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One Mets Fan Finds Nirvana in Menemsha

By JEFFREY SCHEUER

NOT LONG AGO, WHILE LOITERING NEAR THE Bite in Menemsha with my daily ration of clams, I had what we call, in my depraved hometown, a "sighting."

I saw Ed.

Not Ed Harris or Ed Norton or Edward Kennedy or Ed Murrow or Mr. Ed. Just Ed Kranepool, the former first baseman for the Mets.

He was one of my boyhood heroes, or semi-heroes; my real idol was Ron Hunt, the talented (for a Met at least) second-baseman in the mid-1960s, who worked next door to Kranepool on the right side of the Mets infield.

The first time I saw Eddie the K, a.k.a. the Krane, was circa 1963 at the Polo Grounds, the old New York Giants' ball yard in East Harlem where the Mets were first domiciled. He was an 18-year-old kid just out of James Monroe High School in the Bronx, with a minimum of minor league experience; it didn't take much to make the Mets in those days. I clearly remember him as a teenager coming up to the plate and whacking a ball off the right field foul pole. More on that later.

How else do I remember Ed Kranepool? Let me count the ways. He wasn't exactly a superstar; more like those dimmer celestial bodies from the further reaches of the visible baseball universe: the kind that may be old or even dead but whose light still flickers faintly for those who care to look. He was a decent hitter who once reached the .300 mark, with occasional power. A big, slow guy, but exceptionally smooth and graceful around first base. He was solid and deliber-

ate, as reflected in his mannerisms.

In the field, Ed would scrape the dirt around first base with his toe, back and forth in perfect arcs, like a dancer marking out a step on the stage. At the plate he would wield the bat with slow, smooth phantom swings as he waited for the pitch, letting it come to a full stop with the barrel head pointed directly at the pitcher. It may have intimidated a few rookie hurlers.

It was enough at least to spark the imagination of some of us younger fellows, as we strode to the plate at the Chilmark Community Center and glared out at Bill Edison, the ace of Chilmark and patron saint of Vineyard softball.

The otherwise saintly Edison had the annoying habit of announcing loudly whenever I stepped up to the plate: "Good bunter!" thereby drawing in the third baseman — typically my older brother — and a dozen or so other infielders, and thus rendering my bunting skills altogether moot. I'll bet that never happened to Ed Kranepool.

Among other distinctions, Kranepool enjoyed the longest tenure of any Met player, from 1963 to 1980 if memory serves; and he was the only Met to play continuously across three decades. (Tom Seaver pitched for the Mets in the sixties, seventies and eighties, but with wayward excursions to some Midwest-ern teams.)

And now here he was at The Bite, looking in good form. You don't normally expect to see Mets, or even ex-Mets, in Menemsha. I don't know why — maybe because it doesn't have a golf course. So at first I ques-

tioned the accuracy of my sighting. But then suddenly the lady standing next to him said in a Bronx accent: "Hey, Eddie, you want some clams?" Doubt departed.

(By the way, Ed, if you're reading this, that hit's been bugging me for more than 40 years. Drives off the foul pole nowadays are considered home runs in every stadium I know of. But I somehow remember your Polo Grounds shot as being ruled a ground-rule double. Could you possibly enlighten me on this point?)

I wish I'd had the courage, when I sighted Ed, to ask him about that hit. But it's a violation of Vineyard etiquette to bother the great ones, even for queries as ripe and heavy as mine. Like a wise fisherman, I let him get away.

Ed, if you want to answer this nagging question and exchange pleasantries, just keep an eye out for me. In the rear window of my truck is a baseball card of a certain Met first baseman in all his glory. It's from an ambitious collection of early Met portraits, amassed over countless summers entirely at the Chilmark flea market. You might find me there. And I sometimes hang around Menemsha after a clam run.

Don't be shy, Ed. And don't confuse my truck with the Larsens', which looks just like mine but doesn't have your baseball card in the window, last I looked.

Jeffrey Scheuer, a New York writer and author of The Sound Bite Society, has spent more summers on the Vineyard than Ed Kranepool spent with the Mets. Many more.