



The Knobler Blog

April 30, 2009

'You don't quit, don't give up, don't give in'

By Danny Knobler

Steve Palermo has always resisted the idea of a book or movie about his life.

"I always thought it would feel funny," Palermo said today.

But even though he doesn't want Hollywood involved, Palermo has now decided that he wants to get his message out. And it's a good one, about how anyone can overcome adversity the way he has.

If you haven't heard his story, here it is in a nutshell: Palermo was one of baseball's best umpires, maybe the best. In 1991, after a game at Texas, he was at a restaurant, heard about a mugging in the parking lot, and tried to intervene and was shot. He was paralyzed, spent about two years in a wheelchair and eventually fought back to the point where he can walk with just a cane and a small brace. He returned to work as an umpire supervisor for major league baseball, but still holds onto the dream that some day new treatments will enable him to recover and umpire in the big leagues again.

"I'm still young enough where I could get back on the field," said Palermo, who is 59.

Palermo has spoken about his story quite a few times, but now he's pushing to do more and reach more people. He has a new website, www.StevePalermoUmpire.com, and he says that during the offseason, he could talk to people every day if there's interest. He won't give up his baseball job, so during the season there's only time for 4-5 appearances a month.

The message? It's simple, and reminds you a little of that inspirational Jimmy Valvano speech that plays on ESPN during college basketball season.

"You don't quit," Palermo said. "You don't give up. You don't give in."

He said the feedback from people at his talks has been great, and has encouraged him to do more.

"It's maybe something I can give back," he said. "Something where people don't feel like they're alone."

I've seen Palermo at ballparks over the years, and I've seen that it's not easy for him to get around. It can't be easy to get through airports.

"I'm stubborn," Palermo said. "I refuse a wheelchair. My wife says she prefers to ride. I tell her, 'You ride. I'll walk.' It's a principle thing. I don't ever want to get in that wheelchair again."

It's a great message, a great story. And now Steve Palermo wants to tell it.