

Clemente Legacy Geared at Kids

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Roberto Clemente, Jr. throws the ceremonial first pitch of New York-Penn League game at Damaschke Field to Oneonta Tigers hitting Coach Luis Quinones.

ONEONTA _ Roberto Clemente's legacy is living strong through his son, as well as an organization based in Oneonta.

Roberto Clemente Jr., 44, visited Oneonta on Thursday night and threw out the ceremonial first pitch of the New York-Penn League game between the Oneonta Tigers and Williamsport Crosscutters.

It was the third straight night that Clemente visited a minor league park in Upstate New York with Steve Pindar, the co-founder of the Oneonta-based Roberto's Kids. The charitable organization delivers baseball equipment to children Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. In the past, Africa and parts of the United States also received gifts.

"The last three days have become like a dream come true," Pindar said. "As much as we know that we're doing the right thing and believe we're carrying on (Clemente's) legacy, just to have (Clemente Jr.) be a part of it has been unbelievable. Just to hear the comments people make constantly coming up to Roberto and how much they respected his father. ... That's what it's all about."

The three-day trip started Tuesday, which marked Clemente's 75th birthday, at the Binghamton Mets. They also visited the Syracuse Chiefs on Wednesday.

"For me, it's great," Clemente Jr. said of the past three days. "Obviously it shows people remembering him as not only just a baseball player but a humanitarian. For having Roberto's Kids doing the job they've done in honor of my father shows the legacy he left us.

"You have so many kids out there who love the game of baseball and obviously we have countries like the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua that don't have the resources to buy the equipment," he continued. "To be able to receive a glove to call your own means the whole world for these kids. It's great to be part of it. It's something that's very much needed and we're very proud as a family of what Steve is doing."

Clemente had 3,000 hits and a .317 batting average over an 18-year career with the Pittsburgh Pirates. He also won the 1966 National League Most Valuable Player award.

Clemente died in a plane crash Dec. 31, 1972. The plane was carrying supplies to earthquake victims in Nicaragua.

The National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown inducted Clemente posthumously in 1973.

Clemente Jr. was 7-years-old at the time.

"He died the way he lived his life," said Clemente Jr., who was 7 when his father died." That's what he did; he helped people all the time. He did it when there were no cameras around, but that's what he did. There were no cameras when it happened, but people obviously heard the news when the plane went down.

"When you have that type of legacy, I'm very proud to carry his name, and it's helped me tremendously opening doors for a lot of organizations that have to do with kids," he continued. "Obviously I'm taking advantage of that right now because I need to try my best to help (kids)."

Clemente Jr. also said he enjoyed his trip to Oneonta.

"I come to Cooperstown and to the area every year for induction weekend and the people have been awesome," he said. "With Steve being here, it's great to finish this road trip here and let people know this is real and we do need to help with the equipment and that the kids appreciate it. I'm glad I'm here."

Clemente Jr., who played three minor league seasons with the Philadelphia Phillies and San Diego Padres, said he stays involved with the organization as much as possible by helping to coordinate contacts. He also said he will be in the Dominican Republic in November to hand out equipment.

Clemente Jr. said his father would be happy to see what the organization is doing for disadvantaged kids.

"He would be very proud," Clemente Jr. said. "It's something he would absolutely be behind and he would be doing it himself. I'm very proud of what Steve has done so far. We're going to have to make this grow and we're going to continue to do this because it's very needed. I know dad is looking down right now and he's thanking them because it's a great job and a great thing they are doing."