

Christ-Follower and Home Run Great Hank Aaron Dies at 86

Hank Aaron, a Christ-follower who fought both extreme racism and some of the game's fiercest pitchers to become one of the greatest home run hitters in Major League Baseball history, died in his sleep at 86.

Aaron hit 755 career home runs with the Milwaukee Braves, the Atlanta Braves and the Milwaukee Brewers until his retirement in 1976. He is second on the all-time list only to Barry Bonds, who hit 762 but whose career was overshadowed by a scandal of steroid usage.

Before breaking Babe Ruth's then-vaunted record of 714 home runs—a record many said would not be eclipsed—the mild-mannered Aaron opined on his relationship and reliance upon God for his successful baseball career.

"I need to depend on Someone who is bigger, stronger and wiser than I am," Aaron said nearly 47 years ago, *The American Conservative* reported in a 2019 story. "I don't do it on my own. God is my strength. He gave me a good body and some talent and the freedom to develop it.

"He helps me when things go wrong. He forgives me when I fall on my face. He lights the way."

While racism continues to be a challenging cultural issue today, Aaron fought racism in his day after being promoted to the major leagues by the Milwaukee Braves in 1954. Although Jackie Robinson broke MLB's color line in 1947, Aaron dealt with the extreme racism of his day much in the way Robinson did—with quiet humility, class, confidence and the excellence of his play.

"There's only one way to break the color line. Be good," *The*

American Conservative reported of Aaron's words in 1974. "I mean, play good. Play so good that they can't remember what color you were before the season started."

In 1973, he received almost 1 million pieces of mail, but much of it was filled with hatred for a Black man who was approaching one of the most revered records in all of sports—Ruth's mark of 714 home runs in the early part of the 20th century. He endured racial slurs and name-calling to become one of the most feared players in the history of the game.

Aaron snapped Ruth's home run record on a fastball from Los Angeles Dodger pitcher Al Downing to become the home run king on April 8, 1974. Bonds broke Aaron's record nearly 33 years later.

Aaron finished his career with a solid .305 batting average over 24 seasons. He made an incredible 24 All-Star Game appearances and had 15 seasons with at least 30 home runs.

Following his career, he served as general manager of the Atlanta Braves for a few years and then became a successful businessman. *The American Conservative* reported that Aaron was a Christian, a patriot and "very proud to be an American. This country has so much potential, I'd just like to see things better ... and I think it will be." {eoa}