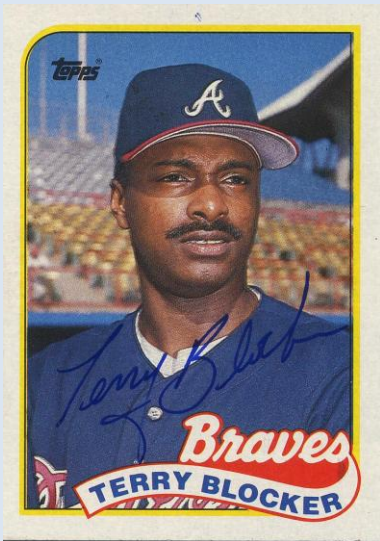




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Terry Blocker



Terry may have been a relatively non-descript outfielder for the New York Mets and Atlanta Braves, but he is an extraordinary man. They were a couple of strangers looking for work during the baseball strike. Terry Blocker soon noticed that Dave Shotkoski was "just like me, a family man, showing pictures of his family." There wasn't much of a caste system in the Atlanta Braves' clubhouse this March. Shotkoski was a former pitcher who had answered the call for replacements. Blocker had once been a promising outfielder with the New York Mets until a collision wrecked his knee. On March 24, Dave Shotkoski went into the city streets, where he was caught in a holdup, and was killed, a replacement player in a strange town, an innocent man shot by a stranger, the ultimate definition of the wrong place at the wrong time.

"A couple of the guys called me and told me what happened," Blocker said. "It brought tears to my eyes. I sat there for a while, feeling maybe I hadn't witnessed as well as I should have. Then I started shivering. I got down on my knees. It wasn't like I wanted revenge for Dave Shotkoski."

What Terry Blocker did was get off his knees and get out into some of the harder streets of West Palm Beach, looking for the man who killed his new friend. He had trained there when he played for the Braves in 1988-89, and he had some contacts. A few were afraid to get involved, but one friend agreed to escort Blocker into a tough neighborhood.

"We didn't give ourselves away," Blocker recalled. "We just talked about the ballplayer that got shot." The first night, Blocker did not learn anything. The second night, Blocker said, "The guy who did it was bragging on himself." Without ever meeting the man, Blocker was able to come up with a street nickname. He went to the police, who soon arrested the man and charged him with first-degree murder and attempted robbery. Detective David Atherton of the West Palm Beach Police Department said, "He went out on his own. Nobody asked him to do it. He's very modest. He doesn't think he's a hero, but if some people had known what he was doing, he would have been in danger. I'm in danger every time I go there."

While Blocker was being praised for his courage, the Braves released him. They said the knee was too far gone to allow him to play even as a replacement. He went back to Stone Mountain, Ga., to his family.

"I knew it was meant to be," Blocker said. "I wasn't bitter. I had 14 years of baseball, and now it's over."

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