

Mike Andrews

*Interview conducted by Mark Liptak in 2002.
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He's approaching 60 years old, but take away the gray hair and former White Sox second baseman Mike Andrews still looks 30. Speak with him over the phone and he still sounds like he can go out and turn the double play or drive one into the left center field gap.

Andrews came to the White Sox just prior to the 1971 season and was an important part of the turnaround from the disasters of 1968, 1969 and 1970. He also made his mark during the 1972 campaign that saved the franchise from extinction, or even worse, being moved to Milwaukee. Andrews was also front row center for the controversial 1973 season that saw the implementation of the designated hitter and saw the destruction of a promising year because of injuries and salary disputes with an inexperienced vice president of baseball operations.

After leaving baseball in a storm of controversy, during and following, the 1973 World Series, Andrews first went into the insurance business but then found his true calling helping others through "The Jimmy Fund." That organization is one of the nations's most established oldest and most beloved charities that help cancer victims, especially children through the Dana-Farber Research Institute in Boston.

Mike took an hour and a half out of his schedule to talk with me about playing against the White Sox in the last classic pennant race in baseball history, about playing for Chuck Tanner, about being a teammate of Dick Allen, about the day former Sox infielder Don Buford punched out a fan on the field at Comiskey Park, and about his good works through "The Jimmy Fund."

ML: Mike you came up for good in 1967. That was the year the Red Sox, Tigers, Twins and White Sox fought for the pennant through the last week of the season. The Red Sox had sluggers like George Scott, Tony Conigliaro and Carl Yastrzemski. The Tigers offered Al Kaline, Norm Cash and Willie Horton. The Twins countered with Harmon Killebrew, and Bob Allison. The White Sox and I mean no disrespect, had guys like Ken Berry, Al Weis, J.C. Martin and Pete Ward. As a member of the opposition how did the White Sox stay in the race? What did you see watching from the other side of the field?

MA: What they had was a total team effort, a bunch of gutsy players who always gave 100 per cent. They also had guys like Gary Peters, Joe Horlen, Tommy John and Juan Pizarro. That pitching staff was the best. On the Red Sox we had Jim Lonborg and everyone else. Gary Bell contributed after we traded for him and Jose Santiago helped, but the White Sox had the best pitching. These guys threw nothing but hard sinkers and they were using balls that were heavier from being kept underground. Comiskey Park also helped them. The infield grass was like four inches high and the baselines were sloped inwards, at least that's what I always heard, to keep the White Sox bunts in fair territory. They were a very good team. Going into that last week, the guys on the Red Sox looked at the schedule and figured the White Sox had it won.

ML: 1968, 1969, and 1970 were collectively the three worst years in White Sox history. They lost 295 games in that span. On December 1, 1970 you found out that you and Luis Alvarado were traded to the White Sox for Luis Aparicio. You couldn't have been very happy about that deal could you?

MA: I was not! I should have known better because just the day before Dick O'Connell, the Red Sox general manager said in the newspapers that "Andrews is untradeable." That was the kiss of death. The next day I'm sitting at home playing cards with a friend when I hear it over the radio that I've been traded... My first thought was 'oh my God!' The White Sox were a bad team, the park was deteriorating, they didn't have any fan base, and it was terrible... especially coming from Boston.

ML: Did your mindset change after speaking with Roland Hemond and Chuck Tanner?

MA: It had to change. I loved both of those guys. If you couldn't play for Chuck Tanner you couldn't play for anybody. I saw what those guys were trying to do and when I went to spring training, I looked around and saw a lot of talent, especially those young kids in the bullpen, Terry Forster and "Goose" Gossage. I said "this isn't so bad." Those guys, Hemond and Tanner made it happen. I mean from what I was told, the ownership was near bankruptcy and they had a guy in Stu Holcomb who wasn't very good.

ML: In 1970 the White Sox won 56 games. In 1971, they won 79, an amazing improvement. How much of that was the positive approach of Tanner and what was he like to play for?

MA: Chuck was the most positive person I have ever met. Even if things were going bad, if we lost five or seven in a row, he'd be in the locker room saying "OK, we're going to turn it around." Chuck was a great baseball man. Like I said, if you couldn't play for him, you couldn't play for anybody. I came from Boston where Dick Williams could go a week without even saying hello to you. Dick was a good manager; he just wasn't a people person. Chuck was always being positive and trying to make things better. Remember Chuck also was a big guy; he could intimidate you just on his physical presence. Here's how he was. We were in the locker room and Pat Kelly, who was a big guy himself, was in a slump. He was really down. Tanner walks by him and sees that Pat's having a hard time. Chuck physically picks him up by the shoulders, lifts him off the floor, pins him to the locker and growls "Pat... smile!" All the guys in the locker room start laughing, Pat breaks into a smile... problem over.

ML: With former Dodger catcher Johnny Roseboro passing away in August, I was reminded of the infamous fight he had with Giants pitcher Juan Marichal. You personally saw almost another incident like that when Don Buford of the Orioles approached the mound with his bat against Sox pitcher Bart Johnson in 1971. What do you remember about that?

MA: I remember that vividly because I saw the whole thing from second base. It was a Memorial Day doubleheader and Bart threw a close one at Buford. Buford started out towards the mound with his bat. I don't think Don intended using that bat though. It just happened that he started towards the mound and I don't think he realized he still had the bat in his other hand. Don played football at USC. If he was going to do something, he didn't even need a bat. Anyway

nothing happened and Don went out to left field. The Sox fans in that lower deck just gave him hell. A few innings later he's in the on deck circle watching the game when I see a fan jump over the wall and start towards him. This drunk was headed his way when a bunch of guys started yelling to Don to look out. Buford turned, saw the guy, and cold cocked him. Just dropped him with one punch.

That's when some of Don's teammates from the Orioles headed out of the dugout and beat the guy. He was bloody from head to toe. I heard afterwards that when they took the guy into the medical room at the park to get worked on, the medics turned their back for a moment and the guy disappeared!

ML: Let's go to 1972, a special year for the Sox and my personal favorite for the 42 years that I've watched the team. Everyone had high hopes heading into the season, even though it was delayed by the first strike that actually caused games to be cancelled. I don't think though, that anybody realized the magic that would happen that season and it started with Dick Allen. You saw Allen every day. How good a player was he?

MA: Dick was as good if not better than anybody I ever saw. As a pure hitter, his 1972 season was as dominant a performance as I've ever seen.

(Author's Note: Allen would finish the season almost winning the Triple Crown. He led the league with 37 home runs, 113 RBI's, a .603 slugging percentage and 99 walks. He led the Sox with a .308 batting average, drove in 19 game winning runs, stole 19 bases, scored 90 runs and was only .0005 points shy of leading all A.L. first basemen in fielding. He was the leading vote getter for the All-Star team and was awarded the league's M.V.P. Award that November.)

I played with Carl Yastrzemski in 67' and I know the kind of year he had, but part of it was that pitchers were actually giving him good pitches to hit, which I didn't understand. With Dick, very early in the season, pitchers were saying, 'we're not going to let him beat us.' They weren't pitching to him and he still had a great season! I saw many times where Dick would swing at a lot of outside pitches and hit them a long way.

ML: Let's talk about some specific incidents from that season. This was an incredible moment for me and supposedly you had one of the all-time great comments about it, June 4, 1972. The Sox beat the Yankees in the first game of a double header at Comiskey Park. In the second game the Sox are losing in the 9th inning. Bill Melton walks, you rip a single, as I recall, as I was sitting in the lower deck in right center and Allen walks out to pinch hit for Rich Morales. Yanks manager Ralph Houk brings in your former teammate and roommate "Sparky" Lyle to pitch. The bullpens at that time were located down the lines so when Lyle comes in, he passes close to you standing at first. According to a "Sports Illustrated" story in 1990 on the closing of the original Comiskey Park you supposedly said "hey Sparky! You're in deep shit now!" True?

MA: True. (laughing) Both "Sparky" and I were carefree spirits and I said that. I may have been responding to something "Sparky" said to me but I don't remember.

ML: To make a long story short, Allen rips the third pitch almost dead on a line into the left center field seats to win the game. You guys mobbed him at home plate and the fans went berserk. They refused to leave the park. Chuck Tanner was quoted as saying that everyone could feel the cheers inside the Sox locker room, it was so loud. Had you even been around that kind of fan enthusiasm?

MA: I did when the Red Sox won the pennant in 67'. But it was so exciting to see what was happening with the White Sox. The evolution of it all. Sox fans hadn't seen a good team for a few years; it had been a long time. We were drawing huge crowds and the fans were absolutely great.

ML: You talk about rare occurrences, on July 31, 1972 at old Metropolitan Stadium in Minnesota; Allen belted two inside the park home runs off Bert Blyleven in an 8-1 win.

MA: That's right, I had forgotten about that. Dick could run, he had tremendous baseball instincts and he stole 19 bases that year. I had been around "Yaz", who worked harder than anybody I ever saw, but Dick was a natural athlete. One time, the Sox were getting criticized because Allen was showing up almost right before game time. It might have been a newspaper guy. Tanner said to him "if a guy can hit 40 homers, drive in over a hundred runs and hit over .300, he can show up right before game time!"

ML: Finally, on August 23, I was sitting in the center field bleachers right near where Harry Caray was broadcasting the game from. New York was in town again and late in the game, Allen hit a blast off Lindy McDaniel. It sounded like a cannon shot. The ball wound up landing about 15 feet from Caray who was going crazy. He almost caught the ball in his net. I'll never forget looking down at the Yanks center fielder, it was Bobby Murcer, as he was hitting the wall and the ball was still going up! Just an unbelievable blast! What were you thinking in the dugout?

MA: I wasn't as shocked because I remember reading in "The Sporting News" when Dick was still in Philly that he hit like 18 of his 20 home runs between the 380 foot signs at Shibe Park. He could hit balls a long way. Dick was such a great player but I always feared that he would lose interest and that's what happened. He loved to play the game but he wasn't really comfortable with some of the peripheral things associated with baseball, like having to deal with the media.

ML: The Sox hung right with the A's until mid-September and they finished five and a half games out. But I'm sure you guys still thought you could win the division.

MA: We thought we were. I remember sitting next to Dick Allen on a road trip, I think we were either coming from or going to Texas and we talked about it. Oakland had to go to Detroit and play a couple of double headers. We thought they'd split or maybe lose three of four and we could catch them. But they won them all.

ML: 1973 was a year that started out with tremendous expectations. That also was the year the American League added the designated hitter. When the season opened up you were in the slot. How did it feel to be the first ever Sox D.H?

MA: Not only was I the first Sox D.H., but I was the second ever in the league. They had some guy tracking it. New York played at home and they started earlier than we did. It was either Ron Blomberg or the guy from the team the Yankees were playing who was first, then I came up to hit. For me, the D.H. was a blessing. I was having throwing problems. It was just like Steve Blass, Steve Sax and Chuck Knoblauch. They called it 'throwing yips'. Nobody knows why it happens but on balls hit right to me where I had a second or two to think about it, I just couldn't make the throw. When I had to move and throw, I didn't have any problems. I also didn't have any problems in practice. Just D.H.'ing was great for me because it was eating away at me. I started out really hot and "Sports Illustrated" did a story on me called "Super D.H" or something like that, but I knew that I was getting a lot of cheap hits at the time. It didn't last.

ML: What started out as a great season ended in disaster and dissension. The Sox had a five game lead on so in late May, then were decimated by injuries. They used the disabled list 35 times that year. Guys like Allen, Ken Henderson and Brian Downing were badly hurt and a number of players had serious contract issues. Guys like you, Stan Bahnsen, Ed Spiezio, Jay Johnstone and Rick Reichardt played without contracts or were flat out released which destroyed any depth the team had. What was going on?

MA: "The problem was Stu Holcomb. He was supposed to run the owner's soccer team but when that folded they had to find something for him and made him the G.M. He didn't handle things well at all. I know Stan said he wasn't going to pitch unless he got a new contract. He won 21 games in 1972 so the Sox finally agreed with what he wanted. Reichardt was flat waived. I was talking with the Sox about a new deal. The Sox weren't going to cut my salary and we were almost ready to sign it when Holcomb went to the papers and said something like 'Andrews obviously hasn't lived up to what we thought we were going to be getting.' I was having problems especially with my throwing. I wasn't playing much and it was a bad situation. I went to Chuck (Tanner) and said "this isn't good, can I just be released?" Chuck said to me, "Mike I don't blame you, let me see what I can do." Chuck was able to get me released and I wound up signing with Oakland."

(Author's Note: Andrews finished the year with the A's and played in both the League Championship Series and the World Series when controversy caught up to him again. In Game #2 against the Mets, Andrews made two errors which led to a New York comeback win. Afterwards, A's owner Charlie Finley claimed Andrews was injured and wanted to force him off the roster. Then Commissioner Bowie Kuhn was livid that the owner would attempt to make Andrews a scapegoat, and denied Finley's request. Oakland players also were united and supported Andrews through this ordeal which made headlines in sports sections across the country. Oakland won the championship in seven games but that off season the A's let Andrews go. He played the 1975 season in Japan before retiring.)

ML: Tell me about your relationship with "The Jimmy Fund" in Boston? I understand you've been involved with that charitable organization for over 20 years now.

MA: "It's been 24 years since I've been associated with it. I first heard about it when I came up to the Red Sox in late 1966. In those days signs weren't permitted on the fences and walls of ballparks, the exception in Fenway Park was "The Jimmy Fund" sign in right field. That was the

only sign allowed. "The Jimmy Fund" was first started by the old Boston Braves and by the Variety Club theater owners in the Boston area. Dr. Sidney Farber was a cancer research scientist at Children's Hospital in Boston. His dream was to build a research building where he and other doctors could work on cancer, at first in children. The Braves and the Variety Club decided to support his efforts. After the Braves left Boston, Red Sox owner Tom Yawkey decided to continue the partnership. That was in 1952, so next year will mark 50 years of association between the team and this charity. To the best of my knowledge no other sports team has had such an intimate connection with any type of charitable organization for that long a period of time. The late Ted Williams was a very big supporter of the organization and that really helped. This year alone we've raised 35 million dollars to promote cancer research and the Dana-Farber Institute is always listed as among the top five cancer facilities in the nation."

ML: Mike, what do you do for the organization?

MA: I'm the chairman and primary spokesman for the organization. It's a 40 hours plus job but I love it. I knew when I started with the charity on a part time basis that this was tremendously rewarding to me. We do a lot of varied things to promote the charity and its mission. We have golf tournaments, fishing tournaments, something we call the 'scooper bowl' which is where for a donation, you can come to a giant ice cream party and of course we have a number of ties with the Red Sox. We have a function where for a donation; you can have lunch with the current players. We have a breakfast with the owners and decision makers. That's where owner Larry Lucchino and field manager Grady Little join the fans to talk about what's going on. Any fan can join us and they can tell them what's on their minds, good or bad.

ML: "The Jimmy Fund" seems to be entrenched in the fabric of the Boston area. You can't watch a game from Fenway without seeing that sign in right field. It's a special relationship isn't it?

MA: It is amazing. Certainly the Red Sox have been a very visible supporter for a long time but remember the Variety Club theater owners have been a big help for years. Back in the 50's, they'd play a movie trailer in all the theaters about the research institute and then pass around a can for donations. A lot of those owners had ties and knew people in Hollywood so you'd have actors like Jimmy Cagney, Joan Crawford, John Wayne and Humphrey Bogart make appeals on film for the fund. You can go to our web site and watch those spots that they did for us. The Massachusetts Police Association also adopted "The Jimmy Fund" as their charity and they've made major contributions for a number of years.

ML: How much longer do you want to stay a part of the organization?

MA: I'll always be with it in some degree. This is the most exciting time. I've spoken with the doctors and research scientists and they are convinced that with all the medical advances, they honestly believe that they will find the cure for all types of cancers within the next 20 years. I played minor and major league baseball for over 13 years and I loved it, but that doesn't compare to the satisfaction that I'm getting in my job. This is an actual life or death miracle.

