

# BASEBALL DIGEST



## ALL-STAR EDITION



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*By Abe J. Schear*  
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People ask me how I pick interviewees and, honestly, many of them have been friends and acquaintances, people who I found to be interesting and with a fascinating perspective on baseball. And that is how I met Jeanne Ann, while she was trying (successfully) to sell us a condominium. In response to an offhand comment about where I'd put a bit of baseball memorabilia, she noted that she had been married to a major leaguer.

Baseball is fun to play, a game with reflex action. The ball is pitched and in a split second you react. The ball is hit, what do you do? But, like the nervous energy involved in youth sports, watching a spouse is complicated – involving nervousness, calmness, maturity, team play with player families and complicated relationships with management.

So I asked Jeanne Ann to relate her perspectives about being the wife of a player, and she surely did not disappoint me. Highs and lows, colorful memories and wonderful stories. I was flattered that she was confident that I'd lead her through memories of years ago and I'm sure you will enjoy her interview as much as I did.

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### Jeanne Ann Beckwith "Spousal Memories"

**Schear: I'm here with our good friend Jeanne Ann Beckwith. So Jeanne Ann, where did you grow up?**

Miami.

**And were you a baseball fan when you grew up?**

I was not. As you know, the state of Florida didn't have much of a presence when it comes to pro baseball. And about the only thing I remember doing, my earliest memory, was flipping pennies for a Mickey Mantle baseball card. But how things have changed now.

**Did you play baseball or softball when you were a child?**

I did not. It wasn't a very big deal. I didn't know of any people doing it back then.

Well, we did go to the beach quite a bit, but Miami is a different kind of town and I guess probably in many ways still is. It's really a northeastern town, but it didn't have the northeastern influence in baseball at all. I don't know...until high school, I don't even remember baseball being played very much. In middle school, I don't remember – and I went to large schools – us having any baseball teams. I played softball in PE, but that was the only time.

**But they had spring training in South Florida when you were young.**

Well yes, but I don't remember it.

**I think the Yankees played in Ft. Lauderdale for a long, long time.**

Well, they did, I used to go to their

**"I was very unknowledgeable about baseball."**

**Was your family interested in baseball or in sports?**

Yes, we were a big football family. My parents had season tickets to the University of Miami and also to the Dolphins. So I was raised going to the University of Miami games as a child.

**So they were all sports fans?**

Yes.

**Did they listen to baseball games on the radio?**

Oh yes, yes. But I can't tell you what teams.

**But back then, I mean maybe – I hate to say this – but maybe the girls weren't following sports back then in Miami. Maybe they were going to the beach.**

games, but that was once I was married to Joe.

**Okay, I'm blasting through some questions!**

I was very unknowledgeable about baseball.

**So how did you get into baseball? We have to bridge this gap from being a little girl to one of those days you married a baseball player. So how did that come about?**

From being totally illiterate to learning a great deal about the game. I went to Auburn University and my junior year I met Joe in film class and got to know him a little bit, and then – that was spring semester, my junior year – and then went home for the summer and he

was going to summer ball. We weren't really dating, we were just kind of friends, and I came back my senior year and met up again and then started dating. I started going to games and learning a lot about it, and... I mean to this day - and I was actually back at Auburn two weeks ago - I can recognize the sound

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**“There was no spring training experience like the Dodgers. Absolutely nothing.”**

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of the cleats. They used to be metal cleats – the metal cleats sound walking across the street going back to what's called The Concourse. And that sound will never leave me but that's how I started learning about baseball, thru Joe. And then the day I graduated was the baseball draft, and Joe could hardly even see my graduation because he had to be in another building because the draft was going on. It was right after graduation that somebody came over and let me know that Joe was drafted in the second round by the Dodgers.

**Joe was a pitcher.**

He was a pitcher, a starting pitcher.

**And my memory about college – I didn't really think about this before, but I once interviewed Tim Hudson who went to Auburn and he used the phrase that he was the “Saturday night pitcher”, the star pitcher, so he always pitched the star game. So I guess Joe must have pitched the Saturday night games.**

Yes. Joe had played in the world games before I had really known him. And I was still so new to this. I remember Mississippi State had such a strong team, and they had been to the College World Series and all that sort of thing, so he was the Saturday night pitcher. He really was.

**And did he play another position?**

No, pitching, that was it.

**You would just go sit and watch the games at Auburn?**

Yes.

**And you had no idea what you were watching?**

Well, I mean I knew baseball, I mean we played softball in high school and middle school. So I'd seen baseball in high school, because I dated a player on the

team. But we just didn't have a team in South Florida until the Marlins arrived.

**And they (the Marlins) hadn't been much of a team at that particular time.**

Exactly.

**So then go forward a little bit. So then you and Joe got married at some point.**

Right, the following autumn/fall.

**Okay, and where was he? This isn't really about him, but he was still in the minor leagues then?**

Yes, when he was drafted he went straight to Double-A which was in San Antonio, and he was there the rest of that summer. And it was a great town, and you learned a lot, and then he came home from spring training and had a sore knee. We were actually sitting around and he stood up and he tore the cartilage in his knee. He ended up having to have surgery with Dr. Jack Houston. It was really interesting, the Dodgers used Dr. Jobe, because he was their exclusive orthopedic surgeon. But they knew Dr. Houston so well that they finally agreed to let Jack do the surgery. And so Joe had major knee surgery. And our wedding was in December, and the week before the wedding he had to go back and be put under anesthesia so that they could surgically bend his knees. So we got to the week of the wedding and he could barely walk, and during the wedding we had kneelers and he had to get down and I was afraid I was never going to get him back on his feet. We went on our honeymoon and he's in the pool doing exercises to recover from knee surgery most of the time.

**And then did you go to spring training then after that?**

Yes, he went to that spring training that following year and he went to Triple-A, and that was in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the Albuquerque Dukes.

**Well let's back up for a second. So he went to spring training in Vero Beach?**

Yes.

**So, how cool was Vero Beach?**

Vero's wonderful. Now you've got me on something I can really talk about. Vero

was exceptional. Now, the first year we went to spring training we (the families) couldn't really go with them. They had to live. . . we had our own motel there. He had to actually stay on-site, and he lived with Bob Welch, the number one draft pick and just a great guy. But we could come and visit, I could play tennis, go to all their games. There was no spring training experience like the Dodgers. Absolutely nothing. The O'Malleys, I never knew Walter O'Malley, but Peter O'Malley and his wife Ann were fabulous. The Dodger organization, in my opinion, was just -- there were no equals. They just did amazing things on so many levels, I couldn't even begin to go into it all. But they would have Christmas in Dodgertown, and they would invite all the players that were married, that had children, big leaguers, and then some of the minors. I can't remember exactly how it all worked, but then they would find out what your children had and what your child wanted, and Santa Claus would come, and maybe this was more after we got to the big leagues. It was just amazing! This organization loved their players. And the front office was just an amazing organization.

**So you had Christmas during spring training?**

We had Christmas during the spring training and it was all decorated down by the pool. And the very first year I went, Danny Kaye was there, the dancer. So I got to meet Danny Kaye, and they actually brought in the train, you know, like four cars. I have pictures of my daughter being in the train with Danny Kaye, and all kinds of people. And I mean it was just such a warm, fun, friendly, caring environment. And in spring training you've got orange groves and every morning those guys are drinking fresh orange juice that was grown in the orange groves that are right there. And the plane, we had our own plane, the KO II. And the airport was not a mile away, you could literally walk. And then there was a golf course that they had right there. So I mean they did things in a way that you just don't see anymore.

Vero was very welcoming, a wonderful town. Actually, my parents came up and they loved it so much they ended up

buying four condos in Vero Beach over the years and then moved up close to Vero, so my family loves Vero Beach. But one of my fondest memories was actually after Joe was in the big leagues and we flew out, right after my daughter was born. This is 1981, and Merrill was seven weeks old, and we got in the plane – it was LAX and Peter O’Malley came up to me and said, “Jeanne Ann” – which that’s amazing that the owner would even know his players’ wives and children – and said to me “Merrill is the youngest player ever to fly on a KO II.”

you that story but I’ll have to remember, I can’t remember it off the top of my head – and then in the afternoon they called us and told us we weren’t. So that night we had no sleep, it was that shocking. Of course for a pitcher, not many pitchers really – especially hardball pitchers – don’t necessarily want to go pitch in Boston because of the Green Monster, but anyway, so we had a little experience there. But Kansas City, it was... you know we didn’t know a lot about Kansas City because it was in the American League, we’d

jumping back to the Dodgers, but one thing the Dodgers always did so well is they knew if your parents were in town, and if so they’d put it up on the scoreboard welcoming my parents, Bill and Betty Jean Driskell. And then the Royals were doing the same thing, so they were really good about that – they thought your family was special.

**Was it fun to go to the ballpark? Did you go all the time, or did you just go sometimes?**

Before I had my daughter I went to every game in L.A., and then once I had Merrill I still went more often than not, but of course you had baby-sitting or you were keeping a young child, you know, happy there, which we did a lot. We did not have a place, we didn’t have a nursery in Kansas City or at the Dodgers.

Other teams later had them, but we did not. So you had to keep a young child busy the whole time, but it was fun.

**What was your favorite ballpark you’ve gone to?**

Well those two had to be my favorites. It’s hard to get past Dodger Stadium. It just... I’m starting to tear up. It’s hard... it was so special. I don’t think they’ll ever tear it down, I can’t imagine going through Dodger Stadium what we’ve gone through here in Atlanta. They were just... it was just a special place.

**Well, I was at the Dodger Stadium once. I’ll tell you my story of Dodger Stadium.**

I’m a crier... sorry.

**It’s okay. I’ll tell you my story. So I’m at Dodgers Stadium, we’re sitting in the second deck, I’m in the second row. And to my left one day is Rob Reiner and his wife and a friend of his, another movie person, and his wife. And all of the other people, the women, did not really pay any attention to baseball, so every time something would happen, Reiner would be distracted, he kept reaching over to me and he would say, “What happened, what happened, what happened?”**

Oh my goodness.

**The next day, I was at the ballgame again, same seats, same Rob Reiner, except he was with three guys. And you realized that he really was from New York, and he was a great fan. And the four guys were all great, they**

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“In L.A. you were very much part of the entertainment industry.”

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And I was obviously very honored, she was seven weeks old, but Joe ended up being injured that spring training and had to be flown back to L.A. by himself. Peter then offered to fly me back, with Merrill, and presented me with a sterling cup, and he said, “Oh, it’s actually a present we have from Tiffany’s” and asked me once I opened it to come up and say something to him, and I did. And he said that he had picked out the calligraphy himself and wanted to know how I liked it. So I mean that he’d taken the time and they sent Merrill a sterling baby rattle when she was born. It was just a wonderful organization. They cared.

**One of my favorite things I’ve done, as I’ve done all these interviews, is some years ago I interviewed Bill DeLury who had been with the Dodgers for 50 or 60 years. We did it at Vero Beach in the middle of the fields, which they’re not using anymore. It was just, to me, the coolest thing. You know you were basically sitting out in the middle of the fields where all the stars had been. So then you went to Albuquerque but then ultimately Joe pitched for the Dodgers for a while and then he got traded?**

Right.

**So, what’s it like to be traded? From a spouse’s standpoint?**

Well, we actually had been traded once before, overnight. We were called about 11:00 at night and told we had been traded to Boston for . . . I think I told

never been there. And they flew us in pretty quickly and... you know, it’s as different from L.A. as night and day. A fabulous organization but a much smaller population in the area. You have a smaller organization, fabulous ballpark. It was delightful. In L.A. you were very much part of the entertainment industry, there was no question, you really, really were. And in Kansas City you were just proud to be a Royal, and it was a very wonderful, wonderful experience. Again, in many ways I think the Royals modeled themselves after the Dodgers. Wonderful owners. Eventually, we had John Schuerholz, and he was a wonderful man to play for; he did things very differently, but very nicely. I mean we didn’t have our own plane, spring training was different but, you know, Dodgertown was just something that was a haven. Yes.

**So when you went to the ballpark, when your family was there, everybody would sit together at the ballpark?**

Yes. The Dodgers and the Royals both had all the wives sitting in sections together. Not necessarily right on top of each other, but with a number of us together, and I know the Dodgers always had security watching. I had problems a couple of times and they were very, very on top of that. The Royals not so much, but it was a different kind of town, you know again, it wasn’t part of the entertainment industry. My parents always sat with us. And I know I’m

really were Brooklyn Dodgers fans, because that's all they talked about. Right.

**And they talked baseball for three solid hours. And I looked back and realized baseball is a great leveler. I mean he was Rob Reiner and he could have been absolutely anybody. And the view is worth crying for.**

It is.

**It is a great, great, great view. It's a pretty flat ballpark, maybe not the greatest ballpark in the whole world, but it does have a great view from behind the plate.**

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**“The second batter was Pete Rose. I can tell you I was a nervous wreck.”**

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It does. And I hope you got a Dodger dog.

**You know I think I've eaten everything.**

(laughs)

**So what's your favorite ballpark food Jeanne Ann?**

Well at Dodger Stadium there's the Dodger dog, of course. You know back then I was keeping my very young child very happy. So it was typically, you know, soft drink, Dodger dogs, popcorn, whatever...

**And hot dogs.**

But FYI – we had stars that would sit up with us, but you got kind of used to it. And there were so many stars that were in the locker room, so we'd see them come out. We'd see them all the time, you know. It was kind of interesting. I used to sit next to Bob Dole -- so that was much fun.

**So, day games or night games?**

Two different atmospheres, two different animals. Night games of course in L.A., there was so much traffic you had to leave for the ballpark hours before and you didn't get home until hours after. Kansas City – so much easier to get there. But, you know for the players and their wives in Kansas City, you would eat a different kind of breakfast. You could go out for dinner after a day game. You could go out and meet friends, you can go to a movie, so just a different schedule for each of them. That's a very good question.

**And, tell me, when you go to the game,**

**how difficult was it to watch a spouse pitch?**

For me, very difficult. The first time Joe ever pitched in the big leagues, the second batter was Pete Rose. I can tell you I was a nervous wreck, of course, but didn't behave like it. Inside, I was a nervous wreck. But here he's facing the great Pete Rose. I would say there was probably more angst for pitchers' wives than other players' wives because of course they're playing every day, often nine innings. Pitchers, you know, there's always ten of them sitting in the bull pen. So, a bit more of the nail biting.

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**Probably made for a nervous day all the way from when you woke up until the end of the day.**

Once we got to the game, when Joe was pitching in relief, you never know when they're coming in, and I have to say a comment I'd like to make about the wives. It's really funny along the lines. I think some people have asked me about the wives, thinking that there were a lot of blondes. These were very independent, very capable, women who are very knowledgeable about the sport, even though we couldn't talk about it all of the time, because we couldn't make it an entire focus of our lives. It controlled almost all aspects of your life, but you had to have a life outside of baseball. They knew what was going on. They watched the game, the pennant races, it was a very different atmosphere. We all knew the standings, but the rules were very different. I might be jumping ahead here. Pennant race life was very different. The guys were always very focused and we had to adapt, and you had to adapt to children and whatever. But, these were women who had to be ready for husbands to be traded the next day, wives being home where they had to be willing to move their children, drive cross country and the winter leagues, go and spend the winter in Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Puerto Rico. Very adaptable, very independent, very bright, capable women.

**You did get to be on a World Series team?**

Actually, two. The one for the Dodgers, Joe was injured the whole season. So he was still at every game and I was at most of the games and he still got to ride, you know, was considered part of the team, which was another wonderful thing that the Dodgers did, but yes, it was wonderful. They were both wonderful.

**You were on the '85 Kansas City World Series champions? [Note: Kansas City, down three games down to one, won games 5, 6 and 7.]**

Yes, that was a serious parade. It was one of the most amazing things I have ever seen. Because it was just a small town, they had us all ride in convertibles, antiques, and they had no idea what the turnout was going to be and I think they said it was four or five hundred thousand people there. And, they were throwing confetti, but it was really unbelievable.

The confetti was everywhere and we were literally picking it up and throwing it out of the cars. Then something terrible happened, which we think was because the convertibles were very close to the ground and there was so much confetti on the ground. Cars in front of us started catching on fire. So, they had to move our manager back to our car, so Dick (Howser) was in our car with us and he was a wonderful man. They literally had a couple of cars burn up! This was in Kansas City! This is a small community! **It must have been really nerve wracking to watch those games.** Very.

**That was a great series.**

That was an amazing series. My mother came up for the last games in Kansas City. My father went to all seven games, because of course, he only had to drive from St. Louis. And, it was amazing. St. Louis is an amazing city but we won. And the saying was, you know, just wait until the 'fat lady sings' and oh my gosh, here we are and we're down to the last game, the very last game! And we were getting so excited and this was my viewpoint, maybe not the viewpoint of others, but the wives started standing up and I'll be danged if we didn't have the whole stadium standing, which nowadays might not be unusual, but it was then. And, we won! I mean we won! Amazing! You know it was just amazing, just amazing, and we were so proud. We had so many good people.

**So, have you collected baseball memorabilia?**

I did, but when we got divorced the stuff sort of got lost. I had collected a great deal – lots and lots of articles and all kinds of things. So, I have a couple of the World Series baseballs and then I have some baseballs that my mother had saved signed by Sandy Koufax. She's getting ready to move here and we were going through the closets recently, pulled out a bag and my mother turned it upside down and out came all these baseballs.

Some were to my father that Joe had signed, some were from my brother-in-law (Ted Power) when he played for Cincinnati. And, so I've got a whole bunch more – 12 or 13 more baseballs.

**Ted was a pretty good pitcher too.**

He was a very good pitcher.

**Was it hard to have such a nomadic style or was it just kind of fun?**

It was both. Joe never had long term contracts. So, we always never knew. You weren't Steve Garvey, you weren't a Don Sutton, Ron Cey or Steve Yeager. I could keep going. You knew you weren't going to be there for a long time. So, you always – we bought a small house in L.A. and the times were so different. I mean, major league minimum was \$18,500, I think, and our first home, the least expensive, would cost five times that. So, it was still a very small nice little house, but about five feet away from the street. But times have changed, needless to say, and major league men make a huge amount these days. It's wonderful to go up to the major leagues. Of course we had to drive 800 miles and it was crossing the Mohave Desert, so you couldn't really find somebody to ride with you. It wasn't a very pleasant drive. **Sounds like it's pretty good memories for you when you look back on it. I**

**just have one more question. Tell me the best part about being involved in baseball.**

The World Series was great because we got to see what it was like twice. But we were very fortunate because we were in the playoffs 4 out of 6 years. But it's memories. I'll give you an example – Toronto. We had to play Toronto to get

**So you do have real memories, unlike other professional sports where careers are not terribly long. You know, Joe's career was way longer than normal as compared to other major sports. And so that means that you, I guess, developed relationships and relationships that probably will be lasting forever.**

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**“We were in the Rose Garden with Ronald Reagan.”**

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to the World Series. We went to Toronto and people in Toronto were wonderful. They were so friendly. We all, the wives, started making friends so the last day our security kept saying we (our team) had to sit together. And we said “No”! No, we are going to sit here around all these people that we have gotten to know, and we kept those friendships for years. So, it wasn't just the World Series, it was the experience and the people, the experiences and the challenges, your children being part of it.

**Well, you know I never would have thought about it. But, I mean unlike football, where you play a game a week and half of the games aren't at home, in baseball you have home series. So you go out the ballpark every day and you get to see people and you get to meet people and you get to feel like you are part of the community that you live in, because you live there. You also are part of a smaller community, so you really do see brothers and sisters and the partners and the spouses, and the children, and you see them when you go to spring training and get to hang out for six weeks, and do whatever people do in spring training – barbeque and go to McDonald's.**

Right. You know for pitchers you're there even a week earlier. If I remember correctly, we were in spring training around February 7th often times. And, if you were lucky enough to be in the playoffs, and then the World Series, that was a lot of time spent together – and this was before we had the extra round of playoffs. When we were with the Royals we came home from the White House on Halloween. So the season had gone from the end of the first week in February all the way to the end of October.

**So, you were at the White House and saw Ronald Reagan?**

We did. We were in the Rose Garden with Ronald Reagan.

**Well, that's kind of a neat thing. Right?**

It was amazing. And, equally as amazing, then we were taken to lunch in the Senate building. There was a huge luncheon there for us, for all the representatives and senators from Missouri and Kansas. And the Kansas senators and representatives had a big map of Missouri sitting up on something and that had redrawn Kansas City, in Kansas.

**And, I'll bet Bob Dole was there.**

Yes, he was there.

**Thank you. This was perfect.**

**Jeanne Ann Beckwith**  
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