

Jim Kaat

*Interview conducted by Mark Liptak in 2007.
Originally published at White Sox Interactive in 2007.*

To say Jim Kaat had been around major league baseball a long time is like saying the Chicago Bears have had something to do with the NFL.

Let's put it this way, Kaat had been a part of the sport longer than the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim has been a franchise! Ditto for the New York Mets...and the Houston Astros...and the Kansas City Royals or the San Diego Padres.

For almost 50 seasons, until his retirement last summer, Kaat had been around the game. He made his big-league debut pitching in Chicago against the "Go-Go" White Sox in 1959. He had to face Hall of Famers like Mickey Mantle, Frank Robinson and Carl Yastrzemski in their prime. He pitched against the 'new and improved' White Sox in the pennant races of 1964, 1965 and the greatest race of all, 1967. When he was considered done, Sox G.M. Roland Hemond snapped him up off waivers where he promptly showed everyone he still had it, winning 41 games in two complete seasons on the South Side, 45 overall. After being traded, Kaat pitched eight more seasons until he retired as a player at the end of the 1983 campaign with an astonishing 25 years in the big leagues. He threw over 4,500 innings, won 283 games, appeared in two World Series, two L.C.S.'s and two All-Star Games. He was a three-time 20 game winner, had 16 seasons with 10 or more wins and won an amazing 16 consecutive Gold Gloves as the best fielding pitcher in the league. Why he isn't in the Hall of Fame is still a mystery.

Then he used his knowledge and his ability to present the game in easy to understand tones as a broadcaster for a number of years, mostly with the Minnesota Twins and the New York Yankees. He also worked for CBS Sports and ESPN, when that network actually had analysts who were professional on the air, and treated their position and the sport, with a sense of dignity, unlike the individuals that do it today.

Jim Kaat has seen all the changes in the game, from expansion and franchise movement to smaller stadiums, to the steroid era, to expanded schedules both in the regular season and the playoffs, to the player's union movement and the owners' stubbornness, leading to numerous work stoppages. He faced most of the greats of the last 40 plus years, he's known all the personalities from George Steinbrenner to Eddie Stanky, from Jay Johnstone to Larry Bowa. The only other individuals I've ever spoken with who have his depth of knowledge about baseball and have spanned as much time around the game are Billy Pierce and Milo Hamilton.

Today, Kaat, who is 69, looks like he is still in his 50's, with a strong voice and a very sharp mind. He and his wife spend a lot of time traveling the country and he plays a lot of golf. Living in Florida allows you to do that. Kaat is also planning a pilgrimage of sorts this summer. He wants to go back and visit the towns where he played baseball in, including his minor league stops. If the fates allow, he may be stopping off in Southeast Idaho on his way from Montana, where he played in the Pioneer League in 1958, on his way through to Oregon. It would be a thrill to meet him in person, one of the best pitchers of the last 45 years.

ML: Jim it all started for you in the second game of a double header on August 2, 1959 at Comiskey Park. Tell me about that day...about seeing Comiskey Park, about pitching to Luis Aparicio, Nellie Fox and Jim Landis. What was the experience like?

(Author's Note: Kaat lasted only 2.2 innings, allowing three runs (one earned) with three walks as the Sox beat the Washington Senators 9-3. Bob Shaw got the win.)

JK: I didn't think I was going to be the one to get called up for that game to be honest with you. I had some shoulder issues and it was a bit of a shock when I was told about it. I was numb to it all. I knew about Comiskey Park and how it was laid out, because my dad took me to a game there when I was a kid and I actually tried out there before I signed my contract in 1957. In those days you had to go through the White Sox dugout to get to the visitors' clubhouse!

I still remember some of the things from that day, I remember Louis Armstrong performed on a flatbed truck between games of the double header--and to a kid who played trumpet in high school that was special--and I remembered how depressed the team was at that time. We were in the middle of a long losing streak and it was the kind of thing where we'd score five runs and give the other team six and so forth.

(Author's Note: The Senators would lose 18 in a row from July 19 through August 5. They won a game, then dropped another four in a row. The Sox beat them seven times in that stretch.)

I had a lot of moments in my career at Comiskey Park. I pitched in my first big league game there; I had my first shutout there, hit my first home run there and won 20 for the first time there.

ML: The Sox made a big trade with Baltimore before the start of the 1963 season, and it changed the complexion of the franchise. They actually had some hitters now, guys like Pete Ward, Dave Nicholson, Ron Hansen, and Floyd Robinson. When you had to face those teams instead of the original "Go-Go" ones did you have to change how you approached the game?

(Author's Note: On January 14, 1963 Sox G.M. Ed Short traded shortstop Luis Aparicio and outfielder Al Smith to the Orioles for third baseman Pete Ward, outfielder Dave Nicholson, shortstop Ron Hansen and relief pitcher Hoyt Wilhelm. Ward would be named Co-Rookie of the Year (with teammate Gary Peters) and would supply power for the next few seasons. Nicholson, who struck out far too much, still had 22 home runs and 70 RBI's in 1963. Hansen would be one of the best defensive shortstops in the league and hit as many as 20 home runs in a season, at a time when shortstops simply didn't do that. Wilhelm became the top relief pitcher in the 1960's. In his six years with the Sox he'd win 41 games and save 98 while producing some astonishingly low ERA's considering he threw the knuckleball. The trade directly led to back to back to back 90 or more-win seasons in 1963, 1964 and 1965.)

JK: No. I learned from Eddie Lopat not to worry about the other team, what they were doing or who they had. I never let the other team dictate how I pitched. I felt that if I threw strikes, kept the ball down and got ahead of the hitters that I'd be fine.

ML: For Sox fans 1964 was a classic season with the Sox just missing the pennant despite winning 98 games. The numbers say you pitched a complete game, 10 inning loss to the Sox on September 10, 1964 at Metropolitan Stadium. Ron Hansen smacked a home run off you to win it 2-1. What was it about those Sox teams in that time period that gave everyone so much trouble? How did they win so many games?

JK: First off, I still remember that game, Ron hit a 3-0 pitch off me to win it. It was a fastball. I still see him from time to time in a press box because he still does a little scouting and I remind him of it.

The White Sox won so many games because they had a good pitching rotation. They had guys like Gary Peters, Joe Horlen, Tommy John, Johnny Buzhardt. They had Hoyt Wilhelm in the bullpen.

ML: How about the 'doctored' baseballs and the field? How much did that have an effect?

JK: We knew that they doctored home plate. That was because they had all those ground ball and sinker ball pitchers, and one time I was pitching against them and the baseball felt like a snowball in my hand, it was that cold! When I came to the Sox I remember talking to Roger Bossard (*Author's Note: Now the White Sox head groundskeeper*) and I said something like 'I'm pitching Saturday, make sure you've got the field ready.' (laughing) And it's a fact that the Sox used to have a light in the scoreboard at Comiskey Park that would tip off their hitters as to what kind of pitch was coming. Today the teams are more concerned about beautification of the field than about giving the home team an advantage.

ML: You seemed to have the Sox number though over the years, 29-12 against them. What was your secret?

JK: I don't think I had a secret. I played for some pretty good Minnesota teams in those years and usually if I'd pitch an average game, we'd score enough runs to win.

ML: In 1965 Minnesota beat out the Sox for the pennant and you had your first taste of the World Series. In 1966 you were spectacular winning 25 games with an ERA of 2.75 and then came 1967, perhaps the greatest race in baseball history. I talked to Mike Andrews about what the Red Sox were thinking going into the final 10 days about the White Sox chances and I ask you the same thing, knowing the Sox closed the season with Kansas City and Washington what did you think was going to happen?

(Author's Note: As we all know, the Sox collapsed with the championship just a kiss away, losing all five games. Minnesota had a chance for the pennant but lost it when Boston beat them twice the final two games of the season.)

JK: We felt good about our chances because we knew that we had the last two games in Boston and felt that regardless of what the White Sox did, they were going to be important. After the Sox dropped those two games to Kansas City we knew we had a great chance. That September

was the best month I pitched in my career. I won seven games, most of them complete games in the middle of a pennant race and was feeling good going into my final start that Saturday in Boston.

Whenever I run into Carl Yastrzemski or “Hawk” Harrelson, they’ll say the same thing, that they would never have won the pennant if I hadn’t gotten hurt in that Saturday game.

(Author’s Note: That Saturday Kaat had to leave the game in the third inning, leading 1-0 when he strained his elbow striking out Jose Santiago. Boston would come back to win 6-4 and clinch the pennant the final day winning again, 5-3, after the Tigers lost to California 8-5.)

ML: We’ll never again see a pennant race like the American League had in 1967 ever again will we?

JK: No. One of the things that I wish I could get my hands on would be a World Series program the Twins made up in case we won the pennant. Had we won and if I hadn’t gotten hurt, I would have started the second game on Wednesday against I think, Bob Gibson.

ML: Over the next, almost six years, you continued to win in double figures every season with the Twins but had some arm issues and in August 1973 they put you on waivers. That’s when the Sox stepped in. Roland Hemond claimed you and according to what he’s told me, he had to do a little bit of a sales job on you to get you to agree to pull up stakes after almost 13 years and start over. Tell me the story of how this all came about.

JK: I knew that both the Yankees and Royals were interested in me and both were leading their divisions. I had broken my wrist sliding into second base, again at Comiskey Park in 1972. Until then I had developed a pretty good screwball but after the injury I just could never get the feel of it again. I knew the Twins were disappointed in the way things worked out. I remember in the bullpen talking to our bullpen coach and I said that “I know I’m on waivers but I’ve got some good years ahead. They are going to regret letting me go.”

It turned out I got a call from Roland and he said the White Sox wanted me to join them. Roland also knew that I was a 5/10 man, the first one in fact.

(Author’s Note: A 5/10 man means the individual has spent 10 years in the major leagues, the last five with the same team and had the right to refuse a deal.)

I was flattered the Sox were interested. Roland offered me a 10 thousand dollar raise immediately. I was making 60 thousand dollars then and considering the money situation with Calvin Griffith that was a big thing. It was about as good a deal as it gets.

ML: Going to the Sox reunited you with pitching coach Johnny Sain who passed away recently. Tell me about Johnny, what made him special as a coach and how he helped you. Also, was that part of the reason you agreed to come to the White Sox?

JK: I think so. John helped me when we were both in Minnesota. As soon as I got to Chicago, John and I went right to the bullpen. He believed in pitchers throwing every day. We threw there every day for a week. He had a lot of ideas and tried to look at every pitcher individually. My arm wasn't bothering me and John worked on restoring my confidence. He believed in throwing strikes and getting ahead of the hitter. He also never believed in wasting a pitch even if it was 0-2 and he never thought doing a lot of running did anything for a pitcher. He used to say if running was what did it, Jesse Owens would have been a pitcher.

I remember one game I said to Brian Downing my catcher, "Brian don't even bother putting down any signs, let's see how many outs we can get throwing nothing but the fastball."

ML: How much of an adjustment was there for you from a baseball standpoint coming to the White Sox? I assume you pitched to certain hitters the same way, but did you make adjustments for the fact that now half of your games were played in Comiskey Park?

JK: I didn't make adjustments pitching-wise. To me the biggest adjustments were the things off the pitcher's mound. What I mean was I had won a lot of games against the Sox over the years and I was very self-conscious about how I'd be received now by the team. It took a while to get over that.

It was also an adjustment after all those years in Minnesota to wearing red shoes with a powder blue uniform! (laughing)

I joined the Sox in Cleveland and that first night I almost got to see Stan Bahnsen get a no-hitter. I remember watching it along with Steve Stone. Stan lost it when Walt Williams got a little bleeder with two out in the 9th inning.

(Author's Note: The game was played August 21, 1973. The Sox won 4-0. It was the start of a stretch where the Sox won 13 of the next 17 games.)

ML: You won 12 straight decisions in a White Sox uniform, one of the longest streaks in franchise history. Were you doing anything different? It certainly couldn't be all luck to do something like that.

(Author's Note: The streak was ended on May 13, 1975 in a 3-2 loss at Baltimore. Jim had won his first five decisions in 1975 to go along with winning his final seven decisions in 1974. Kaat also had a 27-inning scoreless streak from September 4 through September 18, 1974. He then had a 10-strikeout game on September 22, 1974.)

JK: It went back to Johnny. He tried to put a pitcher at ease with what he was doing. He had a saying that every time you go out there you should feel like you're 10-0. If you lose the game, big deal, you're 10-1. So many pitchers would go out there thinking they were 0-10 and they'd put so much extra pressure on themselves that they couldn't pitch.

ML: Sox announcer "Hawk" Harrelson was talking one time about how when a pitcher gets in a groove like that, home plate suddenly expands from 17 to 24 inches. He meant that hitters start

swinging at *your* pitch, not the one they want, in a sense getting themselves out, and that umpires begin calling everything close to the plate in the pitcher's favor. True statement?

JK: I think so. The more strikes you throw the more strikes you're going to get. Stan (Bahnsen) would go out and nibble, nibble, nibble... then throw one right down the middle and it wouldn't be called a strike. I told him you have to get ahead of the hitter. The best I ever saw at that was "Lefty," Steve Carlton. He just played catch with the catcher; the hitter was oblivious to him.

ML: Tell me about the 'quick pitch' strategy and the controversy surrounding it.

(Author's Note: After moving to the starting rotation in July 1974, Jim began working extremely quickly. Literally he'd get the ball back from the catcher, toe the rubber and throw without any type of involved delivery. Batters who didn't or wouldn't step out, or be given time, especially time wasters like Mike "The Human Rain Delay" Hargrove, had no chance as pitches were crossing the strike zone before they even got reset. Umpires allowed Kaat to do this since it was within the rules and that, at that time; he was a 15-year veteran of the big leagues.)

JK: My arm speed was dragging, and John and I were trying to find a way to correct it. I finally told him, "what if I stand like the bases were loaded and someone hit a ball right back to me? I'd take one step and throw the ball." That's what I did.

As far as the umpires, they liked the fact that I pitched quickly. It speeded the game up. The only guy who ever gave me trouble over it and I don't know why, was Bill Haller. He'd always be calling time out on me.

ML: You threw an incredible amount of innings in 1974 and 1975, considering how old you were at the time... how did you do that? Or was that simply expected of pitchers, period.

(Author's Note: In those two seasons Jim threw 581 innings. He was 36 and 37 years old.)

JK: I was pretty efficient when I pitched. You'll see that I didn't walk or strike out a lot of guys. That didn't take a lot out of my arm.

ML: When Bill Veeck took over he proceeded to start a complete overall and literally the next day after he got control back of the team you were traded to the Phillies. How did you hear about it and were you surprised given that you won 20 or more games in back to back seasons?

(Author's Note: Jim was sent to Philadelphia along with a minor leaguer on December 10, 1975. The Sox got back pitchers Dick Ruthven and Roy Thomas and shortstop Alan Bannister. Ruthven was then traded two days later as part of the Ralph Garr trade.)

JK: I wasn't surprised. Both Roland (Hemond) and Chuck (Tanner) had told me that based on what I'd done the previous two years I'd deserved an increase in my salary. At that time the White Sox just weren't making a lot of money. I knew that Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and the Mets were interested in a veteran starter and the White Sox asked me where I'd prefer to go if something could be worked out. I knew the Phillies from training in Florida and thought they

were going to be a pretty good team so that's where I wanted to go. It turned out to be a good deal for both sides. I went to a contender and we won the division the three seasons I was there and the Sox got some young players. Paul Owens was the first member of the Phillies organization to contact me although a friend of mine, sportswriter Ray Kelly was the first person to let me know about the deal.

ML: Jim, you played an incredible 25 years in the major leagues. Before we move into your second career, broadcasting I'd like to know how you did it. You came back from a serious arm injury in 1967 and kept playing. Was it a gift? Was it something about how you conditioned yourself? What's the answer?

JK: I think it was a combination of things. I was left handed and a control pitcher... not a hard thrower so I wasn't going to lose a lot off my pitches to start with. I also learned early from Eddie Lopat how to make adjustments during a game.

Later in my career I started to move from a full-time starter to spot starting and then to relief. It finally turned out that when "Whitey" Herzog took over the Cardinals he wanted me to become just a lefty/lefty specialist.

(Author's Note: Meaning Kaat would only face a left-handed batter or two during a game. Very short relief outings.)

So my work was limited and I was able to keep performing.

ML: Speaking of conditioning. How did that change over the years for you? Were you working out differently say with the Sox in 1974 then you did with the Twins in 1962 and then did that change when you ended your career with the Cardinals in 1983?

JK: I found out that the older I got, the more time I needed to get going. When you're young it doesn't take long to get into shape or to be ready for spring training. As you get older you need more time. I usually started in February before spring training began. I'd take a month off to let my body heal after the season ended then get going. I'd do a lot of conditioning work, things like play handball or racquetball, ride a bicycle. I also did a lot of throwing. When the season ended I'd always take home with me a bag of beat up baseballs. I had a big concrete block that was in my back yard and I'd throw to it.

I wouldn't be throwing full speed and it was only about 40 or 45 feet but it started to get my arm and legs back into shape. You could also work on your fielding with it because the ball would bound off at different angles. It was like what the kids use today, one of those pitch back devices.

ML: And you also generated some strange looks from your neighbors, right?

JK: (laughing) Well I'd tell them that I am left handed so we're supposed to be strange.

ML: How did you get into broadcasting? And where did you work?

JK: It all started back in the early 60's when Ray Scott, one of the Twins announcers, interviewed me after a game. He made the comment that I should think about doing it. I told him that what he was doing sounded like fun but at that time you never think about the future. I thought I was going to pitch until I was 60! (*Author's Note: And he almost did!*) I then got a chance to work at a small radio station in Minnesota in 1965 and 1966. I did high school football and basketball games, got up in the morning to give the weather report and the livestock reports.

Later on, Jody Shapiro from MLB films told me that broadcasting was something I should think about. I got my next chance during the strike of 1981. I was asked if I'd like to go up to Syracuse and do some minor league games with Ralph Kiner and Warner Fussille. Then after I retired I sent those tapes, which were probably awful, to ESPN. They liked them, and I wound up doing a lot of college games for that network.

In 1986 Frank Messer fell out of favor with the Yankees and I got the chance to work with Bill White and Phil Rizzuto on those games. George Steinbrenner though felt I wasn't being favorable enough to the club and my contract wasn't renewed, they let me go after one season.

I did some work for the Braves before getting to be part of the Twins broadcasting team from 1988 through 1993. I did the American League Championship Series for CBS in 1993. In 1994 I worked for ESPN doing a lot of studio work for "Baseball Tonight" and some color on major league games.

While I was at ESPN, I lived in a small town in Connecticut. One day my wife and I were roller blading when I heard someone calling out my name. It was Bryan Burns, the director of broadcasting for MLB and he told me I needed to contact the MSG Network. Tony Kubek was going to retire, and he recommended that I take his place on the broadcasts. ESPN allowed me to leave and I got that position and worked from 1995 through 2006 with them. MSG eventually became the YES Network.

ML: One of the things that has changed over the years is that now team broadcasters are paid by the club, not the stations, meaning they have to be very careful about what they say especially in regards to criticism of the team they work for. You worked for the Yankees who have two of the most pro-home team announcers around in Michael Kay and John Sterling. How did you balance trying to tell the game as you saw it for your audience and not upset those in power perhaps costing you your job?

JK: I've always tried to be honest about what I'm seeing on the field and that goes back to Bill White. White told me that I have to say what I think. Obviously, it caused some issues with George (Steinbrenner) back in 1986. In 1987 I applied for one of the positions on the Cubs radio broadcast team and was interviewed by one of the Tribune Company executives. He asked me if I would have any problems pulling for the home team, the Cubs. I told him that I would, that I needed to be objective and didn't get the job.

When I was with the Twins I was able to get it into my contract that I wouldn't stay at the same hotel as the team and that unless it was an emergency I wouldn't fly on the team flights. When I went back to the Yankees I made sure that I had protection in my contract, that unless I gave

them just cause by doing something really bad or stupid, I couldn't be fired for giving my opinions on-air. I stood up for myself and you have to do that.

ML: Speaking of ESPN, a lot of fans, especially White Sox fans, don't care for that network anymore. They just don't seem to have the caliber of baseball people around like they used to...folks like yourself, Ray Knight, Bill Robinson. To me they've gone away from their roots, what made them great in the first place, doing outstanding *sports* coverage. It seems like they are trying to branch out to so many different areas that they've lost their identity. Has ESPN changed since you worked for them?

JK: I think they are more into entertainment then they used to be. I remember we had a producer and the first thing he'd ask would be, "what are we looking for tonight?" "We'll" I'd say, "I'm going to watch the first pitch and see where the ball goes." (laughing) They are always looking for an angle instead of just letting the game speak for itself.

The other thing that I don't care for is all the graphics that they use. That's why I like to watch golf and horse racing a lot. There's not a lot you can do with those sports from that standpoint. You can't interrupt a race for example with a lot of graphics. The Golf Channel though is starting to go that way, which is why I really like to watch the European Tour...they just show the action.

ML: Between playing and working in the booth, you've probably seen or heard every major league announcer over the past 45 years. The Sox have had four who are in the Hall of Fame in Bob Elson, Jack Brickhouse, Milo Hamilton and when you were a team member, Harry Caray. Tell me about those men, what they brought to the announcers' booth and how you liked them as a broadcaster.

JK: Well the first name you mention, Bob Elson, "the Commander," is a guy I grew up listening to in Southwest Michigan. It was a thrill meeting him and remembering all those games I grew up hearing him on the radio. In fact, Bob was the first guy to ever give me a stock tip. He told me about a mobile home company that was going to do very well. I put together three thousand dollars and invested it. In about seven or eight months it split, and then doubled. I was able to get a new car because of it.

The other person of course was Harry and he had a different style. I remember early in 1974 I was getting hammered and Chuck Tanner called me into his office. I thought I was going to get released, instead Chuck told me I was going through a tough spell and he wanted me to work out of the bullpen for a while to work out my troubles. Well Harry was absolutely relentless on me. He'd say things like, "you know when your fastball and your curve ball are the same speed maybe it's time to retire."

It turns out I wound up having a good year (*Author's Note: Jim went 21-13 with a 2.92 ERA*) and the last week Harry asked me to be on his pre-game show, he said I was his 'Pitcher of the Year' and that I'd get a TV out of it. I told him to shove his TV, to give it to Terry Forster.

Just so everybody knows, I'd see Harry often in spring training or on the road and we'd have a drink and talk, it's not like we wouldn't socialize, but his way just grated players a lot. One time

in the clubhouse guys were talking about it and how much they hated what he was saying, and I said, “Listen the radio has a knob on it, just turn it off, or turn the dial.

ML: Baseball has changed a lot in 50 years, from expansion to labor unrest, from steroids to World Series games exclusively at night, from smaller ballparks to expanded playoffs. You’ve seen them all Jim. Can you give me what you think were the two or three biggest changes in the time you were around the game in any capacity?

JK: I think there were two things. First off was free agency and the other thing was the advent of speed into baseball. When I started, Luis Aparicio was about the only guy you really had to pay attention to and then later Bert Campaneris. If you stole 20 or 25 bases you were going to lead the league. But after baseball began to get the influx of Latin and African-American players it really changed. The game went from slow footed, power guys, who played the corner positions to one of speed up and down most lineups.

ML: When I talk with players sometimes they’ll say, ‘baseball was better back when I played.’ Sometimes that’s posturing but with all you’ve seen and your reputation as a broadcaster I’d like to ask you if baseball *was* better say in 1967 than in 2007?

JK: It depends of your definition of better. Today the athletes are in better shape, they are more advanced then I was at a younger age. Andy Pettitte at 22, had far more control of more pitches then I ever did when I was 22, but I don’t think the game itself is better.

I think when there were only 16 teams or even 20 clubs it was a better game because the pitching was better. 25 per cent of all the pitchers today in major league baseball shouldn’t be there. Expansion has diluted the talent. Kids are being rushed up to the big leagues before they really know what to do.

I also happen to like pitcher’s duels and don’t care for rock music blasting out of stadium speakers. What’s wrong with just watching the game?

ML: What’s your take on the whole steroid issue in baseball?

JK: I think everyone associated with baseball knew it was going on since the late 80's starting with Jose Canseco. But because baseball wanted a lot of home runs and high scoring games, no one did anything about it. And at that point remember there were no rules against it.

ML: Playing ‘devil’s advocate’ here. What do you say to people who make the case that steroids really aren’t any different then Gaylord Perry, Mike Scott or “Whitey” Ford doctoring baseballs? Or the White Sox freezing baseballs in the mid 60's? Or Norm Cash admitting to Sports Illustrated in a story, that he won the 1962 American League batting title using corked bats and then through a series of pictures showing how he fixed his bats?

JK: I agree with that opinion but only to a point. I think those things you mentioned are considered gamesmanship. I remember when I was a young pitcher going up against Frank Lary and coming back to the dugout saying “I think the ground crew really messed up. There’s a big

hole in the mound and they forgot to fill it in.” The guys started laughing at me. Lary would dig himself a hole in front of the pitching rubber and use that as his wind-up point. He’d be throwing from 59 feet instead of 60! This was before every game was televised and he’d get away with it.

I also remember a game when I was pitching when umpire Jim Honochick came in from second base and said, “Lefty, I see what you’re doing.” He caught me putting pine tar on my hand. Every pitcher did that, especially when the weather was cold, so we could get a grip on the baseball. We’d put that stuff on our socks.

The difference is that putting pine tar on my hands didn’t harm my body. Guys have died from using this stuff, I remember some of the Pittsburgh Steelers saying they took steroids and they died at a young age. The other thing is that I don’t think the stuff that we did really threw the records out of whack like today.

As far as the players like Mark McGuire or Barry Bonds, I think if they’d just tell the fans, “I used them, they weren’t illegal at the time but looking back what I did wasn’t good” they’d be forgiven.

ML: Your name has been mentioned in connection with the Hall of Fame. Do you think you’ll ever get in and what would it mean to you and your family?

JK: I went to Bruce Sutter’s induction last year and it was great to hear players like Bob Feller and Bobby Doerr say, “don’t worry, we’re going to get you in.”

(Author’s Note: Kaat can be voted into the Hall of Fame now by the Veterans Committee which requires 75 percent of their vote.)

It would be a thrill and honor and I think I’ve got a better chance now than in the past. I hope it happens, but I won’t lose any sleep if it doesn’t.

The other thing is that if it does happen, the regret will be that my dad won’t be here to see it. In fact, I’m looking at a picture of him on my desk right now. It’s one of my favorites and it’s him standing in front of the Hall of Fame. He went to see “Lefty” Grove inducted. He raised me with a sense of baseball history and with what the Hall of Fame means.

ML: Is there anyone who isn’t in the Hall that you think should be? I know the names of “Goose” Gossage, Tommy John and Billy Pierce are mentioned often by White Sox fans.

JK: I have all the respect in the world for what Dennis Eckersley accomplished in his career, but you look at what “Goose” and Lee Smith had to do to get their saves. There’s an old saying, ‘the last six outs of a game are the hardest to get.’ How many times did those two men have to go out and pitch an inning and a third or two and two thirds innings to end the game? The other player, and this is maybe the biggest injustice, is that Jim Rice is not yet in the Hall of Fame.

ML: In 2005 when the White Sox won the World Series, you were working for the Yankees, where winning championships is demanded by ownership. As a former Sox pitcher, what was going through you the night in Houston where they finally took the series?

JK: I was happy for them. I am more appreciative of when good baseball is played by a team and that season they did that well. That's why I was so disappointed when Cleveland didn't win the World Series in 1997. They had a good team who lost to a club with an owner, Wayne Huizinga, who simply bought a championship.

ML: Jim, your time on the South Side was only two full seasons and about six weeks of another but can you sum up your days with the organization for me?

JK: I enjoyed my stay in Chicago. I still have many friends in the area who are die-hard White Sox fans. When my career may have been over, Roland (Hemond) wanted me and that impressed me so much. I pitched in the All-Star game while with the Sox. I thought we had a good team, but we were never able to win, Oakland was simply better.



