

Ed Lomasney interview, October 18, 2001 [Steve's father]

By Bill Nowlin

It's quite exciting. He's given us a lot of thrills over the years, right through high school.

Poor kid, unfortunately, the last few years he's had some bad luck.

I wish they had moved him up a little sooner, but I guess they know what they're doing as far as Pawtucket is concerned. I think he showed he could hit up there, too.

I grew up in Peabody. Me and my wife, the whole family has lived here all my lives. I was always interested in baseball and football growing up, about equally. Every Red Sox game, my grandfather and father always had the radio right on the table, listening to the Red Sox games. I've watched quite a few Red Sox games in my time. I used to go to Fenway Park a lot as a kid.

[Who signed Steve?] Buzz Bowers, he's sort of semi-retired. It was his senior year, 1995. We basically lost him at 17 years, as a young graduate of high school. That's when the Red Sox picked him up. He also had a full scholarship to Boston College to play football, and the Red Sox bought that out. They put his college money into a Major League scholarship fund, to use whenever he's done. Hopefully some day he uses it, but you know these guys, once they start up there making the money....

Hopefully this will be a good year for him. He's down there in Fort Myers working out every day. His vision's coming back. They fly him up here to Mass Eye & Ear every month to have it checked out. Things are going good. We just hope for the best.

[What do you think about the Yankees?] If it wasn't for this tragedy [WTC bombing 9-11-2001] my feeling would be I just don't want them to win. I have mixed feelings now. I wasn't quite as upset last night when they won [first game of ALCS vs. Seattle] as I would have been. [Will root for Yankees vs. Braves, if it comes to that.] I was rooting for Oakland. I'll be 56 in March. If Steve somehow ends up in the Yankees organization, I guess I'd have to put a different hat on. I guess.

Steve would love to play baseball in the majors in Boston. He's such a knowledgeable ballplayer. He's a very intelligent boy as far as the game is concerned, and I think they recognize that, too. Hopefully, even beyond his playing days, he stays involved with baseball in some capacity. Maybe coaching or whatever. I think that's his dream right now, to be a long time Boston Red Sox employee.

A lot is said about Dan Duquette, but I have to stay with him because he's stayed with my son all these years. I think Steve and maybe Hillenbrand are the only ones left. Duquette should be a little more personable, but what can you do? That's his personality, I guess.

He broke a toe and then last year the eye injury occurred at Pawtucket, prior to a game. He wasn't even scheduled to catch that night, but as the manager said he likes to stay active so he was practicing in the infield. They had the nets up and apparently Lofton - was it? - was up at batting practice and he hit a ball to Steve who fielded it and flipped to the second baseman and as he bent over another ball came right at him. His head was beyond the net and a line drive got him right in the eye. Fortunately he had Oakley glasses on and they didn't even shatter, believe it or not. He had 19 stitches. There was no retinal damage. The orbital bone, I think, was cracked.

The minute I got the call that night I thought of Tony Conigliaro. His girlfriend called. They did a great job at Pawtucket stitching him up where you really won't even see a scar. They drove him by ambulance with his girlfriend and the trainer - Chris Correnti - to Mass Eye and Ear, and Joyce and I met him there about 11:30 that night. They came in and he still had his Pawtucket uniform on - on a stretcher - and boy, he looked like he'd been through ten rounds with Muhammad Ali. From there, they did all the tests and so forth. They pretty much could tell there wasn't any damage but they had to be sure when the swelling to go down and some of the blood dried up.

He's feeling better. There was some blurring at first, but that's going away right now. He's starting to hit live pitching right now. Things are starting to go pretty good.

The game he was in was in Baltimore. I saw it on TV. What a thrill that was. I think he caught about 7 innings. He threw out two runners, but he struck out twice. He looked real good defensively. Of course, he's my son but I don't think there's anybody better than him right now. Well, maybe a few, but I think defensively and his leadership in calling a game and all the things he does, his bat just needs to come a little more consistently. He's got a good knowledge of the game.

One of the great feelings I had was a year or two ago when he was in Trenton. At the end of the season in Double A, they take a vote on different players. Not just your team but all the players you played against during the season. They have things like who would you like to have up at bat in critical situations, who would you like to have out in the field defensively in the ninth inning, those types of things. One of the questions was Who would you like to have in your clubhouse, basically as a leader, and Steve was #1. A lot of people like him. His teammates and other people. He's a straightforward kid and doesn't take any crap. He just does his job. Hopefully, he's there.

interview with Steve Lomasney, October 19, 2001

As far back as I can remember, I was just going and playing ball when I was down at the schoolyard. Starting off in T ball. I've always been involved in it. As early as you can, I think.

I have an older brother, Ed. He played sports growing up. I have an older sister, and a lot of cousins in Peabody that all played sports. It's all part of the family. We just loved playing sports. My brother's 28 and I'm 24. Right now, he works in debt collection. He played college lacrosse. He was a good lacrosse player in high school. My father worked for John Hancock Insurance for years. He's retired now. He got early retirement.

I played Little League. I played Babe Ruth. I played a little Legion ball and then I got into the Junior Olympics. I did a lot of traveling, playing with the New England Mariners. It was just something I loved to do. It never seemed like a job. It was always fun.

When I started Little League, that's when I became a catcher, and from Little League on I caught always. I was ten. When I got up to the 10-11-12 range on the diamond, that's when they turned me into the catcher.

[It's not the most popular position.] No, not at all. I always played well. It was fun for me. We had some pretty good teams I remember growing up. I always played well. I think it was more of me being an athlete, growing up, because I played football and basketball as well. It was seasonal, and I never really thought it would turn into a career. Being a younger kid and a decent athlete, it helped me a lot.

I think it was my junior year the scouts first noticed me. We had Kevin McGlinchy, who's with the Atlanta Braves right now. He was in the Greater Boston League and he was highly touted as one of the top pitchers in the country. And Mike Spinelli. Kevin McGlinchy was from Malden and Mike Spinelli was from Revere, and there were always scouts at their games. It just so happened that they noticed me catching. I was a decent-sized kid and could run well, had some power, had a good arm.

They started noticing me and then by my senior year, there were always scouts at the games watching me play. They were checking out the other guys and then they noticed me. Defensively. That was what definitely got me into professional baseball. I had a strong arm. One of the games we were playing against the Revere team - Mike Spinelli was the pitcher - I threw out three or four guys. It was a good game for me.

In between innings, when you throw down to second base, the scouts would ask me to do it as quick as I could so they could get times on me. That type of stuff. It was definitely the defensive.

I had a conversation with the Dodgers. Obviously the Red Sox. A lot of teams. Pretty much every team came around one time.

I got drafted by the Red Sox. I graduated in '95. I got drafted in '95. The draft was June 1. I was in the fifth round. Buzz Bowers signed me. I received a phone call. We were still playing our high school season. Draft day was there, and my coach said, "You can go ahead home and wait for the phone call." The Red Sox called me and told me I got drafted. My family was there. I told my family. It was a big day for us. I went up to the baseball field and told the coach and the team and then started practicing.

[Did you have any idea the Red Sox were going after you?] Honestly I didn't know what to expect. No one in my family...we'd never dealt with that before. At the time, I'd signed a letter of intent to play football at Boston College. [Steve was offered a full four year football scholarship.] With that, I couldn't have an agent, because then I'd be considered a professional and that would nullify my scholarship. So my family and I had to do it all on our own when the phone calls were coming. That was a big deal, too. A lot of the teams didn't think they were going to draft me because they thought, even if they drafted me, I was going to play college football.

The first pick that year was Andy Yount. He got hurt and never really panned out. They had two first round picks that year. The other was Corey Jenkins. Second round pick was Jose Almeida. Third was Jay Yennaco from New Hampshire. Mike Spinelli was the fourth round pick and then there was me.

[Were you a Red Sox fan as a kid?] Oh, absolutely. Always. I went into as many games as I could. I tried to get to Opening Day every year. That was at the point where it was just before our baseball season started. You could go in there and see Opening Day. I remember me and my friends going in there and getting up in the bleachers. It was fun. [went in about 4 or 5 times a season]

[After you got drafted, you went back out there and played that very day?] Yeah. Went out to practice and we had a couple more games left. We had some playoff games that year. We ended up losing in the first or second round. After that it was a matter of getting me signed and getting me down to Florida, playing.

It took a little while [to get signed.] It was less than a month. I got down here in time to play rookie ball. It was important to me to sign in '95, and not hold out all the way. I had to let B. C. know. I had to make a decision before practices started to get ready for the fall football season. I

still couldn't have an agent. Not until after I signed. Wayne Britton, who is the head of scouting, basically took over from there [from Buzz Bowers, the Sox scout, in the process of signing Steve.]

I went to Ft. Myers, Florida - came down here and played in - not many, it might have been twenty or thirty games at Ft. Myers in the rookie league. From there, I went to the instructional league in '95. It's all in Ft. Myers.

The following year was my first spring training and then I went to the New York-Penn League. The Lowell Spinners. That was before they had the big stadium, though. It was real close to home. I played there, finished up the year there. Then I went to another instructional league, then another spring training. I went to the Midwest league and played in Battle Creek, Michigan, for the Battle Cats in '97.

From there I went to play winter ball in Hawaii. '98 was in the Florida State League, playing in Sarasota. In '99 I started back in Sarasota for a month or two, and then went up to Double A, Trenton. From Trenton, I was called up to the big leagues in '99.

I had 21 days in the big leagues. Going out there, taking the batting practice and that type of stuff. Getting the pitchers ready in the bullpen.

It was a great situation. The team was winning. It was a tight ball game, it was nothing - nothing actually. They were giving the starters a break, and in the fifth inning they called down the bullpen and said, "Get ready. You're going to go in the game." It was just unbelievable. It wasn't nervousness. It was anxiety, anxiousness. I had assumed I was going to play. I knew I was going to get in a game. Jimmy [Williams] kept telling me, "You're going to get in there. You're going to get in there." But they had their own agenda, getting ready for the playoffs. Totally understandable. So I knew at one point the opportunity was going to be there. [When it got down to October 2, I began to wonder] a little bit. I felt like I was kind of taking up space there for a while. But I got my opportunity.

Unfortunately, offensively, I didn't do as well as I wanted to. Defensively, I threw out a couple of guys. Jason Varitek had started the game. They brought in Wakefield in the 10th to close the game and Hatteberg came in. Not that I don't think I could have done it, but I had never caught him - well, I had in spring training, but the whole year, and just to go in there and catch it [the knuckleball] - plus we were leading at the time 1-0 in the 10th inning. They didn't want to take any chances so they brought him in to close the game.

[that was the follow-up to the time Al Reyes hit Nomar in the wrist, which he is still suffering from] The two series we played the Orioles, we cleared benches both series.

It was an experience. I brought in Brian Rose. Me and Brian came in together. We came in the game together. Then I think it went Derek Lowe, then Rod Beck, then Tom Gordon. Those were all the guys I caught. They just brought them in one inning after the other - an inning, an inning, an inning. It was a good game. The Orioles pitchers were pitching a great game. I think they had a no-hitter going into the 7th or 8th inning, a combined no-hitter between two pitchers.

I struck out both times. I struck out my first at bat; I chased a 3-2 count. I was just so over-anxious. He threw a fastball. It was a kid I had faced in the minors before. B. J. Ryan. [Ryan had debuted in late July, 1999.] I chased a fast ball that was out of the zone. Then I got to another 3-2 count and I thought the pitch was a ball, and he rung me up on it. I thought I had good at bats. The outcomes weren't good, but it wasn't like I got up there and struck out on three pitches. I fouled off a couple of balls. They were decent at bats.

I threw out Jerry Hairston. Hairston Junior. And Eugene Kingsale.

They sent me out to the Arizona Fall League. I actually left the next day. I flew home, packed my stuff and flew out to the Arizona Fall League. No, didn't get a chance to see a single playoff game. I was happy to be playing. Arizona's a good league. There's a lot of talent there. Eighty percent of the players who play in the Fall League are supposed to make it to the big leagues. It was a place where I wanted to be. I would have much rather been up there for the playoffs,, don't get me wrong. They made a great run at it, but I was much better off. I was out there playing, getting better. That league ends just before Thanksgiving. I came home and then just got ready for spring training.

It's been tough with injuries the last couple of years. I started off kind of slow in 2000. I was in Double A Trenton. All of a sudden I turned it on, but then just after the All-Star break I tore up my hamstring pretty bad. Tore my hamstring, a high hamstring, up towards the butt area. The thick of the muscle. I was sent down to Fort Myers. Basically I wasn't even able to walk for two or three weeks. I had to come back from that. I came back and was actually rehabbing it in Fort Myers, and it was one of my last games I was playing before I went back up, and I was playing in a rookie ball game and I got run over at the plate - in a rookie league ball game - and it blew out my groin. A groin pull. It was on the same leg. That kind of ended my season right there.

This year, things were going really good. I started back at Trenton. Put up some good numbers there. Catching, probably the best I've caught defensively. Throwing out, I think, close to 50% of the runners. I was up there. Then I went up to Triple A. I got up to Pawtucket late June. I forget exactly what date. Hitting .300 at Triple A, continuing to do well. I was there a little over a month, getting towards the end of the season. Then during batting practice, I thought I was standing behind the screen out by second base and somebody hit a line drive and hit me right in the face. August 17. I was helping the shortstops. They were practicing double plays and I was just taking feeds at second. I had the screen in front of me, and this is something I've done every day of my career. As a catcher, you don't want to get in their way, in the outfield and that type of stuff. So you help any way you can. Take throws at first, whatever. It just so happened that a throw from the shortstop pulled me away from the bag at the same time a line drive was hit.

Edgard Clemente. It was a total accident. A lot of guys get hit by balls during batting practice, but not like this. Even then, when I got hit, I knew I got hit hard. At first, I didn't know I was bleeding. I had a laceration above my eye. Took twenty stitches, and then I thought that was it. I thought that was the only problem I had. I didn't realize I'd fractured my orbital bone. I had some damage done to my lens, in my eye. I've basically been down here, getting to where I'm seeing well and getting back in the swing of things again. Because there was so much hemorrhaging and swelling in my eye, and I had blood in front of my retina and behind my retina, it takes a lot of time for the blood to clear out of there. For the first couple of weeks when I opened my eye, I couldn't see out of there because of the blood in front of my retina. It's still funneling out. I kind of get floaters in my eye where the blood moves around. It's just in my vision, but from what they've said it's going to come back 100%. It's only been a couple of months now. The doctors are telling me it's still early in the healing process.

I went to the same doctor that Bryce Florie went to. He told me that the damage done to his eye was a lot worse than what was done to my eye. Thank God, you know. [Of course, you knew about the Tony Conigliaro story.] Absolutely.

[So, how much do you want to get back to the major leagues?] Oh, it's unbelievable. It really is. I'm still a young age. I'm only 24. But to get the taste when I was 22, it seemed like so long ago, and I haven't been back there and knowing that if I hadn't had these injuries the past couple of years, I might be there....but it's going to make it all that much more sweet when I get there.

With the three guys in the big leagues, I'm number 4 now. We have some good catchers up there now. They do a good job, and they've got big league time, is what it is. I think that's the

biggest thing. They've got big league experience. They've earned their shots and I've just got to wait for mine.

[What would it be like if it just didn't work out, you just never got another chance to get back there? You tried for another two or three years....] Well, I'm not thinking that way right now. I'm confident in my ability that I'll get there. I hope it's with the Red Sox. I think I'm talented enough and I'm confident enough in myself that I'll be there.

{I don't mean to undermine your confidence.} On absolutely. I'm not saying you are. I'm not saying you are.

[I could only guess how I would feel if I strove for something my whole life. First of all, there's the person who never makes it. You spend maybe eight years in the minors and you just never make it, and finally you just give up and go on to something else. It's just not going to happen, for whatever reason. Or you just suffer an injury that really does end your career and you just have to give up that particular thing and go on to something else. That's one thing. But then there's the person who goes up and has a taste for a day and, for whatever reason - maybe they may get run over by a subway car and lose a leg the next day - you don't know what it would be, but something happens and you just don't get back. I just wonder how devastating how that would feel, after all the work you've put in for years and years and years.]

I couldn't even imagine. I couldn't even imagine.

{Well, let not think about that anymore. Let's think about having you come up this next season and have you help out the team!}

That sounds like a plan.

[Steve is in Florida, using the Red Sox facilities.] Actually, they're running an instructional league right now for all the kids that were drafted this past year, and top prospects. They got a lot of people over here. The trainers and stuff. They have a rehab coordinator who's down here all year round, and basically I'm working with him. It's a good situation for the time I've missed. I'm able to keep my baseball skills in tune. B.P. and that type of stuff, I started about a week ago. Batting practice. Nothing in a game situation yet. I think it's been going well. From where I was to where I am now, it's been an unbelievable improvement. And it's not done yet.

They've got winter leagues that go all the way into January so if I get to a point where the Red Sox say, why don't we get you out there and get you playing and get you ready for spring training, I'd be more than happy to go.

[When you were a kid, who were some of your favorite ballplayers?] I never had any particular one. I liked Wade Boggs. Wade Boggs, always getting hits. Always getting on base. I liked Mike Greenwell. Jim Rice. My father was a big, big Dwight Evans fan. He always talked about Dwight Evans. Fisk. I remember a lot of the guys from when he watched. Clemens, obviously, when he was with the Red Sox. Mo Vaughn. He was one of the best hitters in the game when I was in high school. That's a guy you looked up to, too.

[What did you think about the Yankees, growing up?] You know, I don't think I had the animosity that Red Sox fans who have been around a lot longer have. But I'll tell you right now, when I'm playing in the minor leagues against the Yankees, the Yankees and the Red Sox just don't get along. It's in the minor leagues and the major leagues. It comes from the top to the bottom. Everybody knows that the Yankees and the Red Sox don't get along. It starts in the major leagues and you see it up in the major leagues, and it's funny. It's real funny. You see it in the minors, too.

I think that the only reason people would hate them now is because they're so good. It's envy hate.

If you're on top, you don't just give it up. You've got to get knocked off. And nobody's done it yet, so you've got to tip your cap.

When I played in the Florida State League, they played in Tampa. They were the Tampa Yankees. In the Eastern League, they were the Norwich Navigators. When I was in Trenton. And up in Triple A, they're Norfolk. [Actually, I think they're Columbus.]

[So the teams would really get up a little more for the games?] Absolutely. Absolutely.

[Some of the players at the major league level would deny that. So it wasn't just that hey, this is a team that we want to beat, but there's a little bit of extra feeling in there, too?] Absolutely. I think it might be a situation where we know that they're the Yankees. We're players and we're not in that organization. They're probably THE best organization around, from top to bottom. They go out there and you see...from uniforms to batting practice jerseys to warmups, they've got everything and they're looking good and pretty and this and that...it's probably envy hate. Basically. They've got all the top of the line stuff. Their stadiums are always beautiful. You just want to go in there and kick their butt, and show them that even though they've got all this stuff that doesn't mean they're better ballplayers. I think that's where it comes from.

[How did it feel coming to the Red Sox clubhouse. The facilities in Fort Myers must be two or three or four times the size of Fenway Park's.]

That's the mystique about it. Pawtucket is easily twice as big as Fenway. When I first walked in there, I didn't even think twice about how small it was. I was just happy to be up there. Happy to have a locker with my name, and a jersey. 56. That was in my locker. [Had no say in the choice of numbers.]

[Did any of the Red Sox veterans make you feel welcome?] Every single one of them. They all came up and congratulated me, said "Welcome to the club!" They were great. Mike Stanley was one of the first guys I saw when I came in there. He was great. Everybody. Everybody was.

[Did you ever get to know Johnny Pesky?] Oh, yeah. I know Johnny very well. He likes to sit next to the younger guys when he's in the dugout during the spring training games, and throws his knowledge around - 'cause there's a lot of it.

[Who would you say is one of the hardest throwing pitchers that you've caught?] Velocity-wise? {Yeah, or they say some guys have a heavy ball.} Well, a guy like Derek Lowe throws a heavy ball. There's so much movement, to sink. The sinker ball guys got the heavier balls. Pedro, obviously. He throws hard. Tom Gordon, he threw hard, too. He had a short arm. It seemed like the ball came out of nowhere and it was right there, you know? Clemens, I caught Clemens my first year here. I caught him in spring training. In the bullpen. After I was done catching, I got him to sign the ball for me. Pedro in the bullpen, and during early spring training we have simulated games where we're pitching to each other, and I caught him there, too. There's a routine at that point, where they're throwing five fast balls, then five breaking balls, like that. So it wasn't really me working Pedro [calling pitches for him.]

I'm in the books right now as 0-for-2 with two strikeouts. [At least you're in the books!] Yeah, you're right.