

April 17, 1994 | By Joe Williams, of The Sentinel Staff

It was painful to read in the current issue of Sports Illustrated about Mickey Mantle and his battle against alcoholism.

As a youngster who grew up in New York in the late 1950s and '60s with a father who was - and still is - a big Yankees fan, it seemed only natural for me to fall for the Yanks Mantle and Roger Maris. Though my allegiance later turned to the Mets, Mantle always remained my idol.

In the article, Mantle says that alcohol probably shortened his career as much, if not more, than his bum knees. Nobody should be surprised about Mantle's weakness for alcohol. The drinking habits of Mantle and Billy Martin are almost as much a part of Mantle's legend as are his home runs.

Locally, Mantle, Maris and former Yankee pitching great Whitey Ford came to Wildwood's Continental Country Club once a year in the late 1970s and early '80s to help promote the annual Magnolia Invitational amateur golf tournament.

He performed his duties there admirably, graciously meeting with golfers and signing autographs. But Mantle was seldom seen around Continental's clubhouse without a drink in his hand. Apparently, it was seldom he was anywhere without a drink.

He says in the article that the drinking basically started when he got up and often didn't end until he went to bed.

Mantle received treatment at the Betty Ford Clinic and is now sober.

"It used to be said that I was a role model, and kids, even older guys, looked up to me," Mantle said in the article. "Maybe I can truly be a role model now - because I admitted I had a problem, got treatment and am staying sober - and maybe I can help more people that I ever helped when I was a famous ballplayer."

From someone who always has looked up to Mantle, here's hoping this will be the biggest hit of his life.