

BASEBALL DIGEST



ALL STAR EDITION



A Special Publication of Arnall Golden Gregory LLP

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By Abe J. Schear
July 2014

I want to introduce you to my good friend, Allan Gottlieb. Allan has been exceedingly instrumental in youth sports at NYO (located at Chastain Park in North Atlanta) and few of the hundreds and hundreds of players who have played on Allan's team have forgotten (or will ever forget) the extraordinarily wonderful experience.

I have coached each of Allan's five children, some as Allan's assistant coach and others without his sage advice (which he regularly offered without request) and each season has made me laugh and smile, particularly six (6) years ago when we coached his youngest daughter Hollis in T-Ball. Another time, at the end of a two (2) point basketball game (we were losing), Allan and I thought (correctly, of course) that the referee erred so Allan, in his inimitable enthusiastic way, had two technicals called on him and then I had one before being told by the referee that they were "out of technical fouls". I might add that Allan and I had done nothing to warrant such horrific treatment, however it is hard to win when the other team shoots eight straight free throws. We still laugh about the spectacle (as did the players and spectators). Ah, youth sports.

Allan is dedicated, not really to the wins and losses (though he rarely has a weak team) but, rather, to the team experience. Allan's teams play hard every game and the players and their parents have found Allan's passion and love for his players to be so rewarding and memorable. And oh, does he love all of his players.

Baseball is, of course, a child's game and few are able to capture the magic, to share the game's joy, better than Allan. I am sure you will enjoy Allan's memories and perspectives on the game and on coaching.

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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 Schear and mailed to him at Arnall Golden Gregory.

Allan Gottlieb "The Consummate Coach"

Schear: It is June 2nd and I am here with my good friend and sports fan, great coach and great guy, Allan Gottlieb. We are going to talk baseball for a while. So, Allan, where did you grow up?

Gottlieb: New York, born in Brooklyn, grew up mostly on Long Island, Queens and then Glen Cove.

And when did you first start to follow baseball?

Early. My earliest recollections of anything include baseball. I would have been 4, 5 – a little kid. And, you know who I root for. It was as a child that I started rooting for the Mets.

Was that your family's team?

I was born into it, well it couldn't have been because the Mets only came in 1962. I was born in '59. They were all diehard Brooklyn Dodger fans, all with broken hearts and then the Mets arrived. I was born a Mets fan.

And, when you were a little boy, who taught you to play baseball? Did you play baseball as a little boy?

I did – in the street, other kids, like most every kid at that time. Pick-up games in the street.

Did you play organized baseball?

A little bit, not much. I guess when I was 11 and 12 when we were out on Long Island and Glen Cove.

What position did you play when you played on a team?

Outfield. I did play some infield. The last year I played second and short.

Did you play for loud coaches?

Remarkably, no, very calm, collected, very unlike me.

Very unlike you. When you were a little boy, your favorite team was the Mets, but did you root for the Yankees at all?

Did I root against the Yankees? Always rooted "against" the Yankees. It was one or the other. I don't recall anybody who could root for both.

What was the first time you went to the ballpark?

Probably when I was 5 years old. The first year of Shea Stadium, 1964. I have no memory of ever going to games at the Polo Grounds. The Mets played there for the first couple of years.

Who would you go to the ballgame with?

I guess the first game that I ever went to my mom would have taken my brother Scott and me.

Is your mom a really big baseball fan?

No. I wouldn't describe her as a big baseball fan. She was divorced and trying to give us exposure to the game. That would have been my first ballgame.

And, your brother, Scott, was also mixed up in this Mets nonsense?

Also inflicted upon him.

And, so you two have at least one thing in common.

Yes.

Now, when you were a little boy back in the 60s', who were your favorite Mets players?

My first hero would have been Ken Boyer who was their first big hitter in the time I started following him. This comes back to one of the worst memories I have today. My mom had remarried and I guess I was 7 years old and I

was taken by my stepfather to a Mets welcome home dinner when they came back from spring training and it was at the Schrafft Hotel in Queens. We went to the dinner where Mets players would sign autographs during the evening and I hunted Ken Boyer to get his autograph. He was not at the dinner. I did not get an autograph. We might have been the last people to leave that dinner and one of the players came up and asked me what was wrong. I guess he could tell I wasn't happy about not being able to hunt down Ken Boyer to get his autograph. I told him I was looking for Ken Boyer and I didn't see him, that I didn't get his autograph. He then asked me if I would like his autograph. I looked at him like an unknowing 7 year old would have looked at a stranger and said who are you? He said "I'm Tom Seaver". I said, I don't want your autograph, I want Ken Boyer's autograph.

Well, everybody knows that Ken Boyer was a much greater player than Tom Seaver ever became. I might add, some of your little league draft choices have played out similarly. Did you have other favorite players as a youngster?

I rooted for the Mets. I would tell you I ended up respecting a lot of other players. A lot of players, particularly those in the National League that beat them up, had a lot of successes against them over the years. That evolved over time, but I guess among the players that played against them I most respected Bob Gibson who always seemed to end up pitching against Seaver and there were just some great games where both of them would go out and throw a complete game. It was invariably a 2-1 or 3-2 game. Pete Rose, always with his hustle and ability to get on base, his successes, his enthusiasm. I always admired Rose as a ballplayer. I really liked guys like Clemente and Stargell, Lou Brock, Steve Carlton, Johnny Bench, Hank Aaron, Juan Marichal and Dave Concepcion.

Anybody else? You remember when Mays came and finished his career with the Mets?

He did. His skills were quite diminished, obviously. When the Mets played the Dodgers and Giants, they were the games that always drew the biggest crowds in

New York in the late 60s', early 70s. The Giants team was a great team, but you didn't see very much of it back then. You didn't see the west coast teams. You know, as a kid the games weren't on TV the way they are today. I would sneak a radio in the bed at night listening to games on the radio, but that wasn't quite the same as it is today.

“I don't want Tom Seaver's autograph, I want Ken Boyer's autograph.”

When you were a youngster, did you like to watch the ballgame or did you like to listen to the ballgame more?

Any game that was on TV I watched. And, if I couldn't stay up when I was a kid, I would go to bed, I would have an early curfew, but I would sneak the radio in the bed and listen to games on the transistor radio. I went through a lot of batteries, woke up with the game already over a lot of times and had no idea who had won or lost, but would listen to the Mets games announced by Bob Murphy, Lindsey Nelson, Ralph Kiner.

And, were those your favorite announcers when you were little?

They were the Mets announcers. There was no other.

Did you listen to the Yankees games too?

I did, but not with the same passion as listening to the Mets games.

Now, when you woke up in the morning, not knowing who won, did you follow baseball by reading the newspaper?

Newspaper, turn on the radio, sports would come on the same time every half hour - that's where you would get caught up.

And, back then you knew the Mets lost every day.

They were good for a solid 90 to 100 losses every year, my first nine years anyway. Obviously they had that record, 120 loss seasons, which still stands today.

They were awful! They were really awful! You were 3 and I think you could have played middle in-field on that team. Probably so.

Abe, the first run they ever gave up was

on a balk. A balk!!!

They're regressing as we speak. Now, you used to go to Shea Stadium. Of the ballparks have you been to today, what are your favorites?

The most fun would be Wrigley Field. I spent the summer in Chicago between my first and second year at business school, and every weekend when the

Cubs were in Chicago, I was at Wrigley Field. That's a great fun place to watch a ball game. Shea Stadium, which I loved going to. At the time it opened it probably was as nice as any facility, but it was right next to LaGuardia Airport. You always heard planes coming in. It was not a great ballpark.

How did you get to the ballgames?

When I was a little older, I used to take the bus and go with friends from Glen Cove to Flushing, walk across the roads and then over the bridge.

How long of a bus drive was it?

About an hour.

And, then you . . .

And, then a 20 minute walk and then 3 hours of agony!

Followed by a bus drive?

Another walk, another bus drive and that was the day.

And it was terrific, wasn't it?

I didn't know any better.

Wow, you knew they were your team.

When you were little did you collect autographs? Did you ever hang around to get autographs from the players other than Ken Boyer?

Yes, that was the first mistake. Yes, I did, I had autographs but I wouldn't be able to tell you where they ended up. They were thrown out at some point when the house got cleaned.

And, what about baseball cards and magazines? Did you collect baseball cards? Did you read about baseball in magazines? You know, what else did you do?

I did collect baseball cards. I followed most sports. I read the local papers like every kid and I read Sports Illustrated. I had Mets yearbooks; don't where they

ended up, but they disappeared.

When I was a little boy, I used to read Sport Magazine and the Sporting News and both of those just had so much on baseball. It seemed like they had so much on baseball all year long and I don't know, it was a different era – I used to love reading them.

My summers were, each morning going to box scores and that was always, every kid at that time, like you as a kid growing up, you knew who the top hitters in the league were, what their averages were, which pitchers were hot, who was doing well and who wasn't doing well.

When you were done with high school, you went to Vanderbilt?

I went to undergraduate in South Carolina.

When you went to South Carolina, I mean did it occur to you that you might not be able to follow baseball in the south?

School was over the beginning of May. I was back up in New York to resume the torture.

When you were at South Carolina did you ever drive over to Atlanta to see the Mets play in Atlanta?

No, I did not.

And, then you went to Vanderbilt and ...

That was about the time cable was becoming more prominent and through the magic of cable, and WOR, which was the Mets station being broadcast on cable, I was able to keep up with the Mets in Tennessee and when I came to Atlanta.

younger brother. It would have been in my freshman or sophomore year. He asked if I would help him. It sounded like it would be fun and that was the first time I coached. And I did that for a few years and then transitioned to umpiring baseball. Who would have thought of I could make money being involved in baseball? But I would work a lot of games in the summer when I was in college, officiated in youth sports in school. It was a great way to get paid doing something I enjoyed.

And then you coached all of your children, all five of them, in baseball. But leaving them aside for just a second, what's the best part of coaching youth sports these days? How many youth teams have you coached?

I've coached a bunch of teams.

[Editor's Note: The answer is likely near 100 teams, including baseball and basketball.] I'm not certain how many, mostly at NYO at Chastain Park. When a kid has success, whether it's a base hit or playing the field, and there is a smile on their face, when they've done something that they didn't know that they could do, that is quite rewarding.

And even though now your oldest, Bennett, is now 28, you seem to have as much enthusiasm for coaching other children as you did for coaching your own children.

It's easier coaching other children.

You know, I coached my daughters after coaching my boys. Coaching my daughters was easier than coaching my boys. And now, coaching children that

sure you would coach them with your daughters, too, if they were all a little bit older, but you had the opportunity to coach with your sons. How much fun is that?

It's the most fun! A few years ago, coaching my daughter Hollis in baseball, I had the ability to do that with my two oldest boys, Bennett and Ryan. Having them point out the quick decision making without any equivocation is always fun to observe, but it was quite a bit of fun coaching with them and coaching my daughter at the same time.

I'm sure it was. I mean, as someone who has coached all of your children, I think it's terrific to watch your kids come back to NYO, and I am very proud of my son, Adam, who is coaching in the same league as well. It's terrific to watch the kids come back to a program that they played in when they were little. Now, as if you haven't had enough of baseball, what made you decide to start NYO girls' basketball 6 or 8 years ago?

It will be our sixth season. I didn't start it, but I was the first commissioner and have been since the program began. I had done that in the boys program at Chastain and I guess by default there was nobody else still standing to do it. Everybody else stepped back and I stood there at the front of the line to do it. That's been quite enjoyable.

And tell me, are kids today, boys and girls who play baseball -- are they as enthusiastic about playing baseball as they were 20 years ago?

They enjoy playing, they are enthusiastic. I will tell you when I was a kid I spent an awful lot of time watching games on TV or listening to games on the radio. Kids today, I think they are as passionate about participating but they are participating in lots of different things. So, I don't think kids will sit in front of the TV and watch games the way we did as kids. Not all of them have natural anticipation of what's going to happen in the game.

Is there anything you think that youth sports can do to make baseball more interesting to the kids?

It's a great game and they have fun playing. Coaches, as a rule, over coach. At age 9, 10, 11 and 12, in my opinion, you don't need to make it

“The teams I'm coaching are my favorites. Those teams have my favorite players.”

And you still follow the Mets just as much as you did when you were a little boy?

It requires a thousand step program to separate from.

And, you're not anywhere close?

My name is Allan and I'm a Mets fan.

Now, tell me how you got into coaching baseball?

In high school, I had a friend whose parents were divorced. He had a

aren't yours is the easiest. It's the easiest because you're not second guessing why is my son, why is my daughter, doing this or that? Why is your child doing it? It's a lot of fun and the whole process of coaching a youth sports team is wonderful. The ability to draft the team, build the team, help kids improve, is a lot of fun.

And now you've got the opportunity to coach these teams with your sons. I'm

too complicated. Kids aren't playing baseball. That's a function of the parents.

And who are your favorite players today?

The teams I'm coaching are my favorites. Those teams have my favorite players. I say that and I mean that. The last few years, I've started coaching teams without my children on them and I've enjoyed the heck out of coaching those kids. It's hard for me to have a favorite who's earning \$25 million a year doing something they should be doing for free. In my opinion.

My last question. You and I have a wonderful shared history at NYO due to the Christopher League, which is

a baseball league for children with physical and/or mental challenges, and you know for all the years that that program has been evolved – maybe 15 or so years, you've always made sure that your teams have volunteered to assist the players on those teams. I'm curious as to why you've done that and in some ways I'm curious as to whether or not you think that your players will, 20 or 30 years from now, remember being buddies every bit as much as they remember being players.

The Christopher program started by you and taken over by our friend, Leo Rose, has been a great program for lots of different reasons. Coaches in a youth league get caught up in the winning

and losing. The winning and losing sometimes reaches a point which is silly. It's 10, 11 and 12 year old kids playing. When you are out there and you have the ability to put it in perspective of seeing somebody's else's child who can't fully compete and they have other issues and difficulties to deal with on a day-to-day basis, it's humbling and gives you the proper perspective. So, it's helped not only me as a coach and those coaching with me but it's helped each of the kids who have played for me. It's helped my children, giving them a better perspective on what is and isn't important in life. **Okay. Well, I don't have any more questions. You're a great volunteer and this is just a great interview.**

Allan Gottlieb
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Coach"

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63rd EDITION

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