

BASEBALL DIGEST



KICK-OFF EDITION



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By Abe J. Shear
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I've been in Atlanta nearly forty years now and the state sport is, without question, college football. It is hard to ignore and, for me, Vince Dooley is Georgia football and he made me a Georgia fan.

In fact, I know exactly where I was when Kevin Butler kicked his 60+ yard field goal, when Lindsay Scott broke Florida's heart, when Georgia beat Auburn to go to the Sugar Bowl. Dooley's teams, one and all, provided exciting afternoons, afternoons full of tension and, more often than not, victory.

Years later, while not casting his shadow over today's glory, Vince Dooley remains synonymous with the University of Georgia. He loves the school and coach Dooley remains revered like few others in the state. We continue to reflect on his accomplishments while searching for ways to appropriately honor his special legacy.

Much to my pleasure, Coach Dooley is also a fountain of baseball knowledge. (I might add that Barbara Dooley is hardly a slouch either in the baseball memory department.) Coach Dooley's memories repeatedly brought a smile to his face as he looked back on his family in the 40's and 50's. The stories show his passion, his love of family, his amazing memory—each qualities which he's shared with his teams as his other family. Having spent a few minutes with Coach Dooley, I am for sure an even more passionate Bulldog fan.

Vince Dooley "Bulldog Power"

Vince: Barbara was just telling me about growing up in Birmingham. Her daddy went out to see the Birmingham Barons with her all the time.

There's a fella named Eddie Glennard that was the General Manager of the Barons for many, many years. A great citizen of Birmingham.

Abe: And you grew up in Mobile?

Yes. Most of my interest and involvement in baseball started in Mobile because my father was an electrician and he wired old Hartwell Field and, because of that, they gave him two passes to the games. They wanted him there primarily in case something went wrong with the lights. So, I would guess for maybe four years or so, five years, I don't know, six years even, I don't think we missed a home baseball game. And once you'd become a fan, then it's a question of how to follow them on the road, which was very challenging in those days because you didn't have radio. They didn't have broadcasts for games away and I would go down to the pool hall. The pool hall was about four blocks from my house and I'd go sit up there. They had seats there for 10 or 12 people and they had all the scores, the Major League, American, National League and they had the Southern League. They had ticker tape, so people would just sit there and look up at the board and then when something would come on the ticker, the board would change. You sat there doing that, and that's the way I would follow them when they were on the road.

What was the ballpark like that you went to in Mobile?

Well, you'd almost have to go back to see it differently. When you remember things, they all seem so much bigger than when you go back and look at them. The ballpark has been torn down. There was the area where it was located in right field. Beyond right field was a pulley works and they had a baseball player named Babe "Pulley Works" Benning. And they called him "Pulley Works" because he hit one in the pulley park. Had a lot of interesting baseball players at that time connected with the Dodgers, the Brooklyn Dodgers. Some of the characters that we followed are kind of heroes. There was a fella who went out for the Dodgers for a while and as I remember, I think the first ten times he was at bat he hit seven home runs. But he tapered off. He ended up living in Mobile. Chuck Connors was with the Bears. He had a hitting form. I don't think he hit about one or two home runs in a season because he always was a left hander. He always hit into left field, so he had no pull power, but he had an underarm swing. A heck of a good player, a great fielder and a good hitter but he couldn't hit the long ball because of the way he swung. One incident I'll never forget: We had a catcher named Harry Chosen, and Harry Chosen actually broke Joe DiMaggio's consecutive hitting streak, I guess in the minors, but nevertheless as far as Mobile was concerned, it was breaking Joe DiMaggio's record. It was a Sunday double header. This was the time when he had a chance to break it and he got up to bat. He was a fat, squatty guy and he hit the first pitch over the fence. The place

goes crazy. They stopped the game and they passed the hat. Took up a collection. I bet it took them twenty minutes to pick up a collection for him, putting nickels and dimes and maybe dollars. Who knows all

“We went probably every night if they were there. We never missed a game.”

what was in the hat.

In Atlanta, I know that when they talk about the Minor Leagues, they say they gambled on everything. Did they gamble? Do you remember them gambling at the games in Mobile?

Well they could well have done that. I don't recall.

Was there a Negro league team in Mobile?

It was. They had the Black Bears.

And they played at the same ball park?

Yes. I think they did.

Did your mother or father really follow baseball?

My daddy did because of the fact that he wired Hartwell Field. That's why he got into it and he became a great fan and we would catch the bus to go out there and we walked to the bus stop, caught the bus and we went probably every night if they were there. We never missed a game.

Did you play? I know you played a lot of basketball and I know you played football. Did you play baseball as a youngster?

Yes. In baseball we played informal little leagues, I guess.

Sand lot?

Yes, the sand lot league and played up through high school, but in high school I turned my ankle and then they started having spring practice football, so it became football, basketball and then spring football, so I didn't play.

So, that was the beginning of football being a 12-month sport?

Sort of. However, in the Marine Corps I played softball.

And what position did you play?

I was an outfielder, center fielder. I could cover the ground pretty good, get a good jump on the ball. Not a great deal of speed, but I got a good jump on the ball. I

was a pretty good outfielder.

And my guess is that you under-stated the fact that you could throw the ball, because I know you played quarterback in high school. So, you obviously played outfield if you could throw.

I could throw pretty well. Yes.

The equipment that you guys played with in your family, was it handed down through the family and did ya'll go out and buy or did you order from the catalog? How was the equipment back in the 30's and early 40's?

Well, any equipment we had, well you wore your tennis shoes. And they were play shoes. We didn't really have uniforms. The first bat and glove that I ever owned . . . That was pretty obvious at the time, that I had a desire to compete and win, but didn't have the business sense to go with it. We were selling Liberty magazines and so they had a contest that whoever sold the most would win a bat and a glove and I sold a lot, but I also got a lot of tips for some reason. So, I took

“I was a pretty good outfielder.”

all of my tips and compiled them to end up winning the contest of selling the most magazines, but I bought a great deal of them with my tips.

That's funny.

So, I wasn't so smart of a business man, but I won and I got my first bat and gloves.

Did you collect baseball cards as a youngster?

Yes, I did. I sure did. My hero was Stan Musial and I followed him religiously and I remember that I wrote him a letter and it must have taken me two or three days to write that letter, but I never heard from him. I never did. And I told myself that if I ever get to a position that somebody writes me a letter, I am going to answer every letter that I get, which I did.

Well, that's a good lesson that Stan Musial taught you.

But interestingly enough, I finally met Stan Musial. I went out to his restaurant when I was coaching and met him. Then, when I retired, somebody, I think from Mobile, knew that I liked Musial, so somehow he got Musial to send me a bat and he signed it "Congratulations on your career, Stan Musial", so I have that bat at home.

Did you collect anything else other than baseball cards?

No, you did that primarily because you got bubble gum, as I remember.

Right. When you watched the ballgames, did people go and get autographs from the players in Mobile?

No, for some reason, you didn't.

What was the first Major League ballpark that you went to?

Well, the first Major League game I saw was in Montgomery, Alabama. I was in Auburn at the time in college and hadn't seen one yet and after they would have the spring practice, they would work their way back north and stop in these different cities and have an exhibition game in each city. I went to see the Detroit Tigers and, I guess, Hank Greenberg was there and he

hit a ball, probably the highest ball that I've ever seen go up in the air. It seemed like it took five minutes for the thing to finally come down. I never will forget that. But that was the first Major League game that I ever saw and then, finally, I went off to New York and saw the Giants play one time and that's about it in those

early days. Some of the players that I grew up with played baseball. A fellow named Frank Bolling, who was the first second baseman for the Atlanta Braves, was with the Milwaukee Braves and then when they moved here, that first year, maybe the first year or two, he was the second baseman.

Okay.

And we grew up playing basketball together. He had a brother named Milt Bolling who also played with the Red Sox many, many years ago.

Sure.

And so I was classmates or teammates or basketball teammates with those two

seeing a big crowd like that and to be in Chicago and to play against the pros. We were playing the Detroit Lions and Arch Ward, who was the sports writer of the Chicago Tribune, that started that game and that was the first year that the colleges went to two-way football. He required the pros, except for two positions, to play both ways, so the newspapers wrote that there's no way that these pros who were are specialized can play both ways. Well, when you tell a bunch of athletes that they can't do something, it was the worst mistake psychologically that could have been made. It was the Detroit team.

baseball game, it's sort of like an event. It seems you have more time to socialize or at least I always felt that way, primarily I guess, because there was a lot of time in between as opposed to football and, of course, even more so with basketball, but, you know, they are both team sports and great lessons learned from that.

It's always seemed to me that rarely does a team win, at least, in college, if it doesn't have a really great coach or a great leader and it seems like it does start from there. I think that Bobby Cox probably could coach football if somebody could call the plays for him. I think that he probably knows how to motivate and organize and in that way I do think they are very similar. You just don't see many bad coaches winning lots of games. You have to have an awful good team.

Yes. Coaching is important. Yes, I do think it is.

If there was one player that you could meet that you haven't ever met, you know, from days long gone by, who might that be?

Well, I did get a chance to meet Musial, so that would have been perhaps, DiMaggio, perhaps DiMaggio.

And today, do you listen to the ballgames on the radio?

Just in passing.

Did you teach your kids to play baseball?

No, I didn't.

You were sort of full time with another sport.

I think that Barbara was probably more responsible for them not playing baseball because of football and basketball and then when you got into the summertime when we had no time together.

Right.

She wasn't going to let them monopolize the little time that I had before football season by doing that.

I don't think I've got any more questions. You followed my outline straight down the page. I really, really appreciate your time and everything you've achieved. Thank you very much.

“Watching a baseball game, it's sort of like an event.”

guys and knew them well.

What was the baseball field like at Auburn? Do you remember?

Just little old bleachers at Auburn. They were just bleachers. We had a fellow that was a freshman football coach and for some reason they needed a baseball coach because the baseball coach left. This fellow had coached the freshman team and he didn't know anything about baseball but they made him the coach and he ends up winning the championship because he had two things – he had two pitchers and both of them could pitch and it goes to show the importance of pitching. I knew he didn't know what he was doing as a manager, but he had two great pitchers.

I want to ask you one old football question. I know that when you played at Auburn, you played in the All American game, the game where you went and played in Chicago.

Yes.

What was that? That was a big stage and a big stadium. What was it like to go play in a big pro stadium at that time?

It was actually the College All Star game. It was held in Chicago at Soldier's Field and I got selected primarily because Jim Tatum, who was the coach, we had played them earlier and I played pretty well against him. At Soldier's Field,

Bobby Layne was the quarterback and they had been there before, the year before, so more than likely they weren't going to be too excited about going back except when they got challenged by the media that they couldn't play both ways. Needless to say, we got annihilated pretty good or pretty bad. It was an interesting lesson that I remember.

Did you used to follow ballgames on the radio?

I followed, yes, because I was always a Cardinal fan during that time. It was, I mean, there was Musial and there was Red Schoendienst, there was Enos Slaughter and Whitey Kurowski and Marty Marion and, you know, I knew them all and when I was in high school, growing up in grammar school, I knew batting averages for the first fifteen or twenty in both leagues. I knew them and kept up with them daily, so I was a real fan early on, but I got into my own particular specialty in playing football and then ended up coaching. I still followed it, but couldn't follow it like I had.

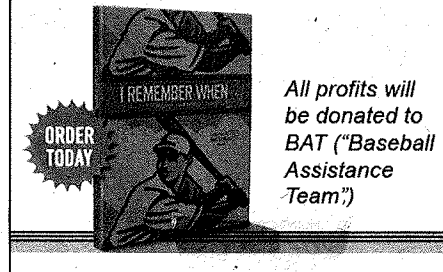
How would you compare baseball to football? Or football to baseball? Are there lessons that are similar or are they completely different?

Well, no. I think there's great lessons in all sports. Competition, teamwork, the value of teamwork. It's a slower pace, obviously, than football. Watching a

Author's Note:

It seems to me in baseball you remember where you sat, what you ate and things like that. In football, and heaven knows, I'm a hopeless Georgia fan, I know exactly where I stood [in the middle of the street] when Kevin Butler kicked the 60+ yard field goal, but I can't remember the rest of the game. I remember exactly where I was when Lindsay Scott scored his classic touchdown to help clinch Georgia's national championship. I was at the game. I know exactly where I was, but I don't remember much of the rest of the game. Baseball is just different, likely due to the pace of the game, but the big plays in football are huge and they are discussed over and over.

I Remember When is a beautifully designed hardcover coffee table book, including the first 35 Baseball Digests. The book is \$19.95 (plus tax and shipping) and can be purchased at www.irememberwhen.org.



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