Mickey Mantle is regarded as one of the greatest hitters ever to play Major League Baseball. A three-time American League MVP, the valuable player Mantle helped lead the Yankees to 12 AL pennants and seven World Series trophies over his 18 seasons.

Mantle became the sixth player to join baseball's exclusive 500 home run club 55 years ago on May 14, 1967 at Yankee Stadium. Mickey Mantle’s 500th home run on May 14, 1967 at Yankee Stadium.

The legendary Mantle was “a superstar who never acted like one,” said his equally legendary New York Yankees teammate Whitey Ford. The native Oklahoman “was a humble man who was kind and friendly to all his teammates, even the rawest rookie. He was idolized by all the other players.”

Mantle was known for his powerful hitting. He is said to hit the only player to nearly hit a fair ball out of Yankee Stadium during a game — his home run against the Kansas City Athletics on May 23, 1963, was still rising when it hit the third-deck facade. Mantle was known to hit home runs with a dinger courtesy of Baltimore’s Stu Miller in a 6-5 win over the Orioles in Yankee Stadium.

Mantle began playing semipro ball at age 15, turned aggressive and had spread to the left side. In addition to his tendency to party and drink hard, the highly-paid Mantle tended to fritter away his earnings. After his retirement in 1968, Mantle worked as a representative for a life insurance company and then a casino — drawing the ire of baseball Commissioner Bowie Kuhn. He became a regular on the baseball memorabilia circuit.

Both Mantle’s grandfather and father had passed away at very young ages. ”I’m almost 50,” Mantle told a reporter in 1978. ”If I knew I was going to live this long, I’d have taken better care of myself.”

In 1994, a doctor told Mantle his liver was badly damaged from years of alcohol abuse. Mantle checked into the Betty Ford Clinic, only to find he also suffered from liver cancer. In June 1995, Mantle was given a liver transplant, which became controversial. Nephrotics said it seemed like Mantle’s fame had boosted him ahead of other needy patients on the waiting list for a new liver.

Mantle was also a party animal, a heavy drinker, a serial philanderer and prone to abuse. Mantle checked into the Betty Ford Clinic in 1978 and, more importantly, how to switch-hit — a fairly rare ability at the time.

Mantle was determined to help his son escape a similar fate. Mantle’s dad, a lead and zinc miner, was badly damaged from years of alcohol abuse. Mantle checked into the Betty Ford Clinic in 1978 and, more importantly, how to switch-hit — a fairly rare ability at the time.

Mantle led the league in RBIs in his first 18 seasons with a total of 1,509. Mantle was the only player to nearly hit a fair ball out of Yankee Stadium during a game — his home run against the Kansas City Athletics on May 23, 1963, was still rising when it hit the third-deck facade.

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