



Inside the Park: Running the Base Path of Life

Willie Wilson

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Willie Wilson played baseball with the mentality of a football player—a grimace, on his face. Totally unprepared for the spotlight of being in the major leagues, Wilson experienced the highest of highs and the lowest of lows, sometimes unable to tell them apart. He helped lead the Kansas City Royals to their first World Series in only his second full season in the Major Leagues. His 1983 arrest on a cocaine charge could have been the defining moment of his life and sent him spiraling downward. Instead, he responded by helping the Royals to the World Series championship in 1985, playing a key role in the Series by batting .367 and scoring two runs and three RBIs in the Royals' win over the St. Louis Cardinals. On his way to winning the 1982 batting title, Wilson was the first switch hitter since Mickey Mantle to get 100 hits from each side of the plate, and his 13 inside-the-park home runs are the most of any modern day player in history. Willie tells his story of growing up a son of the south, displaced to New Jersey at age 7 when he met his mother for the first time. He was a shy child, seeking acceptance in athletics where he was a three-sport star at Summit (N.J.) High School. Drafted by the Royals in the first round of the 1974 amateur draft, Wilson turned down a football scholarship offer from Maryland to sign with the Royals. He quickly made his way through KC's minor league system, making his first appearance with the major league team just two years later. But Willie's story transcends baseball. His life was rocked by the unexpected results of stardom and its demands and pitfalls. He tells a cautionary tale of how a shy young man who never even dated until the 11th grade can survive a post-career bankruptcy and turn his life around to help others with his inspirational tale. He now leads the Willie Wilson Baseball Foundation, hoping to share his experiences with inner-city youth so they can avoid the same missteps he made along the way.

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