

Legendary Chicago columnist could be behind Cubs curse

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Forget Steve Bartman and billy goats. Maybe it's late, great syndicated Chicago Tribune columnist Mike Royko's fault that the Chicago Cubs have gone 100 years without winning a World Series.

At the very least, Royko — himself a diehard Cubs fan who wrote about them often in the years before his death in 1997 — is part of the lore.

And so is Hall of Famer Tony Gwynn, who was the keynote speaker for the Iowa Cubs FanFest luncheon this past weekend at Hy-Vee Hall in downtown Des Moines.

Two decades before Bartman's eagerness to catch a foul ball in Game 6 of the 2003 National League Championship Series perhaps kept Chicago out of the World Series, Gwynn's San Diego Padres rallied from a 2-game deficit with three straight wins in their home park to win the 1984 NLCS — then a best-of-5 affair.

"We were dead in the water," said Gwynn, whose team lost the first game of the series 13-0 and the second 4-2.

The Cubs seemed destined to play in their first Fall Classic since 1945 — when they were allegedly cursed by a man who along with his pet goat were supposedly kicked out of a World Series game at Wrigley Field that year.

Enter Royko, who in a column appearing in newspapers across the country as the Padres returned to San Diego for Game 3 of that 1984 series, wrote that Padres fans were a bunch of "quiche-eating wimps." "I had no idea who Mike Royko was," said Gwynn, who along with his teammates returned to Jack Murphy Stadium (now Qualcomm Stadium) thinking their season was probably over.

"As we got off the plane and got on our busses to go back to Qualcomm, for the first time all year long, the lights were on," Gwynn remembers.

"Normally, when we came home from a road trip, the lights were off. "

And as the team bus came down the road and the stadium appeared from behind the trees, Gwynn recalls a sight that he says without question gave the Padres the impetus to battle back against the Cubs.

"There were like 9,000 people in that parking lot," he said.

But was this spark really Royko's doing?

"I think it was a big reason why so many people (came out) that night," Gwynn said.

The Padres won easily in Game 3, then took a back-and-forth Game 4 with a Gwynn single and Steve Garvey homer in the bottom of the ninth.

Gwynn was also in the middle of the Padres' comeback from a 3-0 deficit in the decisive Game 5 against that year's Cy Young winner, Rick Sutcliffe, who had gone 17-1 for the Cubs including the playoffs.

Gwynn's two-run double on a ground ball that took a strange hop over the glove of future Hall of Fame second baseman Ryne Sandberg all but finished off the Cubs.

"It was a fastball up that I got on top of, and when I hit it I thought it was a double-play ball," Gwynn said.

"I don't know if there's anything Ryno could have done differently. The ball had topspin on it, it hit something, and it bounced over his head."

Gwynn graciously said he was fine with Steve Garvey being the villain responsible for the Cubs collapse.

Or Durham or Royko or ... "Fate," he offered when asked to explain his eventual winning hit.

Which brings us back to billy goats.