

## Bob Shaw

*Interview conducted by Mark Liptak in 2006.  
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*The 2005 season for the Chicago White Sox organization, players, coaches and fans will long be remembered in the annals of this charter American League franchise. Winning the World Series and roaring through the playoffs in a way more associated with such historic teams as the 1927 New York Yankees and the 1975 Cincinnati Reds tends to do that.*

*But the 2005 season also did one other thing. The season created new heroes and broke the final ties to the 1959 White Sox team. That was the last White Sox team to get to the World Series and over the decades, until 2005, the names of players like Luis Aparicio, Jim Landis, Billy Pierce, Early Wynn, and Nellie Fox took on mythic proportions. If you talk to the surviving members of that team they'll tell you to a man, that's a good thing. That means that the Sox finally reached the "Promised Land" and that everyone connected with the team can now move forward into a better future.*

*One of the other brilliant moves by Brooks Boyer and his staff was to give due respect to that team, to bridge the years back to that time period and allow today's White Sox fans to see in person as many of those surviving players as possible through the June "Turn Back the Clock" weekend and then before Game 1 of the World Series to have Aparicio and his teammates take the mound for the ceremonial first pitch. It made for great theater.*

*One of those players who was around for both the 1959 season and for the historic 2005 campaign was pitcher Bob Shaw. The big right-hander out of Long Island, New York, was second in the American League that year with 18 wins. He tossed over 230 innings of work, had three shutouts, three saves, and his ERA was 2.69. In the World Series he went 1-1 with a 2.57 ERA and kept the Sox alive by working the majority of the innings in the classic Game 5 won 1-0 over Sandy Koufax in the L.A. Coliseum. Simply put, without Shaw grabbing the second slot in the starting rotation and pitching very well, the Sox do not win the pennant.*

*Today, Bob and his wife reside in Florida and far from taking it totally easy; Shaw remains in the land development business. He was in his office when he spoke about 1959 and 2005, about having to block out the pressure and perform on baseball's biggest stage and about manager Al Lopez and pitching coach Ray Berres, the men who helped turn his career around.*

**ML:** Bob, you came up with the Tigers and appeared in 18 games in 1957 and 1958 when you were traded to the White Sox. (Author's Note: Shaw and Ray Boone were dealt to the Sox on June 15, 1958 for Tito Francona and Bill Fischer.) Why don't we start with the trade and the implications of it. Were you surprised the Tigers gave up on you so quickly?

**BS:** "The year before I had pitched in Cuba and was the MVP. In 1958 the Tigers brought Billy Martin in to play shortstop and had Lou Skizas at third base ... they were a bad defensive club. The manager was Jack Tighe, who was a rookie himself although he managed for a number of years in the minor leagues. I had a clause in my contract that if I was on the roster by June 15 I'd get a \$1,000 bonus. I wasn't being used much and a few days before the 15th I was called in and Jack told me I was going to be sent back to the minor leagues."

“So I thought about it and asked if I could speak with John McHale, the club’s G.M. I asked if I was going to get the bonus and was told no. I asked if there were any guarantees that I’d be brought back up to the Tigers and was told no. I asked if instead of going back to the minors, I could go to Cuba and pitch because at least there I’d make some money and was told no. So after thinking it over I left the club and went back to my parents’ house on Long Island. It’s obvious that I didn’t fit into Detroit’s plans.”

**ML:** How did you find out about the deal and what was your reaction going to the Sox?

**BS:** “I was actually on the second floor of my parents’ house taking a shower when my mom called out that I had been traded to the White Sox. I was very happy that I had been traded, the Sox were a good organization and they had a chance to win”

**ML:** The rest of the 1958 season saw you get into 29 games. You lowered your ERA from the time spent in Detroit and you had four wins and a save. What was it that changed when you came to the White Sox? And how much did brilliant pitching coach Ray Berres have to do with it?

**BS:** “He and Al Lopez had a lot to do with it. They deserve credit for helping to turn things around for me. Those two were the best coaches that I ever met.”

“I had been throwing from different arm slots, sometimes overhand, sometimes three-quarters once in a while sidearm. They immediately had me go to one arm position. They also made some mechanical adjustments in my delivery, things like getting my hand out of my glove quicker, repositioning my hands a little bit, keeping my weight back. They were simple steps but they made a tremendous difference for me. I worked hard and thanks to their help I was able to put it all together.”

“As far as Ray Berres, you ask any Sox pitcher from those days, guys like Dick Donovan, Joe Horlen, Gary Peters and they’ll all tell you how good he was and how he helped their careers.”

*(Author’s Note: I can verify Bob’s comments as both Joe and Gary discussed the influence Berres had on them in their interviews that I did with them.)*

**ML:** Bob, what kind of a pitcher were you and when you were with the White Sox what pitches did you throw?

**BS:** “I was a sinker/slider type pitcher. I also threw a change-up and a curve but the sinker/slider were the main pitches for me. My slider never broke sharply; it was more of a ‘slurve’. My sinker was very good though, it was a two-seam fastball that I’d twist my wrist a little and it would drop downwards.”

“It also helped that the team I was playing with was tremendous defensively. You had guys like Aparicio, Fox, and Jim Landis that would get to a lot of balls, so by my keeping the ball down in the strike zone I’d get a lot of outs.”

**ML:** When the 1959 season began you were in the bullpen. You allowed three earned runs in 14 games covering 24.1 innings when you got a chance to start in Boston on May 13. What caused you to get switched? I had read that part of it was that Ray Boone, who came over from Detroit in the trade with you, was struggling.

**BS:** “I don’t know if that was the case or not. All I remember is Ray Berres came up to me and said, ‘You’re starting in Boston.’ That’s all; they didn’t make a big deal out of it.”

“That’s one of the things that I admired Lopez and Berres for. They brought me along slowly by letting me work in the bullpen. And they pitched me against teams that they thought I could

handle until I got acclimated. That's something I don't understand about teams today. They'll take a kid and throw him in against the best hitting clubs in the league instead of gradually working him in against some of the easier ones."

**ML:** History records, Bob, that in that game you tossed a five-hit shutout, winning 4-0. For the rest of the year you were in the rotation and responded with a terrific season, going 18-6 with a 2.59 ERA along with three saves. What changed in you as a pitcher? Was it simply knowing the league and finally having confidence in your stuff?

**BS:** "A big part of the change as I mentioned earlier, was the work that was done to my mechanics. Pitching out of one arm slot gave me a consistency that I didn't have before. Another thing was the stuff I picked up from my roommate Early Wynn. Early wouldn't say much to me unless we were out. After he had a few pops he liked to talk. One of the things he preached to me was to never give in to a hitter, that depending on a situation, it may be better to walk a guy rather than throw one right down the middle and have him drive it into the gap or out of the park."

"Another thing he told me, something I had never thought of before, was to never use a rosin bag on your hands on the mound. Early said that what happens is that when you start to sweat with that rosin on them, they get slick and you can't control the baseball anymore. He said to simply wipe your hands on your pants. I never thought of it that way but I listened to him and never used the bag again and he was right. You learn little things like that and it makes you a better player."

**ML:** Bob, that season you tossed some gems in some big games but no game perhaps was bigger than on the night of August 28 in Cleveland, the start of a huge four game set. The Sox started the night only a game and a half up on the Tribe. When the evening was over you went the distance getting a 7-3 win with five strikeouts. Over *seventy thousand* fans were in Municipal Stadium that night and it was the game that started what turned out to be the decisive sweep. Talk to me about that night ... what you remember and what your emotions were like.

*(Author's Note: Other big games thrown by Shaw that season included a 2-1 win in New York on July 18, a 5-0 shut out over the Yankees in Chicago on August 23 and a 1-0 win over Jim Bunning and the Tigers in Chicago on September 18 which cut the Sox "magic number" to two. Also regarding that Cleveland game itself, the key moment of the night was in the 7th inning when catcher Sherm Lollar hit a blast back into left field. Former Sox outfielder "Minnie" Minoso jumped and had the ball in his glove, when he hit the fence and the ball dropped over the wall for a three run home run and a 6-3 Sox lead.)*

**BS:** "I remember a few things from that night. In the game they walked me (in the third inning) and when I was standing on first base wondering why they walked me, I noticed that they had taken the dirt out of the infield and put in sand. They did it to slow down guys like Aparicio, Fox and Landis. The other thing I noticed was that they let the grass get higher in the infield and that the area around home plate was damp and moist. They watered the field heavily to again make it harder on our guys to run."

"The other thing was the Minoso play. I may be wrong but I think the ball Sherm hit was more of a regular fly ball. Minnie went back to the fence, had it in his glove, and it just popped out and over the fence. They was a very big play for us because, until that time, it was a close game."

**ML:** What was it about that 1959 Sox team that made it so special?

**BS:** “You have to remember that I played on two 10th-place teams when I was with Kansas City and the Mets so I’ve personally seen the difference between winning and losing. That Sox club had a nice mixture of good young players and veterans. It was a good combination. Everyone on that team had a good attitude and we played a lot of close games. Usually we’d win them and when that happened it just instilled more confidence that when we got in tight games we’d find a way to win them too.”

**ML:** One of the things I’ve been told Bob by some of your teammates about that club was how close the guys were. You genuinely seemed to like each other and spent a lot of off time going out to eat or going out on the town. True?

**BS:** “Oh yes. Everyone got along with each other. We’d go out a lot, or play cards in the clubhouse all the time. Seriously I can’t remember any personality clashes at all, no one ever popped off.”

“The other nice thing was that we had so many different characters on that club. Sammy Esposito, our infielder, was a class guy and a real sharp dresser. Jim Rivera was a total gentleman, always polite, but he’d always be doing stuff like dancing around the clubhouse. Something was always going on with him, it kept everybody loose but I’ll tell you Jim could play, I wouldn’t want to mess with him especially with a game on the line.”

**ML:** The Sox stayed ahead as the days came off the schedule. Finally it was September 22, 1959 again in Cleveland. The Sox, with a win, clinch the pennant. In the 6th inning, you relieved Early Wynn with the Sox up 4-1 and over the next 2.2 innings you kept Cleveland in check. You ran into trouble in the 9th inning and Gerry Staley came in with the bases loaded, one out, facing the dangerous Vic Power. You’re in the dugout, two outs away from the pennant. Take us through what you were feeling and what was going on, on the bench.

**BS:** “I remember that as it happened everyone in the dugout was calm, nobody was saying much.

“I was sitting there thinking, ‘Well, I guess I got us in a little bit of trouble.’ But I was trying to stay positive. That was one of the things about that team, we all pulled for each other and we knew that if one of us ran into trouble usually someone else would be there to pick us up. I was hoping that Gerry could get a ground ball and that’s what happened. *(Author’s Note: Staley induced Power to hit into a pennant-clinching double play from Aparicio to Ted Kluszewski.)* Right after that I remember jumping up off the bench and running out on the field. I didn’t hit my head in the dugout, but it was close! (laughing)”

**ML:** Tell us about the plane ride back to Chicago and the celebration at Midway Airport.

*(Author’s Note: The front page of the Chicago Sun-Times for September 23, 1959 had the sub-headline that 125,000 fans were at the airport to greet the team in the early morning hours.)*

**BS:** “We used to have this little ritual that whenever we touched down after another flight, we’d all clap, congratulating the pilot. That night the clapping was a little longer and a little louder.”

“I think if you talk to the players from my day you’ll find that, by and large, we were pretty humble, we appreciated playing and to do something like this, to win the pennant, that was pretty humbling itself. Not to say we weren’t excited! Then to step out the door of the plane and to see that multitude of people, at that time of the morning, that’s something that you never forget.”

**ML:** When the World Series came to pass the Sox destroyed Roger Craig and the Dodgers 11-0 in Game 1. Manager Al Lopez pegged you to start Game 2 versus Johnny Podres. The decision

was not without some controversy. Billy Pierce was the fan favorite and many expected him to get the start. Tell us about the decision and how it all came about.

**BS:** “To be honest, I don’t remember Al ever talking to me about it. I remember that Ray Berres came up to me to tell me about it. Like when I made that start in Boston there wasn’t a big deal made about it. I don’t want this to sound arrogant, but to me, I wasn’t surprised. I had a good season. I know that Billy was disappointed, he had many great seasons for the Sox.”

**ML:** As far as the game itself you took a 2-1 lead into the 7th when you were bitten by the long ball. Chuck Essegian, a pinch hitter, homered, then after a walk, Charlie Neal reached the seats. *(Author’s Note: That blast gave outfielder Al Smith a ‘beer bath’ when a fan reaching for the ball knocked over his beer that was resting on the top of the outfield wall. The beer fell right on Smith’s upturned face. It turned out to be one of the most famous baseball photographs of the 1950s.)* That cost you and the Sox the game, as the Dodgers won 4-3 to even the series. What happened to you that inning?

**BS:** “I faced Charlie later many times when I was in the National League and I never had a problem getting him out. I don’t want this to sound like an excuse, but I think the scouting report was wrong. We were told to pitch him away and he just hit everything we threw. When I faced him in the National League, I consistently got him out by throwing the ball in on his fists ... by jamming him. To this day, after all these years, that still bothers me that I think we got the report wrong on him.”

**ML:** The series shifted to the L.A. Coliseum with the famed “Chinese Wall” in left field only 250 feet away. The Sox played tight and dropped the next two games. Suddenly it’s October 6, 1959, and it’s your turn. If the Sox lose, the series is over. First off, Bob, and I guess this is what separates the amateurs from the pros, how in the world do you block out the pressure, block out the fact that 92,000 fans are in the stands and do your job?

**BS:** “Boy, I don’t know the answer to that question. I had pitched in pressure situations before. In Cuba I won the Caribbean World Series by throwing a shutout, we won 2-0. I think part of it may have come from my mom and dad. My dad was one of the finest athletes in the entire New York area. He held all the swimming records; for example, at that time and my mom was the type that she’d never give up on anything. They passed that work ethic down to me, that you always bust your ass and never give up.”

“So for me I went out and really pushed myself to be in the best physical condition that I could be. I did it because I felt it would help my confidence, that it would give me more of a better mental edge. ‘I know I’m in better shape than you and I know that I’m going to win,’ that kind of stuff. So I ran a lot, did a lot of exercises and calisthenics.”

“You just learn to concentrate, to focus on each hitter and don’t worry about the other stuff. You think positive ... you can’t be scared. That’s what I did in that game. Some guys never get it, but I think it is learnable, to be able to perform under pressure.”

**ML:** You pitched brilliantly and had a 1-0 lead with two outs in the 7th inning when you ran into trouble, big trouble. L.A. had men on second and third when Charlie Neal hammered a pitch deep into the gap in right center field. “Jungle” Jim Rivera who was just inserted into the game a few pitches before, tracked it down and made an over the shoulder catch, one of the greatest in series history to save the day. You’re standing there on the mound, watching all this. Take us through the pitch to Rivera’s catch.

**BS:** “I remember that just a few pitches before Gil Hodges hit a ball out that just curved foul, literally by about an inch or two. When Neal hit that pitch, a fastball, I thought it was in the gap. I didn’t expect Jim to be able to make that catch and I thought we were going to be down 2-1.”

“That was one of the greatest catches ever because of the background. In those days everyone wore a white shirt and it was a day game. I don’t know how Jim was able to pick that ball out and make the catch but I’m glad he did.”

“That one of the things that I take with me to this day. But for an inch or two ... on Hodges’ ball and on Rivera’s catch, I’d be known as a ‘loser.’ A guy who lost two games in the World Series. Instead, fans remember me for beating Sandy Koufax and winning a 1-0 World Series game.”

**ML:** So the Sox hang on to win the game sending it back to Chicago where the Dodgers wrapped things up. What’s it like in the locker room of the team that loses the World Series?

**BS:** “It’s very, very quiet ... almost like being in a church. There’s not much you can say except you give credit to the Dodgers.”

**ML:** That offseason the White Sox would trade off the cream of the minor-league system, guys like Earl Battey, Johnny Callison, Johnny Romano, Norm Cash, and Don Mincher (Author’s Note: *all* future All-Stars!) in an effort to get more power. I’ve heard from some of your teammates that basically the attitude was ‘What the hell is going on?’ because you guys personally knew how good those players were becoming. What was your reaction to the deals?

**BS:** “It was a terrible mistake. Bill Veeck had installed the exploding scoreboard and he wanted more home runs.

*(Author’s Note: Perhaps one of the greatest ‘what if’ connected with the White Sox franchise is how might their history had been different had they kept even one of the players they traded away, especially in 1964 when they lost the pennant by a single game or 1967 when they finished three out.)*

**ML:** In 1960 the Sox were in the race, and they certainly hit a lot better than the 1959 team but the pitching wasn’t the same. You, for example, fell to 14-14 with an ERA of 4.06. What happened that year?

**BS:** “We were not the same team. Our defense wasn’t the same. Roy Sievers and Minnie Minoso just weren’t the same defensively for us. Minnie was a great player for the Sox for many years but his career was starting to go to the downside. *(Author’s Note: The Sox would slump from 94 wins in 1959 to 87 in 1960.)*

**ML:** Let me take you back to one bizarre game that year. A game that, in the words of Ted Kluszewski, took the ‘heart’ right out of the team. Maybe you remember something about it, perhaps not, but I wanted to ask you anyway. At the start of play on August 28, 1960, the Sox were only 2½ games out of first place. They were in Baltimore facing Milt Pappas. New York had lost the first of a twin-bill with Detroit and the Sox had a chance to gain ground but were losing 3-1 in the 8th inning. Kluszewski came up as a pinch hitter with two on and blasted what appeared to be a three-run home run. However, it turned out that umpire Ed Hurley supposedly called time right before the pitch. No one saw Hurley call time and he admitted to the newspapers the next day that he wished he didn’t call it. A violent argument took place with Nellie Fox getting thrown out for language and Al Lopez playing the game under protest. Did the recap bring back any memories of that Sunday afternoon?

**BS:** “I remember that no one saw any umpire give a timeout signal. I think he said that a ball got loose in the bullpen or something like that. It was startling. Ted was looking the field over following his home run and then it wasn’t a home run. We were sitting there in the dugout shocked; it took the wind right out of our sails. *(Author’s Note: The Sox lost the game 3-1 and fall three games out of first place.)*

**ML:** By 1961, Bob, I guess someone in the organization thought you needed a change of scenery because you were shipped to Kansas City as part of an eight player deal on June 10. Was that someone Al Lopez? Because I had heard that there were times when you two just didn’t seem to get along.

*(Author’s Note: Shaw would revitalize his career with Milwaukee in 1962, going 15-9 with an All-Star appearance. He’d follow that in 1963 with 13 saves and an ERA of 2.66, then with San Francisco in 1965, he went 16-9 with an ERA of 2.64. The key player the Sox got back in the trade was pitcher Ray Herbert who would win 20 games in 1962.)*

**BS:** “I don’t buy that. Al fined me one time \$500 for missing curfew. We talked and he explained that even though Early (Wynn) was my roommate I was a young guy and needed to take care of myself. I paid it and told Al he was absolutely correct. I never had a problem with Al.”

“Part of the reason people think I didn’t get along with Al was because Jim Bouton made a few references to me in his book *Ball Four*. In that book Bouton said that I kept my hat off all the time so the girls could get a look at me and he also had a quote supposedly attributed to Al, where he was remarking about me being with a different girl every night. Well, the only time that I kept my hat off was when I was running in the outfield. The dirt and sweat caused my forehead to break out so I kept it off while I was running, then put it back on when I towed off and was in the dugout.”

“As far as me being with a different girl every night, I was young and I went out with girls but by the time that comment was supposedly made, I had a steady girlfriend. She was a stewardess for TWA Airlines. I think what happened was that a good friend of Al’s saw me out with a girl in Spanish Park, Washington, D.C. one time and talked to Al about it.”

**ML:** 2005 was a magical season for the Sox as they got back to the World Series and swept Houston. It was also a time when the 1959 club got a lot of media attention as well. The Sox had the “Turn Back the Clock” weekend in June honoring the '59 team for example. How did you like being back in the spotlight again?

**BS:** “It was extremely ego-boosting. I’m 72 years old ... that 1959 World Series was 46 years ago ... that’s a long time. It was so long ago that sometimes you wonder to yourself, ‘Did I really do that?’ I was flabbergasted at the attention. I’d get phone calls and interview requests from everywhere ... New York, Los Angeles ... it was the damndest thing that I ever went through. And that’s not even counting the requests from the Chicago media.”

**ML:** Another thing the Sox did was before Game 1 of the World Series they had a number of the 1959 club on the field around Luis Aparicio as he threw out the first pitch. What was that experience like for you and your teammates?

**BS:** “It was a humbling, exhilarating feeling. One thing I immediately noticed and this I remember clearly, was how brighter the lights were on the field then back when I played. The

other thing was that my wife was on the field taking pictures for this. It's a whole different perspective down there and it was nice that my wife was able to experience that feeling."

**ML:** Watching a game on TV or listening to it on the radio doesn't quite capture the feeling of what it was like to actually be on the field and then at the park watching the game. Talk to me about the atmosphere that night, the crowd reaction and so forth.

**BS:** "I had spent some time on the field just looking around ... I went down the foul lines signing some autographs and shaking some hands. The reaction of the crowd was incredible. I know all of us from the 1959 team were pulling for the players and the organization to win it. That's why you play the game, that's what this is all about."

**ML:** Bob, I know you were only with the White Sox for about three years but it seems that you are most identified with them even though you played for six other teams. Can you sum up your time in Chicago for me?

**BS:** "I loved the town. In fact I even spent the offseasons in Chicago selling season tickets and doing speaking engagements. I made some money but more importantly I made contacts. It was through them that I got a better understanding of the business world and those are things that I've used over the years, even today."






  
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"MY PROUDEST MOMENT AS A CHICAGO WHITE SOX"

3/6/84

*To the People of Chicago:*  
 My "proudest moment" with the Chicago White Sox was when we won the pennant in Cleveland, also beating Sandy Kousser in the 5th game of the '54 World Series in the Los Angeles Coliseum 1-0, which was the largest crowd to ever see a World Series game - 94,507.

Best Regards,  
 Bob Shaw  
 3-8-84

