

Vance Law

*Interview conducted by Mark Liptak in 2002.
Originally published at White Sox Interactive in 2002.*

He wasn't a superstar but you know what, Vance Law, was a pretty good player. At least one member of the media said Law was a big reason "Winnin' Ugly" took over in the summer of 1983. Bill Gleason made the comment during WFLD-TV's special, "Next Year Is Here" which aired in September 1983....."People say there was this metamorphosis and that suddenly this great pitching staff came together. What happened was the Sox got smart and decided to put the bow legged guy (Jerry Dybzinski) at short, and did what every Little Leaguer in the stands said to do, put Vance Law back on third base!"

Law came from a baseball family. His father Vern was a Cy Young award winner with the Pirates and played on the 1960 World Championship team. Baseball was in his blood and he signed with the Pirates organization in 1978, jumping to Triple-A the next year and then making his Major League debut in 1980. Vance doubled off the Mets Tom Hausman in his first game.

He came to the Sox on March 21, 1982 in exchange for pitcher Ross Baumgarten and catcher "Butch" Edge. Vance was with the Sox from 1982 through 1984, then went to Montreal, the Cubs (where he made the All-Star team in 1988), played a year in Japan, and finished his career with the A's in 1991.

Law, his wife, and five children live in Provo, Utah where he is the head baseball coach at Brigham Young University. He spoke recently with me from his home in Utah.

ML: It's been 20 years, but do you remember your reaction when you found out you were traded from Pittsburgh?

VL: It was a big shock. I grew up in Pittsburgh and was a Pirates fan. I never anticipated that I would ever get traded. It was late in spring training and we were getting ready for a game, when I was told Chuck Tanner wanted to see me. I went into his office and he was there along with some other front office people. I remember thinking, I've been sent down before, and never had this many people in the room when it happened. Anyway it seemed like it only took 30 seconds but of course it was much longer. Chuck just told me, "we need pitching and you've been traded to the Chicago White Sox "It hit me like a ton of bricks. I honestly wasn't looking forward to going to the Sox because all of my friends and family were in Pittsburgh. I went back to my locker and started to pack up. News like this gets out quickly and before long, guys were coming up to me, wishing me well and saying how sorry they were. I was headed out the door when Bill Madlock stopped and put his arm around me. He said "this is the best thing that ever happened to you." He was right; I was stuck behind guys like Tim Lincecum, Dale Berra and Phil Garner. The Sox gave me a chance.

(Author's Note: former Sox and then Pirates manager)

ML: How did it happen where you got the regular third base job in 1983, after playing all over the Sox infield in 1982?

VL: We had picked up Scott Fletcher and Jerry Dybzinski during the winter. One day Tony LaRussa pulled me aside and said “you know we think we’d be a better team with one of them at short and you at third base, what do you think?” They threw me out there and I made a diving stop at third and later turned a double play and before long I was there every game.

ML: That 1983 team won 99 games and made the playoffs. What’s the first thing you think of when someone mentions to you the 1983 White Sox?

VL: I remember losing in four games to Baltimore. I still think we were the best team and nobody will convince me otherwise. We should have gone to the World Series and we would have won it because Baltimore beat Philadelphia rather easily. I also remember Jerry’s (Dybzinski) base running error in game #4. What happened was Julio Cruz hit a one hop shot to the left fielder. I was rounding third base when coach Jimmy Leyland stopped me. There was no way I could score on a ball hit that hard. I think Jerry deliberately tried to get himself in a rundown so that I could score. It turned out I was thrown out at the plate. Britt Burns pitched brilliantly and if we could have won, we would have had LaMarr Hoyt going for us in game #5. I only wish the series back then had been seven games like it is today because we would have beaten them (Baltimore). I also remember Jerry after the game standing there and facing the media. He was a man. He didn’t try to hide. He told everybody “I made a mistake.” I haven’t seen or heard from Jerry in years, he was one of my roommates on the Sox and a great guy.

ML: What was it like playing for Manager Tony LaRussa?

VL: I thoroughly enjoyed it. Tony was a great communicator; he let you know where you stood. He was also intense and if you played hard for him you didn’t have a problem.

ML: In 1984 you had a great individual year. You hit 17 homers and drove in 59 RBI’s. Was it a case of finally getting comfortable in the majors?

VL: It really was. Also I looked hard at myself and thought I wasn’t living up to my potential. I was 6-2, 200 pounds and felt I shouldn’t just be hitting three or four homers a year. Greg Luzinski told me “you should start looking for a certain pitch in a certain count and then hit it.” I thought I could be a decent home run hitter.

ML: You’re one of the few players to have played for both the Sox and Cubs. After seeing both organizations and fan bases what do you think are the differences between the two?

VL: First off let me preface my answer by saying I had great experiences on both sides of town. Both fans are extremely loyal, I never felt slighted by anybody in Chicago. The biggest difference I think is that the Cubs have a huge national following. We’d go to San Diego and there’d be more Cub fans in the stands than the Padres. Same in Houston. As far as the Sox I never saw more loyal fans. Especially in 83’... they were behind us, they knew the game better

than anyone else and they weren't afraid to show their feelings, especially if you did something wrong.

ML: Did you ever get the chance to play in New Comiskey Park and what did you think?

VL: "I did in 1991 with Oakland. I thought it was pretty sterile."

ML: After leaving the Major Leagues, you got into coaching, how did that happen?

VL: It kind of evolved. I was out of baseball looking for something to do. I didn't want to teach in junior high or high school. I wound up volunteering at Utah Valley Junior College for two years. One day I went to see my son play in a high school game. His team (Provo High School) had no respect for baseball. They had their hats on backward and one kid showed up wearing red socks (the team colors were green and white) just to be noticed. The high school coach didn't want to be there, so I called up the school, got the job, and we went to the state playoffs four times winning three of them.

ML: How did that lead you to BYU?

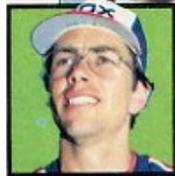
VL: I was doing pretty well when I found out about the opening. I figured why not try, at least you'd get paid for it! (laughing) So I did the resume thing, applied, interviewed and got hired. I've been doing it for three years now and it's a real challenge coaching college players, especially my son.

ML: Vance we've covered a lot of ground. Have I missed anything that you'd like to tell the fans?

VL: "My career went by like a flash to me. I feel so fortunate to have played in a great city like Chicago, with great fans who really appreciated the game. Just great fans... and if they ever have an Old Timers Day or something like that I'd love to go back!"



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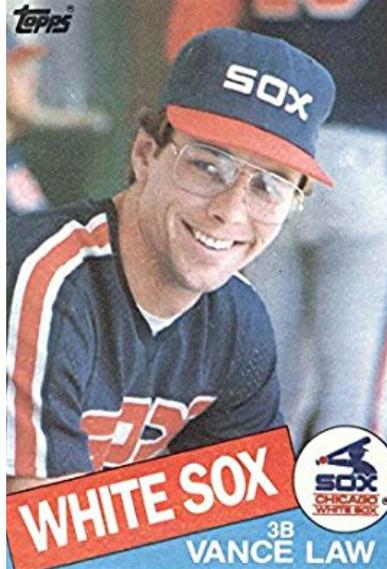
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