono (866-4290), Gayland Gachey's Fly Shop, Veazie, or from Nick Albans's Dirigo Outfitters, Bangor.

If I were in your boots and planned to attend, I would not wait much beyond tomorrow before ordering tickets.

This one's worth your time and money — if only to see many of your old fishing pals wearing a necktie, a matter that happens but once a year, and it's at this annual gathering of the clan.