

## **Donn Pall**

*Interview conducted by Mark Liptak in 2003. Originally published at White Sox Interactive in 2003.*

*You wonder how many Sox fans dreamed "the dream." The dream being the chance that someday, somehow you could wind up on that field. Not only on that field, but wearing a White Sox uniform... playing for the team that you grew up rooting for.*

*The odds have to be a million to one to get to the Major Leagues and perhaps a billion to one of growing up in Chicago and playing for the White Sox when you do.*

*Any wonder Donn Pall always seems to have a smile on his face? This is a guy who beat those impossible odds. Pall grew up in Evergreen Park and when he wasn't playing baseball, he was watching it. Often in a seat at the original Comiskey Park.*

*Like the song says, "And the seasons, they go round and round..." and before you knew it, young Donn Pall was now 26 and on the same pitching mound where he watched Wilbur Wood, "Goose" Gossage, Steve Stone, LaMarr Hoyt and Britt Burns do their thing.*

*Pall played 10 years in the Major Leagues, six with the Sox and was there for the 1990 and 1993 seasons that grow sweeter with time. Donn still lives and works in the Chicago area as a financial consultant for Smith Barney, which is where I caught up with him.*

*Pall talked about playing in front of friends and family, of having some pretty funny characters as teammates, of the day that Carlton Fisk was released, of the night that he and Fisk were refused entrance to the Sox clubhouse before the A.L.C.S., and about how the "baseball gods" may have gotten revenge on him later in his career.*

*And yes...Donn still follows the Sox and you can still find him out at the ballpark, only now the seats are usually a little better!*

**ML:** First off how about that unusual spelling of Donn?

**DP:** That was my mom. She liked the name "Don" but didn't like "Donald" so she came up with "Donn." Growing up I thought it was cool that I was named after Donn Clendenon, the former ballplayer, but it turned out that wasn't the case. It's funny but I've got a short name, only four letters in the first and last name but you'd be surprised how often it's spelled wrong. A lot of time it'll be spelled Don Paul.

**ML:** You grew up a passionate Sox fan. What are some of your best memories?

**DP:** I don't really have anything specific... it was more of just going to the park. I used to love seeing the light towers. I'd see those and think 'I'm here.

**ML:** Now you told me that you were at the park the night of "Disco Demolition" right?

**DP:** I was. I had seats in the lower deck, third base side, about halfway up. As I walked around the park that night it was packed, but I thought I was at a Grateful Dead concert instead of a ball game. I literally saw a cloud of smoke hanging over the field. It's funny, I remember wondering if the record that I took with me to get in was going to be accepted as a disco record. I thought that the ticket takers wouldn't let me get in because it wasn't disco! (laughing) Remember you had to bring a disco record with you and if you did, you could get in for .98 cents.

Between games after they blew up the records, people started running on the field. They weren't just trying to run the bases; they were ripping up the grass, trying to tear out the bases. I remember seeing some guy climbing down the foul pole! I saw a lot of people with gashes on their heads because people were throwing records around like Frisbees. It reminded me of a concert where for a while a baseball game broke out. When that second game was declared a forfeit, I was pissed off! The Sox were pretty bad and they couldn't afford forfeiting a game! I was probably the only person who left the park that night upset over that loss.

**ML:** Where did you play high school and college baseball?

**DP:** I went to Evergreen Park high school and then I went to the University of Illinois. I wasn't recruited by anybody so I walked on as a freshman only to be cut. One day I went out to watch practice and I thought, 'you know, these guys aren't that much better than me. I can play with them.' So for the next year I worked hard and got myself ready. My second year I tried out and made the team. I pitched and in the next two years I went 5-12. Some of my friends then started getting on me because the school record for most losses in a career was 15. They were saying things like it was a cinch I was going to break it. What happened was that my senior year I went 13-1 as a starting pitcher.

**ML:** And how did the Sox get you?

**DP:** Larry Monroe (Author's Note: Former Sox player and front office assistant) watched me and recommended me to the team. The Sox wound up drafting me but Monroe was honest with me. He said that the Sox never expected me to make the Major Leagues. They said they were looking for a solid starter to help fill out the team in Class-A.

**ML:** But make the big leagues you did. How about the first time you pitched in a game?

**DP:** It was in 1988 at Comiskey Park. The A's were beating us like 10-1 and I came in to pitch the 9<sup>th</sup> inning. I was nervous, I remember looking around and thinking 'I was sitting in those stands a few years ago, now I'm out here!' Stan Javier got a double and the next guy got a single. I'm thinking 'OK... relax...' the next guy hit into a double play, I struck out the final guy and that was it. (Author's Note: That game was played on August 1, 1988. Pall pitched one inning, giving up one run on two hits with a strike out. Javier did get the double, Doug Jennings the RBI single. Mike Gallego rolled into the double play and Tony Phillips struck out. I was at the game.)

**ML:** I wonder Donn about growing up and playing for the home town team. I can see where it can actually be a curse because of the added pressure and always having your family and friends around all the time. How did you handle this?

**DP:** I've talked to guys about just what you've mentioned. Some guys have told me they couldn't wait to get out of their home town because of the added pressure, they said it was brutal. Things like people calling them up all the time for tickets and stuff. I never had that problem. I thought it was great to have my parents sitting in the stands. If I had extra tickets, I'd call my friends up and ask if they'd like to go to the game that night. In 1988 I was probably the only player in baseball who lived at home! I remember driving home one night after a game thinking that this was really awesome. I mean I just struck out George Bell, now I'm going home to sleep in the bed that I had since I was a kid. You talk about living the dream, it was great.

**ML:** Talk to me about 1990, a season when the Sox shocked baseball with 94 wins. That was one of those teams where the sum of the parts truly was greater than the individual talent.

**DP:** It was quite a season. We had a lot of young talent, guys who came up through the minors together. Plus we had a great coaching staff and manager Jeff Torborg. I loved playing for him. We had a close family atmosphere on the team. We had Bobby Thigpen and Barry Jones... both had sensational years (Author's Note: Thigpen would set the major league record for saves in a season with 57. Jones who usually pitched the 8<sup>th</sup> inning, went 11- 4 with a 2.31 ERA) those two guys would shorten the game and we had confidence because we played in so many one run games. Then when you have things happen like the Andy Hawkins game, you start to think 'this is our year' (Author's Note: On July 1, 1990, the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of Comiskey Park, the Yankees Andy Hawkins no-hit the Sox and lost 4 - 0! Consecutive outfield errors by Jim Leyritz and Danny Tartabull allowed the four unearned runs in the 8<sup>th</sup> inning.)

**ML:** Another interesting side note to that season was A's pitcher Dave Stewart and his comment that most of the Sox players "couldn't hold my jock." What did you guys think after hearing that?

**DP:** We thought it was pretty funny. The guys didn't take it personally and we didn't draw a lot of inspiration from it. I do remember the fans reaction to it though; they had that big jockstrap in the bleachers and then threw a bunch of jocks on the field the next time Dave pitched.

**ML:** That team had some real characters didn't it? I mean playing a full season with Steve Lyons, Ozzie Guillen and Scott Radinsky had to have its moments!

**DP:** It was cool! I still think Steve dropped his pants on purpose, although he swears it was an accident. (Author's Note: On July 16, 1990 in Detroit, Lyons slid into first base beating out a bunt. While Dan Petry of the Tigers was arguing the call Lyons forgot where he was and dropped his pants trying to get the dirt out. Fortunately he was wearing compression shorts under his uniform pants! After being forced at second later in the inning when he ran into the dugout, female fans in the first few rows behind the Sox dugout starting waving dollar bills at him. It was one of the funniest Sox moments ever.)

Ozzie was always talking. He'd be talking when you were in your windup, he'd be talking as the ball was hit to him, and he still be talking as he was throwing the guy out, and I've never seen a player like "Rad" before. He had no idea who the guys on the other team were. We'd be playing the Royals and he'd ask, "Who's that left hander coming up next inning?" I'd say, "Man, that's George Brett!" He'd have no idea who that was and maybe that was good... he didn't know who they were so he could never get nervous.

**ML:** How about playing for Jeff Torborg. I take it from your earlier comments that he was the best manager you ever had.

**DP:** He was. Jeff was a great communicator. He'd make sure you knew exactly what he wanted you to do. Jeff treated everybody with respect, it didn't matter who you were or how long you were in the league. It's funny but most managers don't spend a lot of time with pitchers. They usually leave that to the pitching coach, but Jeff was always talking with us.

**ML:** I had heard this and don't know if it's true. Maybe you could shed some light on it. I had heard that some members of the Sox upper organization felt that Jeff ruined Bobby Thigpen, that he used him too much and that was one of the reasons the Sox 'encouraged' Jeff to take the Mets job, that if he didn't he was going to get fired. Is that true?

**DP:** I never heard that. I don't see how anybody could have felt that way. If anything Jeff took special care of all of his pitchers. We were in Seattle one time and Jeff told us before the game that no matter what happened, Bobby (Thigpen), Barry (Jones), and I, all the right handers, were not going into the game that we could just shut it down. All of us had pitched two or three games in a row and Jeff said that's enough. Those last three games, when we finished the season in Boston, and they were fighting for the division, Jeff told Bobby he wasn't going to be used. Bobby had already set the record and Jeff felt that was enough. And Bobby didn't pitch in those three games.

Bobby's trouble and I know the coaches told him about this many times, was that even if he was loose and ready, he'd keep throwing in the bullpen. If it was the last of the 8<sup>th</sup> and Bobby knew he'd be going in the next inning, he'd loosen up, but if the Sox had a long inning or scored three or four runs, Bobby would keep throwing! He wouldn't stop... I guess he was bullheaded that way. Bobby threw three times longer than he needed to and that's what wore him out. (Author's Note: Bobby went from 57 saves in 1990, to 30 in 1991, to 22 in 1992, to one before being traded to the Phillies on August 10, 1993 for pitcher Jose DeLeon.)

**ML:** Let's talk about Carlton Fisk. This was a guy you grew up watching, what was it like to pitch to him?

**DP:** Greg Hibbard (Author's Note: White Sox pitcher and Pall's teammate) said it best one time. He said that when Carlton was behind the plate, it was like having a cheat sheet during an exam. You didn't have to think, just pitch. I admired him, we all did. He played the game the way it was supposed to be played and he expected *you* to play it the same way. I remember an at-bat against Robin Yount. Carlton wanted a fast ball inside...strike one. He wanted another fast ball inside... strike two. I'm thinking 'OK, he's set up, now I'll throw the split finger / forkball,' but Carlton wanted *still another* inside fast ball. I shook him off, but he nodded his head up and down and I wasn't going to shake him off a second time. I threw what he wanted and broke Yount's bat, easy out.

I learned about shaking off Carlton! One time we were in Cleveland and Brook Jacoby was hitting. I shook off Carlton and threw the pitch I wanted, and Jacoby hit it out of the park!

**ML:** In June the Sox made what turned out to be a major public relations disaster when they released Fisk while the Sox were in Cleveland. Compounding the problem was that they didn't even hold a press conference to announce it; they sent faxes to the local media. Tell me what happened that day and how Carlton reacted to it and for that matter what the feeling was a few days earlier on "Carlton Fisk Night" at Comiskey Park after he broke the record for games caught.

**DP:** When we had that night for him I turned out to be the winning pitcher when we beat the Rangers in extra innings. I got Carlton to sign the game ball from that night. "Bo" Jackson went around asking guys if they'd donate 500 hundred dollars each and we surprised "Pudge" by getting him a motorcycle which "Bo" drove to home plate during the ceremonies. After the game the guys had a big party right in the clubhouse. It was great! Later that evening guys went out on the field and started running around and sliding into the bases just like you saw in "Bull Durham." The party went so long into the night that a lot of the guys stayed and slept in the clubhouse because we had an afternoon game the next day! That night is something I won't forget.

As far as "Pudge" having lost it, I don't agree with that at all. He still worked very hard but the problem was he was only playing maybe once a week and when you are at that age, not playing causes you to lose your skills quickly. He and Gene (Lamont) (Author's Note: then Sox manager), didn't get along at all and it started one day when "Pudge" got thrown out for arguing balls and strikes with an ump. He must have been out there two or three minutes and during that entire time, Gene never came out of the dugout! I mean managers always come out to defend their players and Gene didn't do that. I lost some respect for him that day and I'm sure the other guys did as well.

We had heard rumblings that something could be happening but it was a poor decision on the part of the Sox to wait until we were in Cleveland before doing something. I mean why have "Pudge" get on the plane if you're going to release him? That morning Ron Schueler (Author's

Note: White Sox G.M.) called him and told him the Sox let him go. That night we're at the game and "Pudge" is sitting in the stands yelling at us! He was saying stuff like "you guys suck!" and everybody got a big laugh out of it.

I talked to "Pudge" and he told me he was going to go way out in center field for the rest of the game. I asked him why and he said he was going to sit next to the guy who used to beat on that drum! "Pudge" said "every time I've come in here that guy was beating his drum and it drove me nuts, so tonight I'm going to sit next to him," and he did. He bought the guy a few beers and had a great time.

**ML:** With the Sox in first place and looking like they were going to head to the post season, you were traded to the Phillies on August 31, 1993. For someone who grew up rooting for the Sox and then pitching for them you had to be devastated. What happened that day?

**DP:** That was the worst day of my career. I was crushed... to be a Sox fan all my life, to be with a team going to the playoffs, and with everything that we all went through to have to leave all those guys...flying home I was miserable. We were in New York and after the game Gene called me in to his office and told me I was traded. The Sox got a catcher named Doug Lindsey. Gene said that the Sox wanted to clear a roster spot for Ivan Calderon whom they just reacquired. It turned out that Calderon did nothing in September and wasn't even put on the playoff roster.

After a while I thought about it and put things into perspective. I appreciated the Sox for giving me a chance to even get to the major leagues and I have no ill will towards them. Plus I went to a club that was in first place themselves and I was still in the big leagues. If that was the worst thing that was going to happen to me, I'd be alright.

**ML:** In another incredible public relations blunder you and Fisk were turned away by security guards before Game #1 of the A.L.C.S. I guess you just wanted to say hello to the guys didn't you?

**DP:** We got to the game early and yes we tried to get in the clubhouse. The security guards who were there, they were the regular guys that had been there all season. When we tried to go in for a moment, the guard said that Major League Baseball ordered that we couldn't come in. I thought he was pretty embarrassed about it because he kept kind of shifting his weight from one foot to another and looking down. He said that he felt really bad about it. I thought it was ridiculous. I mean we weren't agents or a relative of a player, we *were* players. I could understand about me but how could you not allow Fisk, the guy who was the captain of the team, to come in for a minute and wish everybody luck?

Pudge" left the park and I followed him into the parking lot for a while. I had tickets to the game so I could get back in but Carlton didn't have any. He was furious and I think he never forgot about it. I mean come on, somebody couldn't have invited him up into a luxury box or get him a seat?

**ML:** After a month with the Phillies you signed as a free agent with the Yankees in 94', and then shortly before the strike found yourself dealt to the Cubs. Now one thing that endeared you to

Sox fans was comments you made about how you disliked that team and organization over the years. Was it bizarre that suddenly you found yourself with the Cubs? And did any of their players give you some grief over your comments?

**DP:** The Cubs didn't give me any grief but it was weird standing on the mound in Wrigley Field in a Cubs uniform. I grew up a Sox fan on the South Side and yes I said that I didn't like the Cubs but I also appreciated the opportunity that the Cubs gave me, I mean they wanted me. (Author's Note: Donn was actually only with the Cubs for about a week in 1994 appearing in two games.) My friends and family always told me that I'd end my career with the Cubs. They swore that the "baseball gods" were going to get even! (laughing).

**ML:** You closed your career with the Marlins for three seasons but I've got to wonder about the luck that you had in your career. What I mean Donn is you were with the Sox in 93', they were headed to the playoffs and suddenly you get traded. You join the Phillies who are headed to the playoffs but they don't put you on the post season roster. In 1994 you sign with the Yankees who were heading to the playoffs and right before the strike, they deal you to the Cubs. Then you join the Marlins and the year they win the World Series you only appear in two games and they don't put you on the post season roster. Do you ever wonder, 'why me?'

**DP:** No I really don't. I actually came out pretty well in 1993 because the Sox voted me a full share of the playoff money. At the same time, the Phillies gave me a partial share *and* I received a National League championship ring from them. Even though I didn't pitch a lot in 1997, Wayne Huizinga, the owner, said that anybody who had anything to do with Florida winning the series would get a ring. I mean how many Hall of Fame players are out there who never got a ring? I've got two... one of them a World Series ring!

**ML:** After you got out of baseball how did you get into the financial planning business?

**DP:** I had always been interested in finances. When I was pitching in the Sox minor league system I usually had a lot of time so I'd read finance books. As I got more and more into it, I started to get involved in where I wanted my money to go. It turned out I was one of four players elected by the other players to be on the Major League Baseball pension committee. We were working with and looking after money in a billion dollar industry. I got all of my licenses and now manage money for some baseball players as well as a number of people through Smith Barney here in Chicago... If any Sox fans out there would like to get in touch with me to talk about financial planning or if they have any questions, they can contact me at 1-800-621-2251. Extension 3227. I'm always happy to speak with them.

**ML:** Any free advice for investors besides 'buy low and sell high?'

**DP:** (laughing) It depends on your goals and time frame but long term the best bet is still to invest in the stock market.

**ML:** Donn before we wrap this up, I was wondering about something. I've spoken with many older former players and back in the 50's, 60's and 70's, it was taboo for a player to fraternize with a guy on another team. Starting in the 80's though it became common to ask other guys for

autographs, mementos... things like that. I know Curt Schilling has an incredible memorabilia collection and I wonder if you have anything.

**DP:** I really wasn't into that, but my wife Katie, who's also from Chicago said "it might be something the kids would like." So I started getting autographed balls for my two children Mark and Alexis. I was able to get Hall of Famers like Mickey Mantle when I played for the Yankees, although I couldn't believe that Joe DiMaggio wouldn't sign a ball for me. I could understand if it was a fan or a business person but I *was* a Yankee. I was pitching for them.

Anyway that reminds me of a funny story. The Sox were in Texas and before the game; I asked one of the Rangers bat boys, if he'd mind taking some balls to the Texas clubhouse and asking Nolan Ryan, Juan Gonzales and Jose Canseco if they would sign for me. The kid came back a few minutes later with all the balls signed. I asked him if things were OK or if he had any trouble.

The boy said that Nolan and Juan were fine but when he asked Jose, Canseco asked him who these were for. The kid told him "Donn Pall." Jose said "who's that?" (laughing) I said to myself, 'man I've only been in the league for five years and faced Jose every season!' That night I had to come into the game fairly early and struck him out twice. After the game the bat boy comes up to me and said he told Canseco, "I bet you know who Donn Pall is now!" (laughing) I couldn't believe the kid said that and that Jose didn't break him in half!

**ML:** Sum up your days with the Sox for me, will you Donn?

**DP:** I was very, very fortunate to grow up in Chicago as a Sox fan and then to be on the field pitching for them. To be able to throw to Carlton Fisk, to be able to play in front of my family and friends and to even meet my wife while playing for the Sox in 1990 was just incredible.



