

## Jeff Torborg

*Interview conducted by Mark Liptak in mid-April of 2010. Originally published at White Sox Interactive in 2010.*

*As with any major league franchise you can always play the ‘what if’ game. In the case of former Sox manager Jeff Torborg, the ‘what if’ looms large. Torborg took over the franchise at one of the lowest points in their history. They were a young team, seemingly on the road bound for Tampa Bay with little hope for any real success, at least according to the experts. Good thing Torborg, a man with unbridled optimism along the lines of former Sox G.M. Roland Hemond and field manager Chuck Tanner, didn’t listen to them.*

*By the end of the 1990 season, Torborg and his “Doin’ the Little Things” White Sox flat out stunned the baseball world. They finished with the third best record in baseball, racked up 94 wins, fought the eventual American League champion Oakland A’s tooth and nail and in one historic weekend closed the doors on the “Baseball Palace of the World,” the original Comiskey Park.*

*For that Torborg was named Manager of the Year by the Baseball Writers Association of America and by The Sporting News.*

*The future suddenly looked bright as the sun. The Sox had a new stadium, they were drawing fans hand over fist, and young players like Frank Thomas, Robin Ventura, Jack McDowell, Bobby Thigpen and Alex Fernandez were exploding on to the national baseball scene. The Sox hit the trade deadline day in 1991 winners of 19 of 27 and were hot on the heels of the Twins. New G.M. Ron Schueler did nothing at the deadline; the Sox fell apart in a brutal three week stretch and shockingly to all Torborg ‘resigned’ at the end of the year to take the Mets job.*

*I had wanted to interview Jeff for a long, long time and finally was able to track him down at his home in Florida in mid-April. The love Torborg had for his time in Chicago was still plainly evident. The only man in baseball history to catch a no-hitter from both Sandy Koufax and Nolan Ryan recalled those days on the South Side with the ease of a man who still thought about them often. But Torborg in this interview did a lot more than reminisce. He put to rest all the talk that he resigned on his own, he revealed a trade his friend and former Sox G.M. Larry Himes said no to and changed the course of history for two franchises and he got into why his philosophy of team and family worked. He also talked about what he saw in a former player that led him to think he could manage. Oh, he also talked about catching two of the greatest pitchers in baseball history Sandy Koufax and Nolan Ryan when they were at the height of their ability.*

*One can only wonder, if Torborg had been allowed to stay, what might have happened to the franchise in years like 1993, 1994 and 1996...had he remained, the fans certainly wouldn’t have had to try to pierce through the seemingly uncaring attitude of Gene Lamont and the complete total buffoonish-ness of Terry Bevington.*

**ML:** Jeff you managed Cleveland in the late 70's and that wasn't a good situation but I've got to tell you the White Sox situation in the late 80's wasn't much better, if at all. Why were you even interested in the job when the organization let Jim Fregosi go?

**JT:** I had done my homework on the organization and the players involved with it, I thought they had a good future. Just so you know I was also on the short list for both the Houston and Seattle jobs although it never got to the point where I was being interviewed by them. I had my first interview with Larry Himes and Al Goldis here in Florida. They taped it and I knew that Jerry Reinsdorf listened to all the interviews they had done. When the second interview came up, I flew to Scottsdale, Arizona and met with Mr. Reinsdorf. He asked me if I was going to have to go back and talk with the other teams that had interest in me and I said no, that my first priority, the job I wanted was here with the White Sox. It was a very good organization, a good family situation for me and I loved the city...remember I played on both sides of town when I was with the Dodgers and the Angels.

**ML:** 1989 started off miserably but something happened after the All-Star break to this team. They had a winning record in the second half, ripped off a sizable winning streak. They didn't look like the same club. What happened?

**JT:** We scuffled so badly in the first half because we couldn't catch the baseball. I think the trade that Larry Himes pulled off really helped set the stage for the future and that took some guts because Harold Baines was still a very good player. (*Author's Note: The Sox dealt Baines and Fred Manrique to Texas for Scotty Fletcher, Sammy Sosa and Wilson Alvarez on July 29, 1989.*) After the deal and then by the time Robin Ventura came up in September we were pretty well set defensively. I felt we were solid at third base, short, second base and in the outfield. We had Sammy and Lance Johnson covering a lot of ground and Ivan Calderon was a good left fielder, he was out of position in right. The other thing that happened was we established the roles for the bullpen guys.

**ML:** You sincerely believed in the team / family concept. When you tried selling that to the players and the organization what was the response?

**JT:** It was a good one. Larry Himes believed in the same thing and the players accepted it. I did some things that I thought would work for everybody involved. For example, wives weren't allowed to travel on road trips; I changed that and let them come along. I mean, why wouldn't you want guys to be with their family on the road instead of going out someplace? It was so well accepted that in September when I said that the wives couldn't come along anymore some of the guys were really upset over it. I said they couldn't come anymore because we expanded the roster in September and there wasn't room on the team plane. I called a meeting and told the guys that it was written down in the team rules, I wasn't trying to pull something over on them and that if this was going to be a problem, then next season we wouldn't do it again. I didn't hear a thing after that!

The other thing that I remember that I think really helped bring this along and this is also part of why I think we played much better in the second half of 1989, was because of something that happened right before the All-Star break. We were in Kansas City and had a day off before that

series. I told the guys “look I want you to come out here on your off day for a practice. I want to emphasize the things we worked on in spring training...relay throws, hitting the cutoff man, bunting and so on. If you do this and really work hard, instead of having you guys come back early for a practice before we start the second half, you can have all three days off.

So we get to the ballpark and you know this Mark, it's very hot in Kansas City in July. I told the guys, “wear anything you want” for the practice. I turned it over to the coaches and went back to my office to start working on lineups and stuff for the series. After about an hour I went back outside and figured that everybody would be gone but I saw their clothes were still in the lockers...so I went on the field and the guys were done with the workout but were still on the field just playing ball! They were having a great time so I said to myself, ‘OK let's do something with this.’ So I ordered pizzas and we had soda and beer, sat around the locker room and had a really great time.

I wish I could tell you that we played great against the Royals but they beat us three straight but after we got back the guys played better. We won eight straight which caused Tommy Paciorek to get a short haircut. (*Author's Note: Sox TV analyst and former player Paciorek had said he'd get his hair cut if the team won eight in a row*). We lost to Roger Clemens in Boston, and then won three more in a row, that's 11 of 12. I think what we did in Kansas City helped turn it around a little bit.

We had fun too. During the second half, someone got a bobble head doll, we called it the “Sammy-doll,” because Sosa had this thing he did with his neck and it looked like a bobble head. We took it with us and we were playing the Red Sox when it accidentally got knocked off a shelf in the dugout and broke. I said, ‘somebody better get that fixed in a hurry’, so it was taped up or glued up and we hit a home run, I think it was Calderon, to win the game. It was little things like that, that helped bring this team together.

**ML:** Before we talk about that miraculous 1990 season you were telling me about a trade that Larry Himes said no to before the season began. Had it gone through you wonder what might have happened to the White Sox and the Yankees who offered the deal? What was the trade?

**JT:** The Yankees wanted to send us Bernie Williams and Hal Morris for Eric King and Steve Lyons. Now think about what would have happened to our team. Morris was a line drive hitter and a good glove man at first, we had Robin at third. Williams and Lance Johnson would have covered a lot of ground in the outfield and Frank would have been the DH. Think we would have won a few games?

**ML:** The season started off pretty well but was there a point where you said to yourself, ‘you know we've got something going here!’

**JT:** I think I started to feel that way around the second half of the 1989 season. I got lucky because I inherited a good coaching staff and they worked hard to help the players. Then I couldn't have asked for a better group of guys. Carlton Fisk was a leader, Ozzie Guillen was a leader. Jack McDowell was a great player and he was really starting to come on. We

overachieved that season and remember Frank Thomas and Alex Fernandez didn't join us until August.

**ML:** You mentioned Jack McDowell. I had the chance to interview him and I told him that he's the only White Sox pitcher I've seen who when he was starting that day, I had complete faith the Sox were going to win the game.

**JT:** Jack was something wasn't he? What a great talent. The previous season we sent him back to the minor leagues and I know he was upset with me but he was having trouble with his arm. I said to the coaches one day that I was going to catch him in the bullpen; I thought something was going on with him. I caught him then said, "how long has your arm been hurting?" Jack was such a tough guy, such a competitor that he'd never admit something was bothering him, but finally he said "for a while." I told him, "look you have no arm strength that's why your split finger pitch isn't doing anything." Had we kept him on the team in 1989 we would have ruined him.

**ML:** You mentioned Frank Thomas; you wanted him on the club from the start didn't you?

**JT:** I did. That spring because of the lockout we played something like 18 games in 12 days to get ready, we were playing double headers to get guys at bat's. Frank hit on back to back nights two of the longest home runs I've ever seen. He hit one off Nolan Ryan that might still be going, then got one off Brad Arnsberg. I said to Larry Himes that I wanted him to break camp with us and Larry said no. Larry said that he didn't want to hurt Frank's confidence in the field because he was having trouble playing first base. *(Author's Note: While a freshman at Auburn playing football, Thomas tore up his shoulder and had to have surgery. His arm never was strong enough to make the throws across the diamond or to the plate on a regular basis.)*

**ML:** Family and team were such a big part of your philosophy as well as having fun. The annual "Crosstown Classic" game matching the Sox and Cubs was played on April 23 that year and I guess the fact that Steve Lyons played all nine positions during it showed that you didn't mind playing around a bit under the right circumstances. *(Author's Note: The Sox won the game 6-5 with Dave Gallagher throwing out the potential tying run at the plate to end the game at Wrigley Field.)*

**JT:** (laughing) You know what was so hard about that game? Trying to figure out how I could get him to do it! I'm there in the dugout changing things, thinking, 'to play him here I've got to do this'...it was a lot of work.

**ML:** Back to the 1990 season, something significant happened one night in Texas and it helped set up a record breaking season for Bobby Thigpen. Tell me what happened after Thiggy gave up a game winning home run to Pete Incaviglia? *(Author's Note: The incident happened on April 24, 1990).*

**JT:** We blew a 4-0 lead in the 9<sup>th</sup> inning and Bobby and I are sitting in our dugout at opposite ends just completely shattered over what happened. Then on the center field scoreboard they were showing a live interview with Pete and he said, "when Bobby comes in all we have to do is look for the hard stuff." With that Bobby's head snapped up like he was hit in the face with a

2x4. I had told him that he needed another pitch to set up his fastball but this really had an impact on him. We worked with him and the very next night I bring him in to another game situation, bases loaded, nobody out and we're up 5-4. Incaviglia's the hitter... Bobby throws him a first pitch *slider*, gets the double play. Gino Petralli pops out. Bobby struck out the side in the 9<sup>th</sup> inning and we win the game.

**ML:** In June you played the A's seven games in a two week stretch. You won the first game in Chicago then got hammered in the next three. The following weekend though you went out to the Bay Area and swept the A's in a series that featured taut games, angry words, brushback pitches and a famous comment by Oakland pitcher Dave Stewart. That series showed everyone the Sox were for real and weren't going to disappear anytime soon. Tell me about those two weeks.

**JT:** The A's beat us up pretty good in Chicago but when we went to Oakland that was a great series. We wound up sweeping them when Danny Pasqua hit an opposite field home run in the 10<sup>th</sup> inning to beat Stewart 3-2. I always had great respect for Dave; he actually was in the dressing room icing his arm down because he thought the game was over. Dave Henderson hit a two run home run to tie the game in the 9<sup>th</sup> inning and Dave came back out to pitch the 10<sup>th</sup>. The guys used to sit in the dugout watching how a great team like the A's played, after we swept them I told the players, "now you know how to do it."

What was funny about that Henderson home run, well it's funny now, was that the day before... that Saturday, we were winning 5-3 in the 9<sup>th</sup> when Henderson hit one off Bobby with a guy on that I was sure was a home run, I kicked my hat into the stands! Lance Johnson caught the ball at the wall and Bobby came up to me and said something like, 'don't you trust me?' (laughing)

**ML:** That's when Dave made his comment about how the Sox "couldn't carry his jock," after making exceptions for Carlton Fisk, Ivan Calderon and Ron Kittle. *(Author's Note: On August 20 when the A's came to Chicago, Sox fans got their revenge. With Stewart on the mound, Sox fans threw jockstraps by the hundreds on to the field, and then got the last laugh when the Sox battered Oakland 11-1.)*

**JT:** We used that comment for motivation the rest of the season.

**ML:** The Sox won games that season in the most incredible ways or things happened to set up wins. That year you won a game on a wild pitch, Carlton Fisk got hit in the back with the bases loaded on a curve ball, Ron Kittle got hit on the hip at first base with a ball, then Cal Ripken threw it off his catcher's glove to allow a run, Ivan Calderon faked Toronto's right fielder into making a nonchalant throw to the relay guy then broke for home and scored, you'd suicide squeeze at the drop of a hat and even squeeze with Ron Karkovice at third base!

**JT:** We had to play that way Mark. We didn't have the big home run hitters... Fisk led us with 18 and Calderon led us with 74 RBI's...but we had eight players with over 50 RBI's. We forced the issue, we stressed the fundamentals and we didn't beat ourselves. And I'll tell you something about Karkovice, he was the best bunter on the team.

**ML:** Of course the most bizarre, wild, strange, unbelievable win was when Andy Hawkins of the Yankees threw a no-hitter at you, yet you won the game 4-0!

*(Author's Note: The game took place on July 1, 1990, the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of Comiskey Park. Hawkins lost the game when left fielder Jim Leyritz dropped Robin Ventura's fly ball with the bases loaded and two out in the 8<sup>th</sup> inning. Then Jesse Barfield dropped Ivan Calderon's fly ball...that's how the four runs scored on two errors. Meanwhile Sox pitcher Greg Hibbard was also dealing. While Hawkins was no-hitting the Sox, Hibbard was no-hitting New York for the first 5 1/3<sup>rd</sup> innings himself.)*

**JT:** What I most remember about that game was turning to Sammy Ellis in the dugout *(Author's Note: Ellis was the Sox pitching coach)* and saying "you know, we're going to get no-hit and still win this game, I've got this feeling." I think I said it in the 7<sup>th</sup> inning. And another thing about Hawkins... a week or so later we played the Yankees in New York, Hawkins started for them and Melido Perez threw a rain shortened no-hitter! *(Author's Note: The game was played on July 12, won by the Sox 8-0 in seven innings)*

**ML:** At the trade deadline the Sox were only three games behind the A's yet the only thing the organization did was get reserve outfielder Phil Bradley from the Orioles. Were you disappointed especially since there was a lot of talk about the Sox getting guys like pitcher Mike Scott?

**JT:** Sure we were disappointed especially since that same day the A's picked up Harold Baines and Willie McGee. I was sitting in my hotel room when I saw the news come across the TV and I thought 'how did that happen?' because we were behind Oakland, we could have put in a claim. At almost the same time I was thinking this I got a call from Jerry Reinsdorf and he asked me "what's going on?" All I could tell him was that I didn't know.

And you mentioned Mike Scott...this is the first time I've ever heard anything like that. If that's true that just goes to show you that I wasn't involved in everything that may have been going on.

*(Author's Note: ESPN's "Baseball Tonight's" lead anchor Dave Marash reported when Larry Himes was fired in mid-September, that part of the reason was, that he wasn't interested in trading any of his minor league talent for more highly regarded players for the stretch drive. This apparently caused a wedge between him and ownership.)*

**ML:** That season was the start of a real dislike between the White Sox and the Texas Rangers that culminated in 1993 when Robin Ventura charged the mound at Nolan Ryan. There was something going on between the two organizations and there were a lot of strange things that contributed to the bad blood. It started when the two players you'd least expect to homer off Ryan did, Craig Grebeck and Ozzie Guillen back to back, then you had an eight hour 'rain delay'

on a Sunday, resulting in a game having to be played in Texas at twilight, there was a bad brawl on the field during that game and then Carlton Fisk hit his record setting home run in the nightcap. Whew!

**JT:** I remember when Craig and Ozzie hit homers off Nolan and his teammates were giving it to him from the dugout when it happened. *(Author's Note: It happened in the 2<sup>nd</sup> inning of the second game of a double header on August 10, 1990. The Sox won the game 5-1 after taking the opener 5-2.)* I knew Nolan well of course, since I caught him with the Angels and I knew the type of competitor he was.

Then that Sunday it started to rain before the game was supposed to start, it wasn't a downpour but a steady rain. It was the last time Texas was coming into Chicago and we asked them if we postponed it, would they fly back in on an off day to play. They said no, so we said we'll wait as long as we have to because if we can't get the game in we're going to have to make it up next week when we went to Texas and I knew, just *knew*, that if we did, we were going to face Ryan in twilight and I wanted to avoid that. The umpires were furious with us. *(Author's Note: The Sox set what is believed to be the longest wait in baseball history before calling a game because of rain. The game was scheduled to start at 1PM Central time. Persistent rains caused a delay before the first pitch was even thrown. The wait lasted seven hours and 23 minutes, before the game was "officially" called off on August 12, 1990.)*

The next week then in Texas, sure enough, we get Ryan in the makeup game in twilight. It's hard enough to see him during the day but under those conditions...and he was still mad from what happened the week before. He threw at Craig Grebeck during the game and I yelled out of the dugout at him. I said, "throwing at Grebeck doesn't show me anything..." I told Greg Hibbard, "look if we get in a situation where there are two out and nobody on base, the next guy goes down." Remember it was a one to nothing game and I couldn't afford to do something at the wrong moment. It turned out the situation came up and it happened to one of the nicest guys around, Steve Buechele. He charged the mound and it was a really ugly fight, it wasn't your usual baseball fight. *(Author's Note: Texas wound up winning the makeup game 1-0 in 13 innings. Ryan struck out 15, working 10 innings on August 17, 1990)*

Then in the night cap game after Carlton hit the home run, I wanted to win that game for him so badly because of the respect that I had for him as a player. He worked so much with our young players, our young pitchers and was such an influence on how they progressed in the big leagues. *(Author's Note: The Sox took the night cap 4-2. Fisk broke Johnny Bench's record for most career home runs by a catcher with a solo shot in the 2nd inning off Charlie Hough. It was home run #328 for Fisk as a catcher. That record was subsequently broken by Mike Piazza.)*

**ML:** Larry Himes was fired by the White Sox on September 15, 1990. Many people didn't understand the move but apparently things were going on behind the scenes. As I mentioned earlier, the failure to get players for the stretch run may have driven a wedge between him and

ownership and Jerry Reinsdorf had some very strong things to say about Himes on Chet Coppock's radio show. (*Author's Note: Among Reinsdorf's comments was the following "The fact is, Larry Himes cannot get along with anybody. You can hardly find anybody in the Sox organization that wasn't happy when Larry Himes left."*) Your thoughts when you heard the news?

**JT:** It was an odd time to make that kind of change. Larry hired me; we shared the same ideas on a lot of things. I appreciated the confidence that he had in me and I always tried to be loyal to him.

**ML:** Then of course, came the last big event that season... the closing of Comiskey Park. As you look back on the weekend and the final game, 20 years later, what do you remember?

**JT:** It was the most emotional moment I had ever been through in baseball. There was such energy in the park...not one fan set foot on the field when the last out came, the fans stayed in the seats and sang and just refused to leave. I know we all took a victory lap around the field to say thanks to the fans for supporting us.

**ML:** It was a circus like atmosphere at the park that weekend; it seemed everybody who was somebody was at the final game... among the celebrities in the park were Governor Jim Thompson, Major Richard M. Daley, Goldie Hawn, Kurt Russell, Ron Howard, George Wendt, John Candy, Wayne Gretzky, Billy Cunningham and Maureen O' Hara. The Oak Ridge Boys sang the National Anthem and the rock group Styx sang "Take Me out to the Ballgame"...it's amazing you guys were even able to focus enough to win two of the three games. Then you had the story that Jack McDowell was telling me about Goldie Hawn walking not only into the Sox locker room but the training room!

**JT:** I know Goldie was in our locker room and the trainer's room was right across from it so she probably was in there. She performed a one woman show here in Florida a few years ago and my wife and I went to see it. Afterwards I asked her if she remembered being in our locker room and she did. At the time when I saw her in the locker room I asked her if being around the guys bothered her, she said it didn't, so I told her "then it doesn't bother me either..." (laughing)

**ML:** That November Ron Schueler was hired as G.M. It would turn out to have major implications for you nine months later but at the time what did you think of the move?

**JT:** I actually talked about it with Jerry Reinsdorf. He said he was thinking about hiring him and asked my opinion. Remember at the time Ron's wife was very, very sick and Jerry wondered if that might be an issue for the team. I told him that the issue with Ron's wife shouldn't stop him if that was the guy he wanted. I knew of Ron, he was in baseball a long time as a pitcher, a pitching coach and he worked with Tony LaRussa in the A's front office. I told Jerry that if Ron had to be away to be with his wife, that we could do anything we needed to do over the phone.

**ML:** So you go into the 1991 season with high hopes, ESPN's "Baseball Tonight" pegged you to win the division, the Sox acquired Tim Lincecum to hit at the top of the order and you had a brand

new ballpark, the new Comiskey Park to play in. The home opener didn't go exactly as planned though did it? *(Author's Note: Detroit embarrassed the Sox 16-0 on April 18, 1991)*

**JT:** I always felt that the final week of spring training I was playing nothing but my regulars... I wanted to get them in the frame of mind that now it was time to play for real. We won six in a row, *(Author's Note: The Sox took two at Baltimore, at Detroit and against the Yankees)* we lost on 'get away day' in New York, got back to Chicago and played the following day but we didn't really know how the park was going to play. We hadn't had a lot of time in it...boy Detroit sure showed us in a hurry how it was going to play. I remember like it was yesterday Cecil Fielder, Rob Deer and Tony Phillips hitting home runs on us. During the game I remember walking down the dugout saying, "can anybody here pitch? Just to get us through this one?" I'll never forget Craig Grebeck standing up and saying, "I can pitch skip..." Little Craig Grebeck... (laughing)

**ML:** For the first half of 1991 the Sox were doing OK, they weren't sneaking up on anybody and had to work harder for their wins but you were hanging around until July when the team exploded. You went 19-8 capping off the month with Robin Ventura's grand slam walk off against the Rangers "Goose" Gossage. You were three games behind Minnesota but like in 1990, the G.M. did nothing at the trade deadline. Were you disappointed again... because many fans thought the Sox lacked another hitter?

*(Author's Note: Throughout the 1990's the Sox tried various players in the middle of the order to compliment Frank Thomas and Ventura. All had measurable success but for various reasons none stayed around very long. George Bell led the club with 112 RBI's in 1992 but by October 1993 got into a public verbal fight with manager Gene Lamont and was released. "Bo" Jackson made a miraculous comeback with an artificial hip in 1993 but was gone the next year after he got into it with Lamont. Ellis Burks had a solid 1993 but Schueler refused to sign him to a long term deal, he left for Colorado. Julio Franco had 99 RBI's in the shortened season of 1994 but like Burks, left after a year to play in Japan. Harold Baines and Danny Tartabull were signed for 1996 and the Sox almost had four players with 100 or more RBI's in the lineup but Tartabull left for Philadelphia and Baines was traded as part of the "White Flag" deals in 1997.)*

**JT:** We thought the same thing; that we needed another bat in the lineup but I don't know if I was disappointed. We felt we had a good young club that was beginning to peak.

**ML:** Wilson Alvarez threw a no-hitter at Baltimore on August 11. The Sox were a game out and looked to be ready to take control of the division. And then the most incredible stretch that I've seen in decades took place. The Sox simply couldn't hit a baseball anymore. They lost 16 of 19, were shut out three times and that included being no-hit by the Royals Bret Saberhagen on August 26. What in the world happened?

**JT:** The day after Wilson's no-hitter Chris Hoiles hit a home run off Bobby Thigpen to tie the game, then in extra innings Donn Pall gave up another home run and we lost. That seemed to

turn it around against us. I couldn't believe we could lose that many games during that stretch. We should have won 90 or more games again and we would have easily except for that stretch... we just weren't ready yet.

**ML:** The Sox still won 87 games and looked ready to take the next step when word came that you resigned to take the Mets job. I remember reading that you wanted to be closer to your family in New Jersey, Jeff...but I've also heard rumors through the years that some in the front office didn't care for the way you handled pitchers, specifically Bobby Thigpen who went downhill after 1991. When I've asked the guys you managed about that, like Donn Pall, he strongly defended the way you used the bullpen. Can you clear this up for me, why did you leave the White Sox? And were you forced out?

**JT:** My mother was in her 80's at the time but the reason that I left to be closer to my family was just for public relations, we didn't want to hurt any feelings. I didn't want to leave the White Sox. I had no desire to leave...why would I? This was a good young team ready to win; my wife and I loved Chicago and our son Dale was just starting out at Northwestern. *(Author's Note: Dale Torborg now works for the White Sox after a career in professional wrestling as a strength coach)*

**ML:** Then obviously by your answer there's more to the story than was told to fans at the time. What else was going on?

**JT:** Later in the season we were in Minnesota for a two game series, it was a must win series for us because we were running out of time and I heard Peter Gammons report on ESPN that my job was in jeopardy. I was thinking, 'where is this coming from?' Then the last home stand of the year when we played the Twins again, Ron Schueler came into my office before it started and he closed the door. I was wondering what was going on. Ron said to me, "The Mets called me today and they want to talk with you about the managing job." I told him, "Ron, I appreciate it but I have no interest." Ron said, "well think about it and I'll come back in a few days. We'll talk again." I'm sitting there wondering what is going on, because I said I had no interest.

So right before the last games, we had a makeup double header; Ron comes back and asks if I thought about the Mets offer. I told him again that I had no interest but then I said "Ron, I've got to ask you because this has come up, where I fit in with you and the organization?" He looked at me and said, *"I think both of us would feel bad if you turned it down and then something happened."*

When he said that I had to think twice about what was happening. Ron and I never had a cross word between us that season but he wanted to hire his own guy, so when the Mets called I took the offer. It was the best thing for me financially but it was the worst move professionally I could have made. Ironically about a half hour after I verbally told the Mets I'd take the job the Yankees called and said they were firing "Stump" Merrill and offered me the position. I told them I had

already given my word to the Mets and couldn't go back on it but I didn't want to leave the Sox in the first place. *(Author's Note: Schueler and the organization first contacted former Sox coach Jimmy Leyland, then the manager of the Pirates about the position, but he turned them down instead suggesting his longtime base coach Gene Lamont, who got the job.)*

**ML:** Was there any truth to the rumor that part of the reason the organization was upset with you was because of the way you handled your bullpen and how Bobby Thigpen just fell apart.

**JT:** I had heard that I was being criticized by some of the guys upstairs on that. I mean Larry Monroe *(Author's Note: Advisor to the Baseball Department and former Sox pitcher)*, Ed Farmer, and Ron (Schueler.) They all wanted Scott Radinsky to be the closer. Now Scott was a good pitcher and he could be a closer but at that time he wasn't ready. The criticism was laughable; remember this was the bullpen that was the best in baseball in 1990. *(Author's Note: The Sox won the Roloids Relief Team Bullpen of the Year Award based on their record of 29-21 with 68 saves and an ERA of 3.16. The bullpen was primarily made up of right handers Bobby Thigpen, Barry Jones and Donn Pall and left handers Scott Radinsky, Kenny Patterson and Wayne Edwards.)*

As far as Bobby was concerned we played a game against the A's in 1991. We had a lead and Bobby came in to pitch the 8<sup>th</sup> inning for Alex Fernandez and a pitch got away from him and hit Terry Steinbach in the head. Tony (LaRussa) went crazy, I still remember him throwing a bat and my first thought was 'what if that hit a fan? What kind of a lawsuit would he be looking at?'

Anyway it was an ugly, ugly game, we lost the lead, wound up losing the game but there was a big fight after Steinbach got hit. Bobby was down on the bottom of the pile and he hurt his back. I think that's why he lost his effectiveness not because of anything that I or the coaching staff did. *(Author's Note: The game was played on June 1, 1991. The A's came from behind to win 7-4.)*

**ML:** Your thoughts on Sox owner Jerry Reinsdorf?

**JT:** A shrewd business man. A great owner. He loves the game but also doesn't interfere in the day to day operations. On a personal note, I really liked him, we'd talk often and he actually lent me the money so that I could buy the property and build the house that we now have here in Florida. There aren't a lot of owners who would do that.

**ML:** You were the first person in baseball to think that Ozzie Guillen had a future as a manager and you hired him as your third base coach when you were managing the Expos. Tell me about your relationship with Ozzie and what did you see that made you think, 'this guy could be a manager someday...'

**JT:** Ozzie was always asking questions when he played for me, he had a sharp mind for the game so when I took over Montreal, I said that I wanted him to join me if he was interested. I called him up and told him that I'd like him to come but that he should call and talk to the owners first. Ozzie said, "when do you want me?" I said "Ozzie you need to talk to the owners and get a salary worked out." He said, "when do you want me?" He didn't care about the money.

I told the coaches who were already there that I was bringing him in and that he could have any job he wanted...bench coach, first base coach, third base coach so they understood what was happening. Ozzie said he wanted to coach at third base and he was an excellent coach for me.

We both went to Florida and when I was fired, Ozzie called me up and said, "I'm quitting..." I told him, "Ozzie you can't do that, you've got a great future in this game, I appreciate your loyalty but promise me you won't quit" and he didn't. By the way there are some misconceptions about why I was fired in Florida. Jeffrey Loria, the owner, wanted me to fire our pitching coach Brad Arnsberg. I explained to him the reasons why I thought that was the wrong thing to do. It wasn't his fault we weren't playing well and it was very unfair to him. When I finished I told Mr. Loria that if he felt that strongly about it then he should fire me instead and he did.

I wasn't allowed to go into the clubhouse to say goodbye to the players which was unfortunate but I did get a chance to meet most of them in the parking lot where I had a chance to tell them some things. Ozzie's wife was there and she was emotional and very thankful to me for everything I had done for Ozzie and the family.

I actually spoke with the White Sox and recommended Ozzie. I wasn't in anyway trying to undercut Jerry Manuel, I simply said that if the Sox decided to make a move that I felt he was ready to take over a mangers role and that he'd love to come back to Chicago.

**ML:** What did you think about the 2005 season?

**JT:** That was wonderful wasn't it? Dale, my son, was able to get tickets for the first two games and I came to Chicago and surprised Ozzie before Game #1. I just wanted to say hello to him but he insisted that I come into his office where we talked for a little while. I know he had more important things that he needed to be thinking about but he insisted that we spend some time together and I appreciate that. Watching those games it was like I was managing again, I kept pacing around I was that nervous!

**ML:** Jeff normally these interviews are always about the White Sox, but you're the only man in history to catch a perfect game from Sandy Koufax and a no-hitter from Nolan Ryan. I've got to ask you about those two men and those two games. *(Author's Note: Koufax's perfect game came against the Cubs on September 9, 1965. He won 1-0. By the way the Dodgers themselves only got one hit. Ryan's no-hitter was on May 15, 1973 at Kansas City. California won 3-0.)*

**JT:** Those two guys were probably the greatest strikeout pitchers in baseball history. They were the only two guys I ever caught where every time they went out to the mound they had a chance for a no-hitter. They were both that dominant. When I caught Sandy it was his fourth no-hitter and when I caught Nolan it was his second no-hitter. I also caught Bill Singer's no-hitter in 1970.

**ML:** How about as pitchers can you compare them?

**JT:** By the time I caught him Sandy was perfection as a pitcher. He was a big man, not as big as Don Drysdale but he was bigger than people thought. He had the best curveball I've ever seen. Nolan was still wild when the Angels got him. But over time he learned control, developed a curve and then in his later years had a nice changeup.

**ML:** Do you remember anything specific about those two games, I know it's been a long time but does anything stand out?

**JT:** With Sandy he kept to himself during that game. He didn't say anything and I wasn't about to go over and start talking to him! I remember he didn't shake me off one time in the game and that he got stronger as the game went on, he struck out the last six guys he saw. With Nolan's no-hitter I remember we talked in the dugout during it. *(Author's Note: Koufax struck out 14 in his game, Ryan 12.)*

**ML:** Jeff this has been a real pleasure, all Sox fans thank you for your time. Can you sum up your time in Chicago as manager for me?

**JT:** Mark that was such a great experience for me. It was one of the most rewarding times I've ever had in baseball and even today I still have a very special feeling for the White Sox, the fans and the organization.



