

BASEBALL DIGEST

★★ WORLD SERIES EDITION ★★

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By Abe J. Shear
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Having had the good fortune to conduct nearly sixty interviews, I have found that many of the very best moments and lessons come from those who are not particularly famous. This interview proves that point.

Doug Flynn had a remarkable career and continues to have a remarkable life. His career, if measured by his love of the game and that of his teammates, is nothing short of inspirational (and his charitable work which was not the subject of the interview sets a very high bar for us all). Doug played baseball because he loved it, an old fashioned value for sure, and this unbridled affection for baseball shines through each and every answer.

Having spent the best part of the morning with Doug, it was truly wonderful to watch how well he treated people and how he put a smile on each face that passed his way. This is a basic people skill, one clearly learned from his family, shared with his teammates and now with his community. Doug is clearly a leader, one with the unique skill of being able to inspire those around him.

I Remember When, a book which includes the first 35 interviews in this series, is available for \$20. A check should be made payable to Abe Shear and mailed to him at Arnall Golden Gregory.

Doug Flynn “Loving the Game”

Shear: Were you born here in Lexington?

Yes. Not Albany, New York as it says in Wikipedia. I know it's hard to tell with my accent but I wasn't born there. I'm very proud of being from Lexington, Kentucky.

What are your first memories of baseball?

My first memories are of my dad playing, which was pretty neat because my dad was a great player. He played a year in the Brooklyn Dodger organization and I remember him playing in what was called the Bluegrass League. We would go after church and I used to

probably in their twenties and thirties. My dad at the time was probably thirty and he could play. I mean he was a player! He could hit. He played a year in the Brooklyn organization in Hazard, Kentucky with Johnny Podres. Dad hit about 350. They wanted him to return, but they got pregnant with me and so they moved from Hazard back to Lexington because they thought they could get better care at the hospital. I was born in 1951.

What position did your dad play?

He was a second baseman.

Would he rely on his bat or his glove or his speed?

“I got cut from a college team that wasn't very good.”

like it because my dad would jump in the back seat and change clothes and put his uniform on. I was just a small child but going to the games with my dad and watching him play and compete were my first memories of what baseball was really like before I actually started getting interested in it and starting playing in a league.

Was that semi-pro ball?

Yes, it was semi-pro and they were good players. I mean, Governor Chandler played in that league, Woody Fryman played in the league. It was college guys and men. I thought they were all old but they really weren't. They were all

All of the above. He had so many better qualities that I did. He could run. He could hit. He was quick. He had really great quickness because he played basketball at the University of Dayton at 5'8", so you know he was a pretty good athlete. He was just a good ballplayer and fortunately I got part of that. I wish I'd gotten more of the hitting side but I didn't.

Your dad was at the top of the lineup?
He was the leadoff hitter.

So he'd get on and a single was a double?

A single was a double.

Now when you were little, did you play

all sports?

I played basketball and baseball growing up. I played one year of little league football when I was nine and then didn't play again until I was a junior in high school. Then one of the coaches came and said he wanted me to come out for football and I said, "Why? I'm 5'6" and 120 lbs. Why would I want to do that?" He said he was trying to recruit athletes and he thought I could help the ball club in some ways. So I played three sports in high school.

Were you more of a baseball player in high school?

I really wasn't very good at any of them to be truthful with you. I was the kind of guy that was fundamentally sound and I could help a good ball club but I wasn't the type that could carry the ball club. So I was a point guard, played good defense, which afforded me the opportunity to go to the University of Kentucky and play as a freshman – basketball, but I was small. I was 5'8" and 147 lbs when I graduated from high school and went to the University of Kentucky. I was 5'8" and then the summer after my sophomore year, I grew a couple of inches and starting maturing. So I was kind of a late bloomer.

Going back just a little bit, you played little league ball didn't you?

“So I signed for a coke and was very fortunate.”

I played five years of little league ball, two years of pony league ball, a year of colt league, two years of Connie Mack and then played a couple of years of Bluegrass League ball. So I was continuously playing all the time.

At what position?

I was a shortstop mostly. In high school I played second base and when I started getting older and maturing and getting a little stronger, then they moved me to shortstop. Actually, when I went to my tryout camp to try out for pro baseball, they tried me out at shortstop.

Did you pitch? You must have pitched when you were a little boy.

I pitched a little bit. I couldn't throw very hard but I had a good breaking ball.

Well, I had a fast ball, a curve ball and of course everybody tried to get away with my junk because I couldn't throw it very hard.

When did you first start thinking that you might be able to play, be on your college team?

Well I got cut from my college team. So my thinking was my dad knew a lot of scouts. I got cut from a college team that wasn't very good at the University of Kentucky. We only won four or six games I think. So I figured if my dad knew scouts and they didn't think I could play and my college coach didn't think I could play, that probably I couldn't play. So I went to a junior college and was playing softball during the week and baseball on the weekend because I enjoyed competing and we had a team that ended up going to Wichita, Kansas for the summer league and I had two pretty good games and was approached by a scout who asked if I ever thought about playing pro ball? And I said, "No sir, I really haven't." He said, "Well, we'd like for you to go to Arizona State for a couple of years first." I said I really didn't want to go back to college. I said there are some other things I'd like, but if I go to college I didn't want to go to Arizona State.

I didn't know the history behind how good baseball was out there at that time because the team I was on here in Lexington were all local guys. We didn't realize we were playing against high school and college All-Americans in this tournament and so I said no. I ended up going to a junior college and some friends woke me up one morning and said, "Come on, we're all going to try out for the Reds. What the heck, I didn't have anything else to do! So we get there and we realize we had one pair of spikes and one glove for four of us and they said I should go first. I went out and tried out and then the scout, Chet Montgomery, who was a dear

man, asked if I had a baseball uniform because I was in a pair of shorts and a tank top. I wasn't really serious. And I said yes sir. He said come in two weeks with that baseball uniform. So I went to another tryout camp, tried out, didn't hear anything for two weeks. I get a call and they say they wanted me to come to Riverfront Stadium with ninety guys from three different states and they were going to take a good look at me. So when it was over with, he said he wanted to see me one more time. So we came back to Lexington.

He tried me out and he asked what would it take for me to be a professional ball player? I said a coke and a hotdog. So I signed for a coke and was very fortunate. Two years later I was in the big leagues. Not exactly the way most people do it. No, most people are drafted and that's the story I get all the time. What round were you drafted in? Well, I wasn't. But I think the things that helped me were (1) that I was a later bloomer; and (2) that I loved to play and so I just continued playing and fortunately somebody saw me.

You haven't said that your dad pushed you very hard in this. I guess he didn't.

He didn't. Not at all. The only thing my dad told me as far as my career was, I remember wanting to go out with my friends in high school one day and my dad said OK, go ahead, but you won't be playing sports. I said what do you mean? He said it was a choice. You can either go hang with your friends or you be dedicated to whatever sport you're going to play, but you won't do both. And he said to trust him on that and he knew what decision I would make.

What was your favorite team growing up?

Growing up – Cincinnati. I lived eighty miles south of there and I remember Frank Robinson and Vada Pinson, Johnny Edwards and Gus Bell and all of those guys. Jim Maloney.

Would you go up to Crosley Field and watch them play?

I would go some, but you know back then we didn't have an Interstate to get there so it'd take about two hours; now it's eighty miles. But back in those days you'd have to go Highway 25 and you'd

have to wind your way and so it would take you an hour and 45 minutes to two hours to get to Cincinnati. So we didn't go up very much. And then baseball was still the most affordable professional sport, but it was still expensive for us to go so I didn't go very often and I just listened to most of the games on the radio.

As it turned out, you ended up being on the Reds teams of '75 and '76. How surprised were you to make the Reds in 1975?

In '75, I made the ball club. We won. '76, I was on the club. We won. They traded me in '77 and didn't win again until '90. You do the math. I told Johnny Bench that. He says as long as you believe it, it must be true. You know, I was so fortunate, not being a good hitter, in '75 I went to spring training and I always knew I had to go in shape and I knew that because I'd gone in '74 for a couple of weeks, Davey Concepcion was probably going to be late with visa problems; Joe Morgan would work himself into shape through spring training as would Pete. Now at that time in '75 Pete Rose wasn't a third baseman. He was an outfielder and they didn't have a third baseman. Darrel Chaney was there and they had signed John Vukovich to play. So I knew if I went in shape there was a possibility that being a middle infielder that I was going to get a chance to play a lot early in spring training until the other guys were ready. Well, it so happened I got 90 at-bats and had 32 hits; so I set a record, tied a record with Gordy Coleman for hits in spring training and because I had such a hot spring and I lived eighty miles south of Cincinnati, there was a lot of publicity going on about it and Sparky felt like he had to keep me. So I was another utility player along with Darrel Chaney. They said that they were going to try me at third base but John Vukovich was at third so they really didn't. And then one day they saw Pete taking ground balls and that's when they moved Pete to third. They put George Foster in the outfield as an everyday player and then we took off. Our record one time was 19 and 20 and then I think we won 41 of the next 50 and we opened up a pretty good lead.

Sparky, I'm sure this is a little true, he

sort of had two sets of rules?

Sorta!

He had one set of rules for sort of like Rose and Bench and those guys and then he had another set of rules for the whole rest of the team.

That is absolutely correct.

So whatever the stars wanted to do was just fine. Whatever you wanted to do was OK so long as it was OK with what Sparky wanted to do.

“He taught me that my feet were as important as my hands”

That's exactly right. There is no argument here. In Montreal, he did a bed check and he checked everybody except for the big four. He ripped us because there were a couple of guys who were out and he ripped the fool out of us and, when he did that, Morgan, Bench, Rose and Perez all stood up for us and that's when we went on our winning streak. Those guys, right then we knew this is a team, when the superstars are sticking up for—we called ourselves the turds—and we got nicknamed that and that's what we were. George Foster was like the head turd and the rest of us were just, well, we would go out and get our running in and we all worked hard before the games would start, but we were called turds. So we took a lot of pride in that too, because we knew that when we got an opportunity to play, we'd better be ready. It was fun in those days.

So you get to the bottom of the ninth inning in 1975 and the Reds were ahead I guess 4-3; you're in Boston. How exciting was that?

It was exciting because in the top of the ninth I was on deck and it looked like I was going to get a chance to hit with the score tied 3-3. So that was the only action I was going to get. I was only going in the game late for defense for Pete but when we got to the play-offs and World Series, Sparky just used the regular guys.

You never lost any play-off games in 1976?

We won seven in a row.

And then you beat the . . .

Yankees. But you know what? For me, after that '75 World Series I didn't get to celebrate because I had to get on the plane. We got back in town like 3 or 4 in the morning. There were 30,000 people waiting for us downtown. I had to get on the plane the very next day and head to Venezuela to go play winter ball so I didn't get to celebrate it too much. **Then you went to the Mets and you won a gold glove.**

It's funny because I thought I might have won it a couple of years prior to that cause my numbers were better and I didn't win it and it was kind of the old adage, if you'd hit better you'd have won more gold gloves. It's voted on by coaches and managers, that they at least think a lot of you, so I finished second three times and then won one and so it sits at home and I'm very proud of it. There's a lot of guys that don't get a chance. There's a lot of very good fielders that don't win gold gloves. So I feel very fortunate just to have one of them.

You got three triples in a game once.

That's kind of surprising. They just had that on the scoreboard stuff at Cincinnati the other day and said there had only been eleven guys to do that. The first one was to right centerfield gap. The second one was the left centerfield gap and the third one was just a routine base hit to left field. But in Montreal, they had that seam for football that ran across the field and the ball hit the seam and bounced straight over Ron LaFlore's head and went to the wall. And then I got up a fourth time and Gary Carter looked at me and he said, and I loved Gary, Gary looked at me and said you know nobody has ever hit four in a game. You'll be in the record books by yourself. And I got a fastball, right down there, and I hit a nice little one hopper double play.

Carter always struck me as a guy that if the game didn't really matter much, he'd probably help you out hitting just a little bit.

He was really a nice guy. He'd tell you, you might want to look for a fast ball.

What were your favorite ball parks?

I loved St. Louis because I seemed to always play well there. My family could all drive there if they wanted to. Wrigley was always interesting. The crowds were always very good,

need more water. So I win the gold glove in '80 and I bought a watch for all of the ground crew I went back up there last year and one of the guys still has the watch.

That's nice. And do you remember your first home run?

Yes, Merv Rettenmund and Pete Rose

“We called ourselves the turds”

so I loved going to Wrigley. Fenway, I didn't play much in the American league so I didn't know. I learned some new names in Fenway and I had to go home and look them up. Philadelphia, too. Didn't really like going to Philly although that's where I met my wife. I didn't like playing at Dodger Stadium. I thought the field was terrible. The best fields to play on – Tiger Stadium was wonderful. They kept that infield great. Baltimore was wonderful to play on and then Shea became very good. We had a groundskeeper named Pete Flynn, no relationship, and I used to ask Pete if I get a little extra water at second base and he'd say what for, what do you need some water for? I'd say “Well you know I'm probably not going to help a whole lot with my bat tonight so at least I'd better do something with my glove so I'd just like a little more water.” He'd tell me that if I had good hands I wouldn't

were on base and I had a bunt sign. We were playing the Mets. But I had a bunt up until it was 3 and 1 and I looked down to third and there was no bunt sign so I had to step out because I knew Sparky wanted me to bunt and I stepped out and looked at Alex Grammas and he went through the signs again and no bunt. I got a fast ball and it was pretty exciting. **With today's players, is it more about wins or is it more about statistics?** Statistics.

And you think that hurts the game?

I think, so, yes. It's either a lack of knowledge or a lack of willingness to know the history of the game of baseball. Guys today don't know Marvin Miller. Most of them don't know Curt Flood. Most of them don't know Andy Messersmith. Guys need to know that there were sacrifices made so that they are able to make the kind of money that they can make today. You know back in

the 60s, 70s and the days that we played, if you were struggling in the 6th, 7th, 8th inning, you were pinch hit for. You don't hardly ever see guys pinch hit for today. The pitcher is about the only one. I don't know if it's in the contract but there's guys that are hitting 220, 230 that never get pinch hit for. We got pinch hit for all the time. Fundamentally I don't think today's players rely on that as much as they do their talent. But I don't mind that guys are making all kinds of money. I think that's wonderful because I went on several strikes that allowed them to do this. I just wish they had respect for the guys that came before them and why they're making that kind of money. You know, for instance, I made \$16,500 my first year. Today a first year player makes 450, 480, something like that. That doesn't bother me a bit. But have respect for the guys who came before you like I respect the Pete Rose's and Johnny Bench's who played before me and then the Ed Bailey's and the Gus Bell's who played before them and even back further. This game is a game that you have to respect and once we, as players, and former players, once we lose that respect for the game, then the fans will see that and they'll quit coming out to the ballpark.

I don't have any more questions.

Thanks so much.

“Loving the Game”
Doug Flynn

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