

## **Roland Hemond**

*Interview conducted by Mark Liptak in 2005. Originally published at White Sox Interactive in 2005.*

*The role of a General Manager cannot be understated. He is the person directly responsible for acquiring and evaluating talent needed to win games at the big league level. He also has to balance in his head the roles of economics, baseball rules, the player's union, dealing with the media and thousands of other things on a daily basis. It is not a job for the faint of heart or for those who don't have the experience of upper management.*

*The White Sox media guide lists 12 names for that position starting with Harry Grabiner back in 1915. 10 times the position was held by a single individual. Once during the period from 1956 through 1958 two men jointly had the responsibility, Chuck Comiskey and John Rigney. So that begs the question...who was the best White Sox G.M.?*

*Like anything else when dealing with the best, much of it is subjective. However, in my book four names stand out above all the others, Frank "Trader" Lane (1948-1955), Ed Short (1961-1970), Roland Hemond (1970-1985) and Ron Schueler (1990-2000). My basis for those four names are the number of championships / post season appearances, number of winning seasons, quality of their trades and an all-purpose area called franchise situation. Simply put it means what was going on with the franchise when that person was in charge. What main challenges did they have to face, how did they handle them, what were the successes and what were the failures.*

*When Hemond took over the organization the franchise was literally in shambles. He faced challenges no other individual who held the position of G.M. ever faced.*

*The Sox were on their way to a franchise record 106 loss season in 1970. Comiskey Park was falling apart from disrepair. Fans were staying away in droves because the area was supposedly in a bad neighborhood. In 1969 for example the team drew, for the season, only 589,000... even that would fall to a paltry 495,000 in 1970. In 1968 and 1969, owner Art Allyn was playing a portion of his home games in Milwaukee trying the market to see if it would accept a move of the franchise from the South Side. The Sox would even lose their radio station and have to broadcast games starting in 1971 on two small outlets in LaGrange and Evanston, Illinois. Anything and everything that could go wrong for the White Sox did. And into this cesspool stepped Hemond along with new field manager Chuck Tanner.*

*Overnight, Hemond, who spent years in both the Milwaukee Braves and California Angels farm system began to deal. Other general managers trusted and liked him because of his integrity and honesty. He was usually one of the first to be called when trade discussions took place. He always tried to get the best of a deal but never at the expense of humiliating or embarrassing his counterpart. Hemond realized if he did this, the odds of him being called back for future discussions or trades were small.*

*In that first off season he netted the Sox such players as Mike Andrews, Luis Alvarado, Rick Reichardt, Ed "the Creeper" Stroud, Pat Kelly, Tom Egan, Tom Bradley and Jay Johnstone. Superstars? No...but they were solid ballplayers who improved the talent and depth of the club.*

*Overnight the Sox went from 56 wins to 79, one of the biggest turnarounds in the history of baseball.*

*In 1972 Hemond rolled the dice bringing in talented but oft troubled Dick Allen. Allen was on his third team in three seasons and was considered a clubhouse cancer. Hemond also made a deal for starting pitcher Stan Bahnsen. Those two, along with holdovers like Carlos May, Wilbur Wood, "Goose" Gossage, Terry Forster and Ed Herrmann almost brought a division title to the South Side. Allen nearly won the Triple Crown; Hemond was named Executive of the Year and Tanner the Manager of the Year. Roland proved that rebuilding didn't have to take five years.*

*Financial issues still plagued the franchise through the 70's even with new owner Bill Veeck. Hemond was never able to operate with a full deck of cash but he kept the team competitive and in 1977 he along with Veeck put together the "South Side Hit Men" who tore apart the American League bashing 192 home runs. Such 'thrown in's' and 'has been's' like Eric Soderholm, Steve Stone, Alan Bannister, Jim Essian, Don Kessinger and Steve Renko performed exceptionally well and mated with established players like Richie Zisk, Oscar Gamble, Chet Lemon, Lerrin LaGrow, George Orta and Ralph Garr to produce excitement not seen since 1972.*

*When new owners Jerry Reinsdorf and Eddie Einhorn took over in January 1981, Hemond finally had some money to work with. Immediately he and Einhorn took part in the negotiations to bring free agent Carlton Fisk to Chicago. Hemond also convinced Chicago native Greg Luzinski to come back home after the Phillies released him. These two along with other Hemond steals like Billy Almon and Tony Bernazard led to a revitalization of the franchise. Much like 10 years earlier, the Sox produced a winning record in the strike shortened season. They had another winning year in 1982 as Hemond added role players like Rudy Law and Vance Law. By the time 1983 began, Roland was able to extract such players as Scott Fletcher, Dick Tidrow, Randy Martz and Pat Tabler from the Cubs in part because he considered the possibility of taking future Hall of Fame pitcher Ferguson Jenkins in the free agent compensation draft. Tabler was then shipped to Cleveland for Jerry Dybzinski. The pieces were in place and after a slow start, the Sox tore through the league compiling 99 wins on their way to the Western Division Championship.*

*Hemond then used the free agent compensation process again in getting future Hall of Fame pitcher Tom Seaver who'd win his 300<sup>th</sup> games in a Sox uniform in New York on August 4, 1985 as well as trading for a person who'd turn out to be the Rookie of the Year and a future Sox manager, Ozzie Guillen.*

*In the 15 years Hemond was in charge he pulled off over 100 trades, had six winning seasons and won a Western Division championship. Considering the challenges, the team went through economically, talent wise and perception wise, no other Sox G.M. did as much with less.*

*Hemond was let go from the Sox in the wake of the Ken "Hawk" Harrelson fiasco. He worked with the Orioles as G.M., turning that franchise around and winning another Executive of the Year award in 1989. He worked with the Arizona Diamondbacks franchise when they were created before returning to the Sox as a special assistant for current G.M. Kenny Williams.*

*Hemond has spent practically his entire life in baseball and came to the Sox at the exact time the franchise needed a savior. His knowledge and wisdom concerning the game are unmatched today.*

*How he agreed to this interview also needs to be noted because it says something about the man himself. I had been trying to set something up with Roland for many months. However, he is considering writing a book about his life in baseball and was hesitant to disclose a lot of information that could go into his memoirs for fear that it could take away from the book itself. I had assumed that the two of us were never going to be able to get together.*

*In the spring as I was working on the lawn, my wife came home and said there was a message on the answering machine for me. When I played it back it was Roland apologizing for taking so long to get back with me and asking me to call him.*

*I contacted him at his Arizona home and he thanked me for providing him with the contact information that I had on some former Sox players. Roland and Bill Melton had recently started a White Sox Alumni Association and I turned over my information on players to Billy Pierce who gave it to Hemond. Roland also asked for permission to use segments of the interviews that I have done as part of the newsletter for the alumni group. Naturally I granted permission with the proviso that Roland answer 10 general questions on his career with the Sox. Roland agreed to do this, feeling that by limiting the questions, it wouldn't take away from a potential book.*

*Months passed and then in late September I found a letter on my desk from Roland. It was seven pages in his hand, answering all of my questions. He was absolutely as good as his word. The questions and his answers are listed below. It's a rare opportunity to go behind the scenes of a Major League general manager to see how it all works, why certain trades are made and how factors sometimes beyond anybody's control can influence the shape and destiny of a franchise. After the interview you'll find a listing of some of Hemond's best deals and the best deal he never made.*

**ML:** Roland tell me about the process that led to you being named Director of Player Personnel for the White Sox in 1970? (*Author's Note: That was Hemond's original title before being named the official G.M. in 1973.*)

**RH:** Glenn Miller, who was the farm director of the White Sox in the 1960's is the person who recommended me to new owner John Allyn and then Executive Vice President Stu Holcomb. He said that I and Chuck Tanner should get the jobs. Glenn knew that if I were to get the position that I'd want Chuck as my field manager. Chuck had managed in the Angels farm system. I knew him since I also worked for the Angels. Angels G.M. Fred Haney and I had hired Chuck to manage the Quad Cities Angels in Davenport, Iowa. From there Chuck managed in El Paso, Seattle and Hawaii which was then the Angels Triple-A affiliate.

So Stu Holcomb interviewed the two of us and we were hired simultaneously in early September 1970. The press conference then took place on September 14 in Chicago. Chuck's team was playing Spokane in the P.C.L. playoffs so we waited until that was finished.

**ML:** Was there an operating philosophy of sorts the first off season?

**RH:** The Sox had around 13 games left to be played when we took over in 1970. They may have won three of them. It was evident that we had a lot of work to do as that club lost 106 games. We just wanted to improve the team. We made numerous trades at the winter meetings moving, coming or going, 16 players in the first 18 hours of the convention. The club got younger and better for 1971. Chuck did a great job that year.

**ML:** Getting Dick Allen then at the 1972 winter meetings was a huge step. It also had a lot of risks. How did you balance the risk/reward factors before making the move? What factor made you decide to pull the trigger? (*Author's Note: Allen was acquired from the Dodgers for pitcher Tommy John and infielder Steve Huntz on December 2, 1971.*)

**RH:** Acquiring Dick was a daring move. I felt though that Chuck Tanner would be the right manager for him. Chuck is from New Castle, Pennsylvania and Allen was from Wampum, Pennsylvania. Chuck had known Dick and Dick's mom for years. Allen was one of the most talented players to have ever played the game. We felt he could help us. Then we acquired Stan Bahnsen within a half hour of completing the Allen trade. Those two transactions made a big difference in strengthening the Sox for 1972. If Bill Melton hadn't suffered a herniated disk operation in mid-season, I believe we would have won the pennant in 1972.

**ML:** In 1973 dissension and injuries decimated the Sox. The dissension came from a number of players towards Holcomb who apparently took a hard line when it came to salaries. That year the Sox had a number of hold out's and players who simply refused to sign anything. You were put right in the middle of it weren't you? I understand both you and Tanner went to owner John Allyn and basically said this has to stop.

**RH:** Stu wanted the responsibility of negotiating the player's contracts. This led to the controversies that evolved because he ordered me to release players like Jay Johnstone, Ed Spiezio and Mike Andrews when they wouldn't sign the contracts he offered them in spring training.

Stu received the unsigned contracts of Rick Reichardt and Stan Bahnsen. Reichardt asked for his release during the season and Stu granted it. When he wanted to do the same thing with Bahnsen, I contested it. Our ranks were being depleted with getting nothing in return. I went to the owner, John Allyn, and said there was no use my continuing to work under such circumstances. Stu decided to retire and I remained with the organization.

**ML:** What was it like working with and under Bill Veeck?

**RH:** The era with Bill was a lot of fun even though the financial situation was limited. Bill was officially awarded the franchise in December 1975. About three weeks later arbitrator Peter Seitz

ruled on the cases of both Andy Messersmith and Dave McNally contesting the reserve clause. That brought free agency into the game and Bill wasn't financed for this new rule. But he did come up with ideas that led to the 1977 season. He knew that we wouldn't be able to retain players like "Goose" Gossage, Terry Forster and "Bucky" Dent, so he said we'll rent players for a year. Trading the previously mentioned players brought us sluggers Richie Zisk and Oscar Gamble. That team was the surprise of the season.

**ML:** The shape of the franchise changed dramatically with the signing of Carlton Fisk in March 1981. The Sox now were players for the best talent. What do you recall from that season?

**RH:** Jerry Reinsdorf and Eddie Einhorn supported me in the Fisk signing, as well as the purchasing of Greg Luzinski's deal. That was the strike year and what I remember is that commissioner Bowie Kuhn decided to have a split season as far as the standings were concerned. No one knew that such a decision was going to take place. If we had only beaten Oakland one more time we would have won the first half and gone to the playoffs. Looking back though we did have many, many productive trades which led to the successful 1983 season.

**ML:** In 1983 a number of folks both inside and outside the organization wanted Tony LaRussa fired. You were always in his corner. Why?

**RH:** Regarding Tony, my confidence in him never waned while others tried very hard to destroy him. I feel very vindicated today as Tony is on his way to Cooperstown as a member of a very elite group of Hall of Fame managers. I recognized Tony's intelligence in finding ways to get the most with whatever personnel we could provide. He was a severe critic of himself, admitting to himself and to me, when he felt he made mistakes during a game. He eliminated repeating mistakes and devised ways to improve and not to fall into ruts of buying into old baseball clichés. I could go on and on why he is such a successful manager. I reserve the right to withhold more information on this for various reasons.

**ML:** Roland what is your greatest moment with the White Sox?

**RH:** I've had many high moments during various stages of my career. Certainly 1983 was a terrific season, overcoming a slow start. This was a special group of players and staff. Since this club was on such a roll from late August on, we had lengthened the lead over Kansas City, so the clinching of the divisional title was imminent earlier than usual. I had felt the celebration might be somewhat subdued. However, when the sacrifice fly hit by Harold Baines scoring Julio Cruz took place, the celebration just exploded into sheer bedlam for the fans, and uniformed personnel and front office people. It is difficult to express properly on how happy you feel at such a moment shared with everyone around and family members who are not present at the time. The memory is indelible and you are exhilarated whenever you reflect upon it.

**ML:** Your tenure with the Sox ended after the 1985 season when broadcaster "Hawk" Harrelson was named to replace you. Can you talk about the circumstances surrounding that and give us an overview of the rest of your career?

**RH:** I'll withhold my comments regarding the "Hawk" episode.

I did work in the commissioner's office for a year and a half under Peter Ueberroth and then American League president Dr. Bobby Brown. Then I became the G.M. of the Orioles from November 1987 through 1995.

**ML:** How does it feel being back with the Sox and how did that happen?

**RH:** It's great to be back with the club. I'm now in my fifth season back. The fact that Ken Williams asked Jerry Reinsdorf, whether he could explore the possibility of my leaving the Diamondbacks to help him was very appealing to me and I was honored.

Once in a while you are in a position to lend advice or suggestions, due to the fact that I have encountered similar problems that exist today. They may be of greater magnitude now because of the much higher financial figures but you are still dealing with human beings, so people skills are still vital.

I also love to be traveling through the farm system and dealing with young managers, coaches, players, scouts and front office personnel. It brings back memories of my years as a farm director/scouting director. That is a very exciting part of our game.

It's thrilling to witness the growth of Ken and Ozzie Guillen and what a great job they have done. I root for them to be rewarded by going to the 2005 World Series. Jerry Reinsdorf deserves a baseball world championship.

**Roland Hemond's Best Trades:** (in chronological order...)

1. **November 30, 1971:** White Sox send Ken Berry, Syd O'Brien and Billy Wynne to California for catcher Tom Egan, starting pitcher Tom Bradley and outfielder Jay Johnstone. *(Author's Note: Bradley would win 15 games with a sub three ERA in both 1971 and 1972. Egan served as a very good backup to Ed Herrmann and Johnstone added speed, pinch hitting abilities and a crazy character to keep the clubhouse relaxed.)*

2. **December 2, 1971:** White Sox send Tommy John and Steve Huntz to Los Angeles for first baseman Dick Allen. *(Author's Note: The trade that saved the franchise. Allen won the M.V.P. award in 1972 leading the Sox to a near division championship. His ability to hit for power and average was unmatched on the South Side for years. Named to three All-Star teams.)*

3. **December 2, 1971:** White Sox send Rich McKinney to the Yankees for starting pitcher Stan Bahnsen. *(Author's Note: Bahnsen would win 54 games in three and a half seasons in Chicago including 21 in 1972.)*

4. **November 19, 1972:** White Sox send Tom Bradley to San Francisco for outfielder Ken Henderson and pitcher Steve Stone. *(Author's Note: Henderson was a Gold Glove winning, power hitting center fielder while Stone added depth to the pitching staff. Bradley never regained the form that he showed with the Sox and was out of baseball by 1975.)*

5. **August 14, 1973:** White Sox acquire starting pitcher Jim Kaat on waivers from Minnesota. *(Author's Note: Kaat was a two time 20 game winner for the Sox in 1974 and 1975. Made the All-Star team in 1975. Won 45 games in two and a quarter years in Chicago.)*
6. **June 15, 1975:** White Sox send pitchers Stan Bahnsen and "Skip" Pitlock to Oakland for outfielder Chet Lemon and pitcher Dave Hamilton. *(Author's Note: Lemon would turn into one of the top center fielders in baseball with the Sox making the All-Star team twice. Hamilton was a regular contributor to the 1977 White Sox team with four wins and nine saves.)*
7. **December 11, 1975:** White Sox send third baseman Bill Melton and pitcher Steve Dunning to California for first baseman Jim Spencer and outfielder Morris Nettles. *(Author's Note: Melton had a bad back and had worn out his welcome getting into a shouting match in a Milwaukee hotel lobby with broadcaster Harry Caray. Spencer meanwhile won a Gold Glove for his defensive prowess in 1977 saving many errors. He also had 18 home runs and 69 RBI's for the "South Side Hit Men", twice driving in eight runs in a game.)*
8. **April 4, 1977:** White Sox send shortstop "Bucky" Dent to the Yankees for outfielder Oscar Gamble, pitchers LaMarr Hoyt and Bob Polinsky and cash. *(Author's Note: The deal was made because the Sox could not afford to resign Dent. Gamble blasted 31 home runs for the "South Side Hit Men." Hoyt would become a very good starting pitcher winning the Cy Young Award after going 24-10 in 1983.)*
9. **July 10, 1979:** White Sox send pitcher Jack Kucek to the Phillies for infielder Jim Morrison. *(Author's Note: When the Sox were being rebuilt in the early 80's Morrison provided stability and power at either second or third base. Had three seasons of double figure home run totals.)*
10. **December 12, 1980:** White Sox send pitcher "Tex" Wortham to Montreal for second baseman Tony Bernazard. *(Author's Note: Bernazard was a switch hitter with speed and the ability to hit to all fields. He was a good second baseman in his two and a half years with the Sox. Hemond then sent him to Seattle for Julio Cruz a move that crystalized the 1983 team.)*
11. **January 25, 1983:** White Sox send pitchers Steve Trout and Warren Brusstar to the Cubs for infielders Scott Fletcher and Pat Tabler along with pitchers Dick Tidrow and Randy Martz.   
*(Author's Note: Perhaps Hemond's greatest deal. Roland used the free agent compensation rules that were in use at the time to inquire about getting Cubs future Hall of Fame pitcher Ferguson Jenkins whom they left unprotected. Cubs G.M. Dallas Green got word of it and quickly made this deal. Part of it was the promise by Hemond that the Sox would not take Jenkins. Fletcher and Tidrow were important parts of the 1983 team. Tabler was then traded to Cleveland for Jerry Dybzinski adding another part to the club.)*
12. **January 20, 1984:** White Sox select starting pitcher Tom Seaver from the free agent compensation pool. *(Author's Note: The future Hall of Famer would win 32 games in two years with the Sox including his 300<sup>th</sup> beating the Yankees 4-1 on August 4, 1985.)*

13. **December 6, 1984:** White Sox send pitcher LaMarr Hoyt and two minor leaguers to San Diego for pitchers Tim Lollar and Bill Long along with infielder/outfielder Luis Salazar and shortstop Ozzie Guillen. *(Author's Note: Hoyt would see his career quickly end after the 1985 season due to substance abuse. Lollar and Salazar helped the 1985 team to a winning record but Guillen would become the Rookie of the Year in 1985 and win a Gold Glove in 1990 along with becoming a two time All-Star.)*

### **Roland Hemond's Best Deal That Never Happened:**

As part of the major rebuilding effort after the disaster of 1970, Hemond had worked out a trade with the Washington Senators that would have sent left handed relief specialist Darold Knowles to the White Sox for relief pitcher Wilbur Wood. However, Wood was holding out and never signed a 1971 contract. Therefore, the Sox couldn't deal him until he did. By the time Wood signed the Senators were no longer interested.

It turned out to be a major blessing for the Sox.

Wood would blossom into one of the top starting pitchers of the decade, winning 20 or more games four times and being named to the All-Star team three times. He would be named a member of the Sox Team of the Century in 1999. Sometimes the best deals are the ones you never make!



