

John Tudor

SABR Oral History Collection

Interview by John McMurray
Transcribed by Liam Hamm
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Q: This is John McMurray of the Society for American Baseball Research, and I'm pleased to be speaking today with John Tudor. John pitched in the major leagues between 1979 and 1990, most notably with the Boston Red Sox and St. Louis Cardinals. We are recording this interview with John's permission on February 13, 2024. John, what got you interested in baseball?

A: I was a kid. That's about it. That's what you did. Back then, you played baseball. You played football, you played hockey. I grew up in the Northeast. It's just what you did all day long, every day.

Q: You were in Peabody (Massachusetts), and were you a Red Sox fan at that time?

A: Yeah, I suppose so. Baseball wasn't on TV every day like it is nowadays. Back in those days, I was just more a fan of playing the game. I mean, I did follow the Red Sox when I could.

Q: You also in Little League played first base. Tell us about what it was like to play first base and when you first started pitching.

A: I pitched all through it. I just played. I played first base when I didn't pitch. I mean, that's again what you did if you weren't pitching, you were playing a position somewhere.

Q: I know you said that ice hockey was your first love. Was that in fact true? And were you more inclined to play hockey than you were to play baseball?

A: Well, depends upon the season. ... My hockey career for the most part was just playing pond hockey in the winter time. At that time of year, obviously up in the Boston area, there's not much baseball going on in December, January, February, March, so we moved to other sports. You know, we just went from one sport to another as they came up. Hockey is my first love and unfortunately I wasn't real good at it, but you know what, I'm not sure what else to say about that.

Q: You went to Peabody High School. You're at that time 6 foot, 185 (pounds). Tell us about your high school career playing baseball.

A: Well, at that point, I was not 6 foot, 185. I'm probably closer to 5-foot-10, 5-11, and about 150 (pounds). But my high school career was pretty nondescript. I didn't really play much in high school, I started some games my senior year, but I was pretty much a benchwarmer watching. And I just loved the game, like being around the game, and just kind of stayed with it.

I mean, I'd tell people all the time, I'm glad that lacrosse had not come into the picture at that point up there, because I probably would have, it's a sport I probably would have been drawn to and probably would have stopped playing baseball.

Q: You went on to North Shore Community College in Danvers. You were the MVP of your team in 1973. Tell us about that season.

A: I don't know. It was my first year in college, obviously. I was a freshman. We were just a little junior college team. I mean we had some good players and we had fun with it. I mean that's just another ... I pitched and I played first base. MVP could have been one of a number of guys on that team and the coaches just happened to pick me.

Q: You went on to Georgia Southern College, joined the baseball team as a walk-on and had success there. At what point did you start to think that maybe the major leagues were within reach?

A: Oh, I don't know. Not really until I got into professional baseball, or really, higher in the organization with the Red Sox. I started to think, you know, probably in my second year in Pawtucket that I might have a chance. And up until that point, I was a fill-in player for the most part. I pitched out of the bullpen and would get some starts later in the year, maybe when somebody got hurt. I had the opportunity to pitch in a game against the Red Sox in an exhibition game in Pawtucket and was able to get some notice there and got put on the roster the next spring.

Q: The Mets had selected you in the 21st round of the (1975) amateur draft, but you didn't sign. And you were eligible for the secondary phase in 1976, and the Red Sox took you. How did you feel?

A: I was good. I was actually into my senior year at Southern at that time and ... back then there were two drafts. There was that January draft and I just kind of decided at that point that I don't know, maybe I should sign here this time. I might not get this chance again. And so, I did.

Q: In your first three years in Boston's minor league system, you spent a lot of time in the bullpen. I'm sure you were glad to have the opportunity to pitch. Did you have any dislike of being in the bullpen?

A: No, and I took the ball when they gave me the ball. That's about the extent of it. I wasn't a high draft choice, so there were guys obviously in front of me as far as that went and just tried to take advantage of the opportunity when it came to me. I got to start some games in my first year in A-ball toward the end of the year. I had a decent year and then I was lucky. I kept moving up in the system and never really got stagnated in any one place. So it kind of made it easy to hang on to it for a little while longer.

Q: What kind of pitcher were you at that time? Obviously, you had a great fastball, but you also relied on your breaking pitches. If someone had seen you pitch back then, what kind of pitcher would they have seen?

A: I was more of a power pitcher back in those days. I didn't really have a very good breaking ball. I struggled with a breaking ball, really, my whole career. Trying to find something that worked and, you know, I came up to the big leagues throwing probably low 90s, topping out probably around 93 or so. And so I had a pretty good arm. I was lucky enough to be left-handed and it was a little bit of a rare commodity back in those days. If I started the game back in those days, I was probably throwing 80% fastballs. And then, you know, trying to mix in a curveball here and there. I didn't really find the changeup until a little bit later in my career.

Q: There wasn't as much emphasis on using radar guns then. Did people care how hard you were throwing the way they do today?

A: No, I don't think that — I mean, they certainly cared or it made you get noticed a little bit better. But it wasn't as much of a prerequisite as it is now. The emphasis back in those days was “Can you win?” and “Can you get people out?” And unfortunately, in a game today that's partially run by people that never played the game — it's easy to scout a game with a radar gun. It's easy to scout a pitcher with a radar gun. It's easy. It's a lot more difficult to — you have to have a feel for the game or understanding of the game in order to see the little variables in a person. “Is he a winner? Is he not a winner?”

Q: When you were at Pawtucket, you were managed by Joe Morgan. Tell us both about what it was like to be managed by Joe and any work that he did with you there.

A: Joe didn't do much work with me. When I came up in the Red Sox organization, or when I came up to the minor leagues, there were no full-time pitching coaches at places. Even in Pawtucket all we had was a rover that came through, you know, three or four times a year. And the reality of it is, they spent more time with the higher draft picks than they did with guys like me. So I think I actually benefited from not having guys constantly trying to teach me something. We kind of learned from each other, and I think it makes things stick a little bit better when you learn it from the guy in the locker next to you, rather than some guy who's coming in and seeing you once every three months or once every two months.

Q: Did you have any pitchers that you watched and you said, “I really want to be able to pitch like this particular player”?

A: Yeah. I think that Scott McGregor with the Orioles was a guy that I emulated a little bit. He was kind of my style of pitcher, although he had the big curveball, but I kind of liked his mechanics and I like the way he handled himself on the mound. And he's probably really the one guy that I really watched and kind of paid attention to, tried to learn from.

Q: During the winter in 1978 and 1979, you played in the Dominican League. There were several major leaguers who were there at the time, like Cliff Johnson or Mark Clear. It seemed as though that experience really helped you to grow and set you on a course toward the major leagues. Is that a fair assessment?

A: No, I really don't think it is because when I went down to the Dominican in 1979, I hadn't been on the mound in probably six or eight weeks because the minor league season had ended at the end of August, and they threw me right into the fire. And my first start there was a complete-game shutout and that pretty much was the end of me for the winter. My shoulder started bothering me and I think I started one more game and ended up going home shortly afterwards. John McNamara was the manager down there. McNamara had gotten the job down there and he had gotten the Cincinnati job when we were there and he had left. So when he left, I asked him if I could leave as well and I did, and I went back there again after the 1981 season, the year of the strike. And I had a good winter down there and I think that is what maybe sent me a little bit more on course. I was already in the big leagues at that time, but that kind of established me a little bit more as a possible big-league pitcher, I think.

Q: And you made your Major League debut on August 16, 1979 in Boston. I know that you had some of your friends from Peabody who were there. Tell us about your first game.

A: Not very memorable, to be honest with you, other than the fact that it was my first game. I think I only lasted maybe three or four innings and gave up three or four runs. I can't remember exactly to be honest with you. It was definitely a little bit of a nervous time and it was fun to have my friends there and also a little bit challenging with them standing over the bullpen rail in Fenway yelling at me while I'm warming up. But yeah, it was good. It was good to get that start under my belt and that end of the year was not great but it again kind of put me on the radar, I guess a little bit, for good or for bad.

Q: When you did get your first win in Boston in September over the Detroit Tigers, you were sharp with your breaking ball and your fastball. And I wanted to ask you about just having command of those pitches because you had a reputation of always having great command of all your pitches. What's the key to having that kind of control?

A: Oh, I don't know. I think it's just repetition. You know, my command was not as good in those early days as it was later on. Like I said, I was more of a power pitcher back in those days. It was a "here it is, hit it" attitude. And I developed more control later on, again with just I guess the opportunity to get out there and pitch every fifth day or fourth day with the Cardinals for a little while.

Q: Was your shoulder giving you any trouble at that time? I know you had hurt it at Georgia Southern.

A: Yeah, my shoulder bothered me my whole career pretty much. I went in and out with shoulder soreness pretty much throughout my whole career. I went through streaks where it

didn't bother me and through streaks where it bothered me every time out. And it's just the nature of the beast.

Q: Tell us about some of your Red Sox teammates when you get up to the team. Let's just say Carl Yastrzemski. What was he like as a as a person and as a player from your perspective?

A: Well, when I first came to the Red Sox, they were pretty much an All-Star team, with Yaz and Jimmy Rice and (Dwight) Evans and (Rick) Burleson and Butch Hobson, and Freddie Lynn and Carlton Fisk. It was an All-Star team and then the pitching staff was (Dennis) Eckersley and Mike Torrez and Tom Burgmeier. So the Red Sox back in those days — they described them as 25 guys, 25 cars. And rookies back in those days were expected to be seen and not heard. So that's kind of kind of what I tried to do. I had a couple of friends of mine in Glenn Hoffman and Dave Stapleton who were there at the time, that I had played with in the minor leagues and been roommates with. So the three of us, really, and maybe one or two other guys, kind of hung together, especially on the road. It was a challenging time for all of us just to try and stay in the big leagues.

Q: And a particular highlight for you was in May of 1983 versus the Blue Jays. You pitched the first of your two career one-hitters. Tell us about that game.

A: I have no idea. Yeah, it's a start. I don't remember the game. I remember the one hit was early in the game and it was a ground ball between short and third. The hit came in probably the fourth inning. So it's not like I was flirting with a no hitter and it got broken up.

Q: Do pitchers pay attention to those things? I know you always try and go out and give your best effort, but whether you give up one hit or three hits, does it really make a difference if you aren't giving up runs?

A: No, I don't think it does. I didn't have no-hit stuff. So I was again trying to get through nine innings if I could, try and to get a win and keep our team in the game as best I could. That was my strategy through it all. I think that's pretty much any pitcher's strategy.

Q: What do you consider the high of your time in Boston and what did you learn from being in Boston?

A: What was that? You broke up? I missed the question.

Q: I said, what do you consider the highlight of your time in Boston and what did you learn the most from pitching in Boston?

A: I mean, I did just gain experience from pitching in the big leagues, period. I don't know if I learned anything necessarily from pitching, particularly in Boston. But we're in a lot of highlights. I mean, I was there to see Yaz's 400th home run and his 3,000th hit. So those were kind of highlights, but as far as you know, personally I was the guy just trying to hang on, trying to get year to year.

Q: In terms of pitching in Fenway Park, as a left-hander, how difficult was it in fact? And did you make any particular adjustments that made a difference when you were pitching in Fenway?

A: No, I didn't change anything pitching in Fenway. I think the left-hander in Fenway thing is a little bit overblown, or at least I thought it was back in those days. I mean, the wall gives and the wall takes. You know, you get the wall-scraper doubles or a few cheap home runs. But there's also those rocket line drives that hit off the top of the wall that end up being singles or doubles that normally would have been a home run. So I think that's probably a 50/50 proposition there as far as giving up home runs. And the wall is pretty close as in center field so it was a big-league stop for me. So that was the whole thing was the ability, the opportunity to pitch in the big leagues, which was obviously a dream, especially as I grew up.

Q: In December of 1983, you're traded to the Pittsburgh Pirates in return for Mike Easler. Did you expect that the trade was coming? And what did you think of it when it did?

A: No, I didn't know it was coming at the time. I'll be honest with you, I'm not sure what I thought of it. Just as another opportunity, I guess. The Pirates that year were expected to be a decent team, so I thought it would be a good opportunity. As it turned out, we were not. Unfortunately, we were actually pretty bad. But it gave me the opportunity to continue to pitch the big leagues and I think it made me appreciate defense and runs because we struggled to score runs. We struggled to catch the ball in Pittsburgh, and it made me appreciate every runner that was on base and try to keep them from scoring because it didn't take much. It didn't take very many runs to get you beat there or get you out of a game because the National League was a little bit different. You got to the sixth or seventh inning in a National League game; if you're losing 1-0 or 2-0 or 2-1, then you got pinch hit for and you're out of the game, no matter how good you're pitching. So it made a difference from that standpoint. I guess that it made me appreciate it and made me know that runs given up should be eliminated if possible.

Q: You had one season in Pittsburgh and after that you go to St. Louis and that obviously was a big turning point in your career.

A: Yeah, it was. I mean, I remember sitting in the dugout with the Pirates, when we were in St. Louis. You know, seeing the sea of red in the stands and watching those guys play defense and watching them run, saying, "Boy, would this be fun?" But I never thought that — we kind of knew with the pitching staff, with the Pirates, because we had a really good pitching staff over there with Rick Rhoden, Larry McWilliams, John Candelaria, José DeLeón. Our starting staff was really good. And we knew one of us was going to be gone because they needed to find another bat or two, but I never thought it would be me because I had just gotten there. And I didn't think that they would trade me only because, like I said, I had just gotten there and that would maybe seem like they'd made a mistake and gotten rid of a pretty good hitter in Mike Easler for an arm that they, as it turned out, did not really need.

Q: (Cardinals manager) Whitey Herzog said when you got there that he liked pitchers who were tough and who knew how to pitch in Fenway Park. Tell us about your interactions with Whitey Herzog, what he was like as a manager and how he helped to coach you.

A: Whitey was great. Whitey was a player's manager. If you went out there and gave effort, then you had no problems with Whitey. He gave me the opportunity to come over there, which was great. And he also stayed with me during some difficult times early in the season, and he very easily could have given up on me in that first part of the season and then who knows what would have happened. But he stayed with me and gave me the opportunity to pitch. And the thing I admire most about Whitey, he was very even-tempered and as long as you gave him a chance, he gave you a chance.

Q: Now the early part of the (1985) season is well chronicled. You were 1-7 with a 3.74 ERA. What happened at the beginning of the season?

A: I wasn't getting anybody out, apparently. I had some games that I could have won, and I didn't and it just kind of snowballed for a while. Luckily, we were able to right the ship and that was such a good team that for me it was a matter of getting my act together and getting a little bit more control of the strike zone and making guys put the ball in play. Because mistakes that we made as pitchers over there in St. Louis, a lot of times didn't show up in the scorebook. So long as you could keep it in the ballpark, those guys were going to catch it somehow. And they were a lot of fun to watch.

Q: I had read that you'd had some issues with where you were releasing the ball at that time and that there was a coach, Dave Bettencourt, who had watched on television and had corrected an issue with your delivery. Is that true? And what exactly did you change?

A: It wasn't a release scenario, it was — Dave was a teammate of mine in high school and we talked occasionally and he had just mentioned something to me as far as a gathering point, which is just a little bit of a pause at the top of my delivery that he said, "hey, it looks like it kind of rushing through this." And Mike Rourke and I had been working on stuff in between starts for weeks and just couldn't put a finger on it. Mike had really not seen much of me and so didn't really know my mechanics. And once we were able to maybe put a finger on something, I don't know if that was all it or just got lucky or what the story was. But yeah, we finally got it together and kind of went on a pretty good run.

Q: And you had an incredible streak in 26 starts, you had a 1.37 ERA, losing only one, and your changeup was especially effective. Tell us about that pitch and also pitching inside, which seemed to also to be a big part of your effectiveness.

A: I think it's a big part of anybody's effectiveness, pitching inside, part of it. You have to do that. You have to be able to keep hitters off the outside part of the plate, especially somebody like me who kind of lived out there, not only with the fastball but with the changeup. And I was a two-pitch pitcher. I was a fastball-changeup guy to righties and a fastball with slurve to lefties. I

mean, after I left Boston, I'll bet I didn't throw two curveballs to a right-handed hitter the rest of my career. So the changeup became a really big pitch for me. I just got pretty good control of it and really just wasn't afraid to throw it in any situation and in any count. So it made a big difference. It got guys off my fastball a little bit and just kind of gave me another weapon.

Q: You had 10 shutouts during that run. I assumed that the mentality you had was that every time you started a game, you wanted to finish it. It seems as though very unlikely that anyone's going to challenge that anytime soon, given that pitchers do not pitch nine innings. What's the key to pacing yourself over nine innings so that you can pitch a complete game and pitch a shutout?

A: I don't think there's any such thing as pacing. If pitchers pace themselves, I'd be very surprised. And as far as the 10 shutouts and somebody chasing it, there's nothing to chase. It's not a record of any kind, it was just a really good year for me. And I think every pitcher, well, every starting pitcher back then that walked out onto the mound walked out there with the intent of walking off the mound after the ninth inning. It's not the case anymore. The game has changed considerably. Some for the good, some for the not so good. But yeah, that was the mentality back then. If you were pitching good, you were in the game, bottom line. If you weren't pitching good, they took you out. Nowadays, these guys walk off the mound in the fifth or sixth inning, you know, tapping their heart and thanking God that they got through five innings. That wasn't the way the game was run back then. I don't begrudge them anything. If you get away with it, then get away with it. But we didn't. We didn't go out there with the intent of coming off the mound until it was over.

Q: How did you train? In other words, were you doing a lot of weight lifting in order to stay in the game, or was pitching itself what got you through nine innings?

A: Pitching itself is what's got you through. Weight training back in those days, for pitchers was kind of taboo. You know, with the exception of maybe some cuff weights, like light shoulder type exercises and even those came in kind of midway through my career. Pitchers weren't expected to lift weights. It was deemed to be not conducive to the flexibility that pitchers needed. But yeah, for me, it was the pitching aspect of it. You know, if I was out and going seven, eight, nine innings every start, then I maintained my fitness.

Q: One of the more memorable games you had that season (in 1985) was pitching against Dwight Gooden, where you both had nine scoreless innings and after the game, you were particularly praiseworthy of Gooden, saying that you thought he deserved to win the Cy Young that year. Tell us about both that game and Dwight Gooden.

A: You know, that game was one of several games we had with the Mets that were like that. I think I had three or four starts against the Mets just like that one almost. That was the only one against Dwight. I had one later on the year where I threw 10 shutout innings on my second to last start of the year against Ronnie Darling and he threw nine. And we ended up losing the game in the 11th inning. But it was a game. I mean, I didn't do anything different, it was just during that

streak where it seemed like whatever I did was right. And Gooden was a great pitcher. You know? Obviously, he was in the second year of his career at that point. And very much a power pitcher with a big overhand curveball. I've met Doc, but I don't know him personally, but yeah, he was a great talent.

Q: It sounds as though whether you're pitching a big game or any game, you're approaching it the same way and your mental approach really doesn't change and you're just trying to pitch your game.

A: Yeah, I think that's true. I think you come into situations sometimes where you know you're going to be in a tight game and you're more inclined not to maybe try and allow a run. Let a runner score from third base with less than two outs early in the game or something just to get an out. You know you're going to be in a tight game and it kind of makes you bear down a little bit more. But yeah, I mean my approach was pretty much the same all the time. I approached each hitter as an individual hitter for the most part. But I also concentrated on doing what was right for me, not so much what was right for a particular hitter. Just as an example, if a hitter was a good off-speed hitter, it doesn't mean that I didn't throw him a changeup. Today, with all this analytics and sabermetrics stuff, all that stuff shows if Mike Trout is a great off-speed hitter. I don't know if he is or not, then they don't throw him off-speed stuff. But if I'm an off-speed type pitcher and that's my strength, then I still have to do that. I have to make it work and I just have to try and use his tendencies against him in those type of situations.

Q: That 1985 Cardinals team won 101 games. What do you feel were the main reasons that team played so well and had such great success?

A: Well, there's no doubt that team had great success because of its speed and defense. You know, Whitey was a great tactician and put people in positions where they could be successful and gave them the opportunity to succeed. But that team with its speed and with its team defense, like I said, they didn't beat themselves very often. And as pitchers, our jobs were to go out there and throw strikes, make hitters put the ball in play, and give those guys a chance to play in the field. And that's what I tried to do. And that's what I think all of us tried to do and it was a fun team to watch, with the way those guys with their defense and stealing bases. I couldn't even imagine how many times we were winning one to nothing after the first inning and didn't have a hit. You know, just because (Vince) Coleman got walked, stole second, stole third, and scored on a groundball to second base, and that was the nature of our game. It was a very unselfish team. A guy wasn't trying to hit the ball out of the ballpark with Vince on third base and one or no outs. They were just trying to get them in and if that meant hitting a ground ball, giving themselves up and making them out, or hitting a ground ball to second base with the infield back and Vince scores, then that's what they did. And that's what made that team so good. And what makes the game different now is I don't think hitters really give themselves up in those scenarios. They're all worried about their own individual stats and I'm saying that as an outsider, someone that's not in the dugout. That's my impression of the game today.

Q: And with Vince Coleman having 110 stolen bases, only one player on that Cardinals team had as many as twenty home runs. And that was Jack Clark.

A: Right. Yeah. And Tom Herr drove in 110 runs or something like that with less than 10 home runs. You know? So that's the unselfishness that I'm talking about. I can't remember, Tommy hit third maybe in that lineup, I think, behind Ozzie. He might have even hit second, I can't remember exactly what the lineup was. But Tommy's probably got 20 RBIs on ground balls to second base or shortstop because Vince again had stolen second and stolen third or hit a double and stolen third or whatever. And then scored on a ground ball or scored on a sac fly, you know.

Q: At the time, many people made an issue of the Busch Stadium field (the AstroTurf artificial surface), saying it was the kind of thing that changed baseball because you could bounce the ball high on it or bunt down it and so on. And it was just different than playing baseball on grass. What are your feelings about the field and its effect on that team?

A: Well, I think the field definitely had an effect, but it's not like it's the only turf field in the league. Probably half the teams, probably half the fields in the league, were turf back in those days. Maybe not quite half, but a lot of them. Yeah, the field definitely played a role, especially defensively because they gave our infielders a true bounce. But it didn't give our infielders any more of an advantage than it gave the other team's infielders, so I don't think that Busch Stadium has played any role in the success of that team, other than the fact that it was an AstroTurf field. The high bounces as a pitcher, they hurt you just as much as they help you sometimes because you give up a little flare hit to right field or left field, and it's a high fly ball. If it bounces in front of the outfielder, it takes that 15-foot bounce up in the air, and the guy ends up with a double instead of a single. So, you know, all that stuff kind of goes both ways.

Q: And for someone who didn't see him play, what was it like to observe Ozzie Smith in the field?

A: Ozzie was incredible. Ozzie was the was probably the hardest worker on the team. Ozzie was taking ground balls. I don't know how many he took every day, but he took them in all kinds of different scenarios from bunting to in the hole to turning double plays to the in-between chops that you're talking about. He probably took 50 ground balls during batting practice every day. But yeah, there were more than a handful of times where with somebody on first base, if a ground ball was hit back up the middle towards me, I just would get my glove out of the way and say, "OK Ozzie, it's all yours. Go get them." You know, take myself out of the scenario and he was usually in the right place at the right time.

Q: And Willie McGee?

A: But that whole defense was outstanding, between our infield defense with Terry Pendleton, who was probably the best third baseman I ever played with, and Tommy Herr, I'd say the same thing for him at second base and in the outfield with Coleman, (Willie) McGee, and (Andy) Van Slyke. There weren't a whole lot of holes in that defense.

Q: And I was going to say that Willie McGee ran down so many balls in the gaps during that season. I feel as though his defense is underappreciated.

A: Yeah, not just him, like I said, but Vince was the same way. Vince wasn't quite as gifted a defensive player as Willie was, but he was still pretty darn good. And you know, Andy Van Slyke was as good a right fielder as I ever played with at that time because he was still playing right field back in most days with us. You know, before we went over to Pittsburgh. But, you think about those three outfielders out there and you know, as the pitcher, like I said before, "Here it is. Hit it." As long as I keep it in the ballpark, there's a pretty good chance they're going to catch it.

Q: And what do you recall about Vince Coleman's injury before the World Series?

A: Yeah, it was in the playoffs. It was Game Four of the playoffs against the Dodgers. I actually started that game. We had some rain early. And they were putting the tarp on and back in St. Louis in those days, the tarp was automated. It kind of came up from underground and I did not see it actually happen. I was coming out onto the field for batting practice when they were kind of carrying Vince in. So that made a significant impact on us offensively, obviously. We were able to get through the Dodger series, but just weren't able to develop any kind of an offense against the Royals. Losing Vince took a big hole out of our lineup.

Q: Tell us about the 1985 World Series and what you remember about it.

A: I just remember Game Seven and I sucked. That's about the most of what I remember of it. I have a tendency to remember those types of things. Rather than the other ones.

Q: I know in that final game you had pitched twice before. Is there a point, especially after a long season, when you really feel it in your arm?

A: I don't know if that has anything to do with it. I'm not blaming that. I just pitched poorly. Bottom line, I didn't get the job done. I'm not the only one that had gone through a long season. So I'm sure (Royals ace Bret) Saberhagen had a bunch of starts as well.

Q: Now I know the next season in 1986, you started to have shoulder stiffness and you mentioned how your shoulder had given you trouble throughout your career. How were you doing at that point?

A: You know, day-to-day, I think I made most of my starts in 1986 at the end of the year. I think they shut me down towards the end of the year in 1986 for the last two or three weeks. But pitching is a challenge. It's wear and tear on your body and sometimes some guys have more luck, you know, staying healthy than others do. I, unfortunately, had certain bouts of injury throughout my career and I'm just grateful for the starts I was able to make.

Q: You did have shoulder surgery in early 1987 and techniques were not as advanced as they are now. How did you go through that surgery?

A: I just had arthroscopic surgery to clean it up a little bit and I think I made my first start sometime in probably late April or something like that. I can't remember exactly when it was, but that was one of a few surgeries.

Q: And then you had the incident with (Mets infielder) Barry Lyons also early in that season where he was by the dugout and you suffered a broken leg. Tell us about what happened there.

A: Well, he just was chasing the foul ball and came into the dugout and hit me. That's about the extent of it.

Q: I know you've read that if you were not there, he might have gotten hurt himself.

A: Well, I guess that's the reason for trying to help him, right?

Q: I get it. And so you did have some time on the disabled list in 1988, but you also were pitching pretty well at times during that season. And then you were traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers. What was it like joining that team? Because the Dodgers, you know, had quite a collection of great players, too.

A: Yeah, it was a good team. I mean, yeah, the 1988 season for me was a little bit up and down. We struggled in St. Louis to score runs. And we were still playing good defense, still doing all the other little things, but for some reason, with almost the exact same team, we just really had a hard time getting runs across the plate. But going over to the Dodgers was good. It was a fun team to be around. They were a good group of guys. You know, with (Kirk) Gibson and Orel Hershiser, Mike Marshall, you know, a lot of other guys. Mike Scioscia, just good baseball people. And you know, Gibby was the heartbeat of that team. And Hershiser had his historic year, breaking (Don) Drysdale's (consecutive scoreless innings) record. So, it was fun to be part of what ends up being a World Series-winning team. But I didn't really participate that much in it.

Q: Although you did pitch in the World Series and I know you were there for a short period of time, you certainly witnessed the Gibson home run (in Game One). Tell us about what you recall from that?

A: Yeah, if you want to call it that, yeah. Well, I actually been sitting with Gibby in the video room kind of watching the game. I like to watch games in the video room because that gives you an opportunity to kind of see a hitter's approach and how they react to certain pitches and where their weaknesses were. I obviously had not seen the A's prior to that. So I was trying to get a feel for them because I knew I was starting that first game back in Oakland. And then he left and said he's going to go warm up. And it kind of caught me by surprise because (he) can barely walk, let alone go up and hit. But you can never count Kirk Gibson out. He's one of those guys where he just never quits. He's just the ultimate competitor and a great teammate and a great leader on that team. He changed the culture of that Dodger team at that point. And it was, you know, obviously fun to watch.

Q: You mentioned a little about facing the Oakland team. That was a formidable lineup. I know that you struck out Mark McGwire when you were in the World Series. That team was a powerhouse. Were the Dodgers, at that point, intimidated in any way? Or were they confident?

A: I don't think teams get intimidated. Big-league players don't get intimidated. I mean, if they do, they don't belong there. You take a team, you know, two guys like McGwire and (Jose) Canseco. Those big hitters that were in their lineup and (Dave) Henderson was there. They had some pretty good hitters, but we had some pretty good pitchers too. I unfortunately hurt my elbow in the first inning of that game. I was able to kind of battle through an inning and a third of it, but my last pitch on McGwire was a high fastball at about 70 miles an hour, and that was the end of the day for me. But yeah, it was like I said, that Dodger team was "no quit." They took what Gibson taught them, "Don't give up, keep battling," you know, with guys like Mike Scioscia and Mickey Hatcher, who was just another gamer, you know, and it was a fun team to be around. They're a good group. They were a really, really good group of guys, too. There were no big egos left in that locker room.

Q: And you did have some work done on your shoulder. You're back in action by mid-1989 and then you would go on to join the Cardinals again. But you were a different kind of pitcher at that time. You didn't have the same fastball that you did before you were throwing, you know, 80 miles an hour or so. Is this a situation where you really knowing how to pitch made the difference?

A: Yeah, I think it did. My shoulder was really bad at that point. I think I pitched on, like you said, control and a lot of reputation. I think I was a guy that hitters knew wasn't afraid to throw the ball inside, although by the time I got to that point, I was struggling to get the ball inside. But it was still in the back of hitters' minds and I think it was also a factor that I was literally out of hitting speed. You know, I wasn't at a comfortable hitting speed at 80 miles an hour or sometimes less than that. With big-league hitters, they had a difficult time adjusting to that velocity and for some reason, that made me successful. You know, I think I made the comment one time, "I'd have a hard time getting a high school team out right now, but I can get big-league hitters out. And again it was because I was not a comfortable speed to hit at.

Q: Now when you did eventually retire, was it something that had been on your mind for a period of time?

A: I thought about it for a little while, but the game had gotten to a point where it wasn't fun for me anymore because of my physical problems with my shoulder. And I quite frankly had gotten to the point where, you know, when I was able to go out there, I was only able to go out there for like, six innings. And back in those days when we took them out, I was going out there with the intent of trying to go nine. And becoming a six-inning pitcher and putting three innings on the bullpen every time I started. But the majority of it was the fact that, like I said, it wasn't fun because my shoulder hurt all the time and it was time. I had a pretty good year, but it was time.

Q: I know you returned to Massachusetts initially after retiring. What have you done since leaving Major League Baseball as a player?

A: I coached for a little while in the minor leagues and started a family. My kids are all, you know, grown up now and we're living in Florida right now. We've been kind of here and there. We were in Mass. for a long time. And I mean, I grew up there, so it was a good place to be.

Q: Do you still follow Major League Baseball closely?

A: Closely, no. I never did follow it closely. Even as a kid, I didn't follow it closely because, like I said, it wasn't on TV all the time. We were always out at the parks playing, you know whether it's day or night. If it was nighttime, I was out playing basketball on a basketball court somewhere. So I never really watched games. Games weren't really on in my house. My dad wasn't a sports fan. So baseball games weren't on the TV, but when they were on, we spent our time outside the house. Unlike what takes place in today's world with the kids, which is unfortunate, but yeah, that's about it. You know, I coached my kids in baseball and in hockey, while they were growing up, and I'm sure they would have mixed reactions to those experiences. But yeah, it was fun for me.

Q: In terms of modern baseball, even if you don't follow it closely, is there any particular player or a pitcher that you look at and you particularly admire or appreciate?

A: No, I don't think so. I mean, I think you watch, you see certain guys. I mean, I follow the Cardinals every now and then. So a guy like Adam Wainwright or Chris Carpenter ... they were guys that I followed with the Cardinals. You know, a guy like Clayton Kershaw who's just a freak. And, you know guys like that who go out there and perform day in and day out and take the ball when it's handed to them. You know, those are the guys that I kind of admire. I was happy to see Wainwright get his 200th win (in 2023). Yeah, but like I said, I don't follow the game that much. The game's different on the mound. It's a different game.

Q: With all these relievers who are coming in, I imagine that would have been very difficult for you. If you're pitching a good game and they had decided before the game and started that you were only going to be allowed to go five innings, that would have been both deflating and it would have kind of changed the core mission of what a pitcher does.

A: Yeah, definitely would have. I mean, like I said, I grew up in a different era. I grew up in an era where you were out there until you weren't out there. And today's game, like I said before, with the game being run by guys that never played the game, you get to the point of starting a reliever and then bringing the starter in which, you know, just to me is just reinventing a game that's not broken. They got to put their spin on it. You know, if it isn't broke, don't fix it. I just think it's different and you know, and for good or for bad, there's so much money in the game right now that they protect these guys. And they should protect them to a certain point. But you also can't take away the competitiveness that professional athletes should have. And I think they do that to a certain point on the mound, you know, they know they're only going to go five

innings, so, if you know if they've gone six, they've exceeded everybody's expectations. It's a different game, but it is what it is. And I have no doubt that the guys pitching in today's game, given the opportunity to readjust, become longer and deeper into the game type pitchers. But those choices are taken away from them.

Q: You were known as a very intense and competitive player and I wanted to get your assessment of to what extent you feel that is true and if true, does it take away from the intelligence that's also required to be a good pitcher because you had that too?

A: Yeah, I don't know how they're mutually exclusive. I'm definitely a very competitive person. I've always been that way, you know. Like I said, I grew up playing every sport, so and we played every day and we played to win, you know. They didn't give participation trophies back in those days, you know. But I don't see how being competitive could take away from someone that's intelligent, or that's a smart pitcher because certainly guys like Clayton Kershaw or Adam Wainwright. There's certainly competitive people when they're on the mound and especially Wainwright. I don't know Kershaw, but Wainwright certainly is competitive and smart, you know, because he's not a guy throwing 98. He's thinking his way through the game as well, so I don't, you know, I guess I don't really understand the question, but I don't think that.

Q: I guess I mentioned in the way of do people not give enough attention to your intelligence because they focus upon your competitiveness?

A: You could be the most competitive guy in the world and not be successful. I mean, I'm sure there's been plenty of pitchers coming up through the minor leagues that are very competitive, but for whatever reason, weren't able to make the adjustments either in their mechanics or in their approach to get them to the next level. I again, I don't see those things as mutually exclusive and I don't see any reason why anyone would doubt someone's intelligence because they're competitive? I don't know. I don't know.

Q: When you were pitching, what was your mental approach to pitching? And I guess I asked in the sense of were you keeping, let's say notebooks on particular players? Were you reading scouting reports consistently? Or were you in the moment deciding what to throw and how to approach particular hitters?

A: Yeah, I think that I was much more in the moment kind of guy. I did not keep books. I did not do that. I pitched primarily to my strengths. After a little while, you've seen guys so many times that you kind of know what their tendencies are and you understand the situation and you understand what the hitter is trying to do in the situation and you pitch accordingly. But yeah, no, I didn't keep a book. Or we used to get scouting reports that that would come out to the media. I'd read them before the game and the only thing I wanted to know really about a hitter is does he want to hit first pitch and if he gets on base, does he want to run? Those are the only two things I really wanted to know about a hitter. Is he on a good streak? Or is he 0 for his last, you know, 15? You know those are really the things I looked at. We went over teams before every series.

But a lot of what was said in the meetings didn't really even apply to me because I was a little bit different type of pitcher than some of the other guys were.

Q: What moment do you remember most fondly from your career, and how would you like others to remember your career?

A: Oh gosh, I don't know. I mean. Most fondly, I don't know. I really don't. I mean, there were a lot of good moments. There were a lot of bad moments. It's just that again, that's the nature of the game. If you play it long enough, you've had some good moments and you've been beat up a bunch of times, if you play the game long enough. And I don't know that I could put a fondest moment on it, you know. I know, though, my least fond moment would be Game Seven of the 1985 World Series. But beyond that, I don't know, and I don't remember the second part of that question.

Q: Second part was how would you like people to remember your career years from now?

A: As they will. It's not my job or my inclination to worry about what other people think. You know, my job at the time was to get out there and try and get the job done, try and support my teammates, try and give them a chance to win. And so that's what I did. I was a competitor, and I tried my darndest to give our team a chance to win. I mean, I went out there and I tell people all the time I went out with the attitude of "It's going to be a fast game for me, one way or the other. You're going to get my best effort." Every time I go out there, sometimes it's not going to be very good, but it's always going to be my best effort and I think that was my approach to the game. Just do what you do and just never — and I used to say it to my kids — you don't ever want to walk off the field or off the rink or off the court or whatever it was thinking, "Geez, if I'd only given a little bit better effort, maybe the results would have been different." You don't want that to happen. You always want to know that whatever you did on that particular day was your best effort and so long as that is the case, then we shouldn't have any reason to look back on it.

Q: Well, John Tudor, we are grateful for you taking time today to speak with us for our SABR oral history.