

HANK AARON'S LASTING IMPACT ON ONE UWM STUDENT

Hank Aaron left an incredible legacy on and off the baseball field. Nobody knows this better than UWM senior Hawa Brema.

For the past four years, Brema's UWM education was funded through gifts to an endowment created by Aaron's Chasing the Dream Foundation 4 for 4 Scholarship. The scholarship at UWM is in memory of Aaron's longtime friend and UWM alumnus, the late Joseph Kennedy.

Aaron died on Jan. 22, 2021, at age 86. Like so many people, it hit Brema hard, and even a few weeks afterward, she wiped away tears while talking about him and what the scholarship has meant.

"He changed my life. He literally changed a lot of people's lives," says Brema, a senior majoring in human resources management who was scheduled to graduate in May. Brema's UWM education also included certificates in real estate and cultures and communities.

In September 2019, Brema met Aaron and his wife, Billye, when the Aarons invited foundation scholars from across the United States to their home in Atlanta. The Aarons paid for the students' expenses and treated everyone to a barbecue and an Atlanta Braves game.

"They were so nice, just really genuine people," Brema says.

Brema was born in Sudan and spent 12 years in Kenya before her family emigrated to the U.S.

"My dad's big on education," Brema says. "He wanted us to come here for a better education." The family settled in Milwaukee, and Brema graduated from Bradley Tech High School, but with Brema having five siblings, college tuition was a challenge for her family. Aaron's scholarship made it possible.

A high school softball player, Brema wasn't a stranger to baseball, and she learned more about Aaron's baseball career when she applied for the

scholarship. She's the second student at UWM to receive the four-year renewable scholarship.

Aaron's path to the Baseball Hall of Fame spanned 21 big-league seasons and included minor league seasoning in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. His major league career began with the Milwaukee Braves and ended with the Milwaukee Brewers. He won the 1957 World Series with those Braves but left Milwaukee when the Braves moved to Atlanta in 1966.

Although his best playing days were behind him when he returned to Milwaukee and the Brewers for the 1975 and '76 seasons, it was a fitting coda for the man who meant so much to Milwaukee baseball.

Aaron retired as MLB's all-time home run leader. He hit his 755th and final homer on July 20, 1976, at County Stadium. His career homer record stood for 31 years. He remains MLB's career leader in RBIs (2,297), total bases (6,856).

At his funeral, Aaron was honored for his contributions on and off the baseball field.

"In my humble opinion, he was no doubt the greatest player of our generation, but, more important, he was a great and wonderful human being," said Aaron's longtime friend Bud Selig, MLB commissioner emeritus and former Brewers owner, at a memorial service. "Neither fame nor fortune changed his extraordinary kindness and empathy, which led to his greatness off the field. His impact not only in baseball but all of America will never be forgotten."

Aaron's scholarships have supported more than 100 students since 2010, and they will continue.

"I'm glad I had the chance to meet him in person," Brema says. "I don't have any debt because of him and the scholarship. He was just a blessing. That's all I can say." 🐾 – Kathy Quirk



Hawa Brema stands with Hank Aaron (right) and his wife, Billye, in 2019.

UWM'S TIES TO AARON

UWM's baseball team played its home games at Henry Aaron Field in Lincoln Park from 1994-2019 before moving to its new stadium, Franklin Field, for the 2020 season.

UWM also played a key role in honoring Aaron in 2007 when the Brewers commemorated his 755th and final home run at County Stadium. Because Aaron hit the home run in 1976 and County Stadium was torn down in 2001, it was hard to figure out the ball's exact landing spot.

Professor Alan J. Horowitz, then chair of UWM's civil engineering and mechanics department, teamed up with students from UWM's chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers. They studied GPS measurements, reviewed surveys of County Stadium, studied aerial photos of Miller Park and County Stadium, and closely examined video of the home run to determine where the ball landed.

Horowitz and his team calculated that the ball traveled 363 feet and landed in what became a parking lot for Miller Park, which was recently renamed American Family Field. A plaque marks the spot. 🐾