

Joe Moeller
SABR Oral History Collection
Interview with Mark Collatz
August 11, 2016

Collatz: Before I begin I would like to acknowledge that this interview is being taped and the recording will be made part of the of the Society of American Baseball Research Oral History Archive. Let me begin my name is Mark Collatz and I will be interviewing Joe Moeller and the date is August 11, 2016. Joe, starting out the first I wanted to ask I know that you signed for a considerable bonus and the n was member of the Dodgers when you were 19. Did you ever anticipate that you would be a member of the team that quickly?

Moeller: After the first year I had I was fine with that. I was kinda new to the process and the life in the minor leagues. But after the first year in the minor leagues and I was 20-9. I felt confident enough that I could make the club. I had an outstanding spring and then I had kind of make or break down in San Diego against the Braves where I think I struck out 5 out of the 6 that I faced. So I thought I definitely earned a spot and if anything I faltered even a little bit they wouldn't keep me. I thought I had made the ball club.

Collatz: Your fastball was your best pitch—what were some of your other pitches that you threw?

Moeller: Well, my curveball at that time was compared to something like Koufax which was really my best pitch in the minor leagues. So then I worked on a change-up but that that time I just had trouble connecting with it and that was the pitch would have sent my career to a different direction.

Collatz: I know that you had some control problems particularly in the first couple of years. What was one of the advice that Joe Becker gave you to help address those problems?

Moeller: Well, it's interesting my first year in the minor leagues and I'm right of high school and in 237 innings and I think I only walked 70 hitters and so I had outstanding control but at that time especially as young as I was when I went to spring training I think people were trying to change my delivery and that wouldn't even happen now days. But everybody wanted to grab on to what looked like was going to be a successful career so guys were trying make changes and I was so eager, I'm 18 -19 years old, you listen to everybody and if anything it was a real problem because the fact is don't fix it if it's not broken. And everybody was trying to fix that thing so I think when I got older I think I got it back after that.

Collatz: Was it different coaches or was it some of your teammates help you with that? Did they get involved with that?

Moeller: It was anybody that came along. It was minor league people but I don't blame anybody. I was the one that listened to them and be eager to try to learn. Here I was in a big league camp—a dream for anybody. Totally somebody that was intimidated or overwhelmed so anybody that made a suggestion. It was teammates to what you would to let's say minor league coaches whatever that I knew their names.

Collatz: Maybe I'm asking this question in a different way. As you look back now do you feel you were rushed along a little too much and if maybe you had had a couple of minor league seasoning before you came up you might have been more successful right at the get-go?

Moeller: Not really and I will tell you why because again the changes I did some things that were a little bit unorthodox that I did in the minor leagues the year before. I would warm up 6 feet further than that 60 feet 6 inches. Maybe, six to nine feet probably further. I did a lot long stretch that I thought would strengthen my arm. Then when I got up to the major leagues or a major league camp, I stopped doing all those things. And so I just think that the way I did things in the minor leagues and the control I had that I had just been left

alone I could have carried that on through because I had the stuff to do it. It was just that with the changes that affected my control —that was the biggest problem. So, no I think I would have been just fine if they had let me do what I that had let be successful in the first place. Because I was with the Marlins for 15 years and I just retired - their policy is don't fix it, don't try to make a .300 hitter into a .320 hitter, or don't take a pitcher who is successful and try to make changes to make him more successful.

Collatz: This is where I am going to reference David Plaut's book now—in his book he mentioned because of your age and the bonus you felt a certain amount of isolation from the rest of the team when you first came up. Can you talk about that a little.? Your first year being 19, being kind of the young guy with a bonus.

Moeller: Yeah, it was totally understandable—with the money that I got with my brother and my Dad. I think it was \$90,000 and so a lot of those player, I wouldn't think like Snider all those guys weren't making much more than \$30K to \$40K at tops -- Drysdale and Koufax held out --and especially those guys that played in Brooklyn. I mean my first year in the major leagues I made \$6500—pitching for the Dodgers as a fourth starter. So I didn't understand and that time but now I think about it I got money. I could feel the resentment easy I was one of the first players to have his own room. You always had roommates but no one wanted to room with me. Besides I was 19 years old, I didn't drink, I was Christian. It made it very difficult. There was no question there was resentment. They voted me a half a share and I only gone 30 days and I pitched 100 innings and they voted me half a share of what would have been the World Series money or playoff money. So there was definitely, on the road I knew there was team party in different cities but I was never invited to those. So I was totally isolated and Durocher I have mentioned this many times Tommy Davis stuck up for me, which I didn't know until just recently and he told Leo to leave me alone because every time I would walk out of a dugout before a game he would, you know, he'd ask me., "Hey kid want to go get drunk tonight?" and the he'd say "Oh, no, you can't because you only drink milkshakes." Then, he'd get all those reporters to laugh and that was constant.

Collatz: I want to get back to that in minute. I know In Michael Leahy's book and he talked about this voting the half share. He goes into that in the book about that it was Snider to push that. Was there anybody in the locker room who stuck up for you about not doing that.

Moeller: No, not at all. It was like I don't think quietly—but you could just sense it. It wasn't outwardly blatant other than Leo—they just did not like the fact that I was with the ball club he was doing it in a way to entertain the sports writers. But he never said anything to me -- you don't deserve to be here or whatever. What also hurt me that first year too is that because we are on a four man rotation. Koufax, Drysdale, Podres, and myself and then because you had more off days—you had a Monday or a Thursday so they would skip my spot in the rotation with the off day and I would go eight days before I pitched sometimes. That really hurt. But it was understandable too. Because you get those other guys pitching every fourth day and then you get my spot as the off day.

Collatz: In your time with the Dodgers, what managers, coaches or teammate influenced you the most?

Moeller: That's interesting because they kind of assigned him to me— Troy inaudible the nicest guy in the world inaudible they had him room with me a couple of times, just to have a roommate I think. And Norm Sherry was just a super guy and couldn't have been better to me. They usually had him catch me because he definitely handled young pitchers—the guy was really good so they wanted Sherry to catch me.

Collatz: Who were some of your favorite Dodger teammates and you close with anyone still?

Moeller: Jeff Torborg, we were close friends. He must have joined the club in '66. Jeff was a class guy—a solid Christian guy. We roomed together. Don Sutton roomed together—still friends. Let me think of

anybody else. Jimmy Avila I kind of grew up with so when he joined the ball club we actually roomed together a little bit. Yeah there were a lot of guys and Rene Lacheman was our batboy my first year in '62 and were only two years apart in age and I actually felt closer to him than some of the players.

Collatz: In your eight years with the Dodgers can you talk about one or two of your most memorable games?

Moeller: Yeah, pitching in the World Series and I gave up one run in the two innings I pitched is every pitcher's dream—anybody's dream.. Because there are a lot of guys in the Hall of Fame, Ernie Banks – Had all those wins—but never got to a World Series. So to have pitched in that World Series in '66 is absolutely—I didn't think I'd get in games, we had Koufax, Drysdale, Sutton, and I was the fifth starter but I just pitched the doubleheaders and we had one of the best bull pens in history with Bob Miller, Jim Brewer, Phil Regan then I was just going to enjoy World Series then Drysdale got in trouble in the first game and I got a chance to pitch it. So that was easily the best game—the one that sticks out to me.

Collatz: Any memorable or colorful teammates that you remember that you always have to smile about?

Moeller: Well yeah every clubhouse was like that. Jim Brewer out in the bullpen. He was a funny guy. Phil Regan a great guy A lot of good teammates but that was later after I was more established and little older too so that I fit in more with those guys. *Inaudible* those were guys who didn't make much money – most guys had a job in the off season selling cars or clothes just to make ends meet.

Collatz: Now I want to get into the Durocher area I guess. My first question, clearly Durocher and Alston were different personalities with very different perspectives. I saw a quote from you in David Plaut's book that there were two camps—one that sided with Alston and one that sided with Leo. Can you talk a little about that? Was there kind of a them and us kind of thing, not so much player against player but if Leo was managing we would have done this instead.

Moeller: Yeah there was no question and again I was –there was like three groups. There was two groups and then myself, especially in '62, would because I wasn't included in anything but I would be standing there would be Darryl Spencer, Andy Carey, Lee Walls, the guys that weren't playing and they be down at the end of the dugout and Leo would come down and he'd be "How can he do that? How can he make that? I can't believe he did that." He was undermining the ball club. He wanted that job. It would have been perfect for Leo. He'd been married to Lorraine Day He was with the Hollywood crowd. Close friends with Sinatra. Friends with Joey Bishop and Sammy Davis Jr. So he was close to those guys so he would have loved to manage that Dodger ball club. But for an outsider in that Dodger dugout, I could see even as a young kid that he was trying turn the club against Alston and with players hopefully get him fired- just no question in my mind.

Collatz: Did you ever see any of the players who were supporting Alston say "Leo, Knock it off—this isn't helping the team"?

Moeller: No, not back then. – not at all. I don't think anyone stood up. There were some of the regular players who disagreed –like any one you're going to disagree with the manager and what he does sometimes —you're not all going to be in agreement but Durocher was just stirring it up –just totally trying undermine Alston—he just wanted his job.

Collatz: I know you touched on this already when you talked about some of the comments he made and in general Leo had a lack of faith in younger players in general and it kind of comes out in the book and some of things that struck me reading from Michael Leahy's book. All of things I have read from his time as manager of the Cubs—it was like Ok this was all on the table before he ever took over the Cubs' job—you

see this constantly in the years that he managed the Cubs. Are there any other stories as far as where he treated you or some of the other younger players with not as much respect.

Moeller: See now again.... again I have just stick to the way it was. I don't even think I realized what he was doing at the time. I was more definitely an introvert – I just kinda stayed away from him—pretty much sat at the end of the dugout and then seeing what would come – how he would come down and talk to the other players when he disagreed with what went on. But Alston was so quiet –just totally opposite of Leo. He knew what going on—he knew Leo wanted his job. You could tell that was a given. But Leo was part of the ball club not like today when the manager picks his coaches with maybe the exception of one. You could see they were not on the same page.

Collatz: Another question. I have read a lot about what happened and Plaut goes into this obviously a lot more than Michael Leahy's book does—the whole blow up at the end of the '62 playoffs and the fact that Bavasi actually fired Leo then for whatever reason Alston somehow talked him back into it. He was fired and then he wasn't fired. I guess my question here is was there any change in the relationship after he came back in '63.

Moeller: I wasn't with the ball club in '63—I was sent to the minor leagues although I'm not sure why because I had an outstanding spring.

Collatz: Even in spring training that year—they went their separate ways the end of the '62 season. There was this understanding that Leo got fired then got rehired somehow. When you came to camp in '63—what was kind of the feeling at that point?

Moeller: *Inaudible* I was trying to win a job at that point. I wasn't concerned about Leo and I don't remember what was going on. I probably was a little bit surprised you know it was hard for me to believe that Walt wanted him back. Buzzie pretty much controlled everything so that had be a Buzzie thing for me. I can't imagine that Walt would have encouraged him to come back.

Collatz: This my last question on that this and I know you read Michael's book clearly his premise here with regard to Leo and his treatment of some of some the younger players in '63 and '64 hurt him to the point that people all got tired of Leo's schtik at some point and that was really the reason he wasn't invited back I know you saw some stories about Leo and Frank Howard and Leo and Jeff Torborg. Did you see anything like that in '64 that shows that as well? That people were just tired of Leo's act.

Moeller: Yeah, I think the players were finally...there was no question that the players ...you just get tired of hearing him undermine things and there were even a couple of guys who were that on his side, who were closer to him, these were just guys who weren't playing –they were not happy about not playing and that's who he gravitated towards he knew he could get them by saying "if I was managing you'd play". That was the guys who'd gather around him. I do remember that. I'll tell you I remember when he hit Howard's shin he have all the writers around boy he came out and Frank was no mood. There wasn't nicer gentle giant than Frank but boy he should not done that, that day. I could have kissed him because that's what I wanted to do. Just grab him.

Collatz: You mentioned Jeff Torborg. I know the story in the book about Torborg knocking him out when he was trying to knock the ball out of glove when he was doing an exercise with Pete Reiser. Let preface this if I can I talked to Dick Tracewski but I haven't interviewed Dick Tracewski yet. I talked with him on the phone and I had a 10 minute conversation and I was giving him what I was kind of looking for and I mentioned this story and he was covered in the book so much I thought he would have read the book by then but he hadn't read it yet. But I mentioned the Torborg story as an example and kind of discounted that . No,

that never could have happened. I'll have to go back and read the book but that never would have happened. Do you have any...

Moeller: Torborg knocking the ball out of the glove?

Collatz: Yeah the story was that he was working out with Pete Reiser to keep the ball in his glove. Durocher came along and said, "I can knock the ball out of your glove--anytime." And he got warmed up and he set up bases and he comes running around the bases and Torborg lays the ball on his head --doesn't sound like he meant to do it anyway but he put the ball on his head and he knocked Leo cold. And there are other players around and they're kind of giggling at the whole thing.

Moeller: I didn't see that but it wouldn't surprise me. Torborg wouldn't say that if it didn't happen. I just know him. He wouldn't make up that story. He just got way too much class for that. So I know Jeff was not fan of Durocher. Leo was so boisterous, put on a show, and put down players to make himself feel good. I know few players who were put in that situation who would do that to Leo.

Collatz: I have one last question. This is totally off of topic I got this because I noticed in your SABR bio that you had worked with some teams in developing computer programs for tracking players tendencies. I'm assuming this is the kind of modeling for the development of the shifts that we are seeing every day in the major leagues. Can you talk about little bit about some of the work your doing in that and how that may have carried over into what may be going on in the majors now?

Moeller: That's interesting Don Sutton would say every once in a while you were so far ahead of your time. How it started --it goes back Bob *inaudible* goes back early '80s maybe '83-'84 -- and I was at the game and he had a heart attack in the dugout and died and I have always been fascinated, even when I played, with statistics, and setting up defenses and things like that. And I'd love to do that job so after a few days I went down in the dugout and in the clubhouse, I wanted to see how they were doing it now. There were a stash of notebooks that covered the whole world. About charting guys and I know I charted behind home plate the night before I pitched and charted --how they collected the information and what they did with it.. I thought there has gotta be a better way do it. Computers weren't fashionable --just coming in. So I went to a computer search lab run by computer major at USC I think it was and we talked and I ended up spending about \$100,000, which I really didn't have, to have him develop a program for if I was an advance scout what kind of information would be helpful. So he did the program, I started taking it around to different clubs—and I remember Al Campanis—I showed it to him and he said "Joe, in whatever 1948 or '49 we won the pennant and we didn't have a computer, why do we need one now?" But that was the mindset of baseball at that time --they were intimidated by computers and they have been doing it one way for so long --we don't need this garbage. And the eventually Jeff Torborg became the manager of the White Sox and he as was on board with it so I sold it to the White Sox and I sold it to the Padres and I sold to the Mets. To the White Sox I sold it for \$100,000 and I think \$70-80,000 to the Mets something like that and then Bob Boone, we were kind of field friends, and we played together a little bit and I showed it to him and he was a Stanford graduate and he a fairly was aggressive about that and I let him use the program but still took us quite a while after that. I kept working on it and improving it of course technology got better and now there's software programs that cost would one-hundredths of what it took to develop my program. I'm a believer in a combination of monitoring statistics and all the things they do—with what goes on out there. When I was advancing I would find out information for a guy whose pitching-- here's guy—he's not turning on the inside pitch --that's not going to show up in analytics and things like that. It's also whose keeping the information --what is it ah—*inaudible* they just have somebody who could be just a high school baseball player and they don't identify different pitches—not taking it away from them that they can't cover baseball—there has to be a certain amount —Rene Lacheman told me "I would rather have no information rather than wrong information." So you know I'm not involved in ball now-enjoying my retirement-but it is interesting to me to watch and how aggressive shifts have gotten and I would like to see how many times the shift has worked

and doesn't work—are there numbers that to show they didn't work and ball went through the hole where the guy should be.

Collatz: I wonder now what this will eventually create at the amateur level and the minor league having people become more hit to all fields than they are right now. I'm wonder if it has gone this way now there will be a reaction to that.

Moeller: That's a good question—there going to be teaching hitters that you can't hit into that shift—so let's work on that—but are you taking away that guy's strength and will go back and forth and it will take awhile. I'm thinking Inside Edge, it's company and it had nine different managers with them, and Joe Giardi, he was with the Marlins and I went to spring training one year and I said, "Joe, I'm your advance scout." and he said "Oh, OK nice to meet you." And walked away. But you see Joe was huge—he loves his Inside Edge he could care less to listen to me or an advance scout—he loves statistics.

Collatz: And it's kind of interesting, I'll confess I am Yankee fan so I follow Giardi quite a bit and I know he said a few weeks ago and he was advocating, I didn't see it personally, but I heard a report so maybe he was joking but he would like to make the shift illegal.

Moeller: Hmmmm...

Collatz: It seemed out of place and maybe he was just frustrated because of the way they're hitting this year and they have got a lot of older players who going do it their way no matter what so maybe he's just frustrated or maybe he was being sarcastic. But it seemed odd coming from I've heard of him being kinda being a forward thinker.

Moeller: Yeah boy he wasn't with me. There some values with Inside Edge but. I don't know whose putting that information—people in the press box talking away? What kind of information are you getting to say Ok there behind in the count they're using the breaking ball or not using breaking ball and things like that but how accurate?

Collatz: Right, right you have to have somebody who is really paying attention to the game. To be putting that information in to make it real.

Moeller: Yeah, there's a lot of things Somebody asked me the other day the differences in the players in the '50's and '60's back then and today and I said when I in spring training in the early '60's they used to tell us not drink too much water when it was 100 degrees out because you'd get cramps or Buzzie Bavasi would fine you if he ever caught you lifting weights again—now there are weight rooms in the clubhouse for anybody. It has to better—the conditioning, the nutrition—all the things that have come about in the last 20 years. Players have to be better.

Collatz: Yeah..absolutely..absolutely. Well again I think I'm done here I thank you again for your time today. I will send you a transcript and memory stick one I get that done—it may be a few weeks. I am supposed to do an interview with Stan Williams in the next couple days and I still have to catch up with Dick Tracewski yet. I am going to try to do those all at once and get them all together and get them to SABR.

Moeller: OK. The interviews with those two guys you'll definitely get different viewpoints because who they were. Stan was a veteran and Trixie was a veteran too and both good guys Trixie especially was liked by anybody He and Sandy were really close because he was one of the most popular guys on our ball clubs.. Ok look forward to it.

Collatz: Well, thank you very much.

Moeller: Good luck to you.

Collatz: Have a good day.