

## **Milo Hamilton**

*Interview conducted by Mark Liptak on February 4, 2006  
Originally published at White Sox Interactive in 2006.*

*It was one of the most memorable ways I've ever had to start an interview.*

*I call Milo Hamilton at his home in Houston on Saturday February 4 and his phone rings. He answers. He knows that I'm calling since it was arranged for this day and time...only instead of saying hello, Milo breaks into what he might have been saying to open the White Sox pre-game show from his days with the team in the 1960's.*

*I retort with another way he used to open Sox games, commenting on what a "bee-u-tiful baseball day it is" and that "the first three innings of White Sox baseball are brought to you by sparkling, golden Budweiser."*

*Hamilton then pulls out his trump card....40 years after the fact; Milo begins reciting word for word the entire "Friendly Bob Adams" commercial he and his partner Bob Elson used to do during Sox games.*

*"Call Friendly Bob Adams at ANdover 3-2020. You can get a loan from 25 to 500 dollars. Call on your way to work and you can pick up your loan as you're coming home later that same day."*

*Game...set...match, to Milo Hamilton.*

*Then we say "hello" to each other and the interview is on.*

*The Hall of Fame broadcaster has done over nine thousand major league games during his professional career that began in 1953 with the St. Louis Browns. Along the way Milo has also worked for the Cardinals, two stints with the Cubs, the Braves, the Pirates and for the last 21 seasons, the Houston Astros. He also worked on WCFL radio and the White Sox network, which then had 100 stations, one of the largest in baseball, from 1962 through 1965. The Sox network in those days stretched from Indiana and Michigan all the way through the south including Jackson, Mississippi, Atlanta and Sarasota, Florida.*

*Hamilton has called 11 no-hitters, two World Series and been behind the mic for some of the greatest moments in the history of the game. He called the record breaker as Hank Aaron passed Babe Ruth in 1974. He was also behind the microphone when Roger Maris hit his 61st home run in 1961, when Stan Musial hit five home runs in one day, and when Nate Colbert duplicated Musial's feat two decades later. There is very little in baseball that this Hall of Famer hasn't seen or knows about.*

*The 78 years young Hamilton still has an amazing voice, unchanged over the years. His recall about baseball events is still first rate and his enthusiasm for the sport remains as strong today as when he first went into the booth in St. Louis, doing the hapless Browns games.*

*He talked about his days with the White Sox, about "The Senior", Al Lopez, and the Sox players that used to drive the manager crazy, about the real reason the Sox released a young pitcher named Denny McLain, the near pennant in 1964, Bob Elson, and what he learned from him, and the business of broadcasting in general. He also discussed the difficulties he had with Harry Caray when both were with the Cubs in the early 80's. Milo Hamilton is a pro's pro and a part of the "Golden Age" of White Sox baseball.*

**ML:** Milo normally I'd start with you being hired by the Sox for this interview but I think it's important to get a sense of where you were at before you came to the team. You started with the St. Louis Browns in 1953... how did that happen?

**MH:** I had been broadcasting minor league games in Davenport, Iowa, the Quad City area, and I had gotten to know a lot of the major league people who came through the area. Our season ended on Labor Day and we were a Cubs affiliate. When I'd go to Chicago I'd always stop by Wrigley Field and take in a game. I knew Bert Wilson, the Cubs announcer and he'd always invite me to sit in the booth during a game. One time I was there after our season ended and he asked if I'd like to do an inning. So I did.

I also knew Bob (Elson) well for the same reasons, in fact, the team I was working for switched affiliations and became a White Sox farm club, so I'd do the same thing, only this time go to Comiskey Park and sit with Bob. Bob asked me to do an inning during one of the Sox games as well. I applied for the job that went to Don Wells in 1953. Until that time Bob never had anyone with him on the road. Don deserved to get the job and I was happy to have been considered.

I was working back in Iowa and got a call one day from Don Lynch, a friend of mine who managed a sporting goods store. Two people from the Rawlings Company were coming to town to show him the new baseball equipment and he asked if I would interview them. I did and the folks from Rawlings liked it so much they asked for a tape of the interview. I got them one and it turned out that they took it to a new TV station going up in St. Louis. That station already had the contract to do the St. Louis Browns. The program director, Ted Westcott, heard the interview, liked it and called me asking if I'd like to go to work for them. I did the sports as part of the news block at 6 and 10PM and also did some of the Browns broadcasts.

**ML:** Milo you worked for the Cardinals for a year and then went to the Cubs but there was a period right before you came to the White Sox when you were out of the broadcasting business, at least in the big leagues. What did you do from 1958 through 1961?

**MH:** WIND was doing the Cubs games at that time but then WGN got the contract and Jack Quinlen joined Jack Brickhouse in the booth. Lou Boudreau was hired as the analyst which I felt was a very good move. I had a wife and two small children so I spun records and did the news for the Howard Miller show among other things. In fact I had the #1 rated music show in Chicago but then new management came in and they wanted to change the format so I was out of work.

The Liberty Broadcasting System was around at that time and they were actually recreating major league games so I did that. I also did Northwestern University football and basketball.

*(Author's Note: The Liberty Broadcasting System was a potential rival to the powerful Mutual Radio Network. Founded by Texas millionaire Gordon McLendon it was based primarily in the Southwest. It proved to be the training ground for announcers like Lindsey Nelson and the previously mentioned Don Wells. It did recreate major league games from ticker tape accounts simulating crowd noise and other ballpark sounds. White Sox part owner Chuck Comiskey actually worked for that organization as director of sports, for a short time in 1951 after he left the club due to front office infighting. The network eventually was done in because major league baseball objected to having its games pirated away from their authorized networks and the FCC started investigating McLendon.)*

**ML:** After the 1961 season Ralph Kiner left the Sox radio booth to take over with the expansion New York Mets so there was an opening. How did you hear about it and was there anything in particular that appealed to you about the position?

**MH:** Well it was available for one thing. I had worked in Chicago, knew the town and liked it. Bob Finnegan, who'd go on to work with Bob (Elson) after I left, told me about it.

**ML:** Can you take us through the process from when you applied to getting the job.

**MH:** I don't want this to sound like the job was automatically mine, but there wasn't much to it. I had done major league baseball in Chicago, I knew the Sox needed an announcer and I knew Bob Elson.

**ML:** Milo I understand that to this day you are one of the most prepared broadcasters around. How much did that attention to detail help you re-learn the American League? I guess it was about eight years since you had worked it on a regular basis.

**MH:** I stayed up with things. Back then the Mutual Network was still doing the Game of the Day on the radio. I was still doing play by play once in a while if they needed someone to fill in so I was able to keep up with the league.

The other thing that really helped was in the spring of 1962, the General Finance Company, one of the Sox sponsors, wanted *every* spring training game done on the radio. The Sox were one of the few teams in baseball broadcasting all the spring games. That was around 30 games where I had the chance to see the players and the other teams in the league.

**ML:** I know you listened to Bob Elson growing up in Iowa. What was it like working with the man and what did you learn from him?

**MH:** It was great, a dream come true. As you say I listened to him for a number of years. I always thought that Bob was the best interviewer around. Remember he did that show from the Pump Room for all those years. He taught me that the way to do a good interview is to make sure you actually listen to what the other person says.

The other thing he taught me was that in a game don't spend all your emotion early... something may happen later in the game that is the most important of all.

Bob and I got along well. He was a good traveling companion and he understood that I wasn't a threat to him. Bob had worked with some guys who tried to take over, to crowd him and he eventually got them fired. Jack Brickhouse also got a guy fired for doing that to him. I was doing the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> innings but when I wasn't calling the game I was going through books, records, finding out more information than we were getting from the team's P.R. folks. Then when I found something interesting or important to that day's game, I'd write out a note and slip it to Bob. I guess he appreciated the fact that even though I wasn't calling the play at that time I was still trying to be helpful. I was always a team player.

**ML:** This is kind of an off the wall type question but in the early 60's did the Sox ever take the train to their next destination or was it all done by air travel? Certainly when you came up with the Browns in 1953 a lot of clubs still did a lot of their travel by train.

**MH:** When I was with the Sox the only time we ever took the train was at the end of spring training when we'd go from Sarasota up through the south playing teams right before opening day.

Now when I was with the Browns we'd take the train all the time because California still hadn't gotten the Dodgers and Giants yet. That's one of the things that I miss because when you traveled by train the guys were always together and they talked baseball. It's not that way today.

**ML:** I don't know what the atmosphere surrounding the team was in 1962, but it dramatically changed when G.M. Ed Short sent Luis Aparicio and Al Smith to Baltimore for Pete Ward, Hoyt Wilhelm, Ron Hansen and Dave Nicholson. That deal seemed to reshape the ball club.

*(Author's Note: The trade was completed on January 14, 1963. Ward would become the 1963 co-Rookie of the Year with teammate Gary Peters, Wilhelm was the best relief pitcher in the league in the 1960's, Hansen was one of the top glove men in baseball and regularly contributed double figure home run totals... unusual for a shortstop at that time and Nicholson, even though he was a disappointment, had 22 home runs and 70 RBI's in 1963. The Sox would go 94-68.)*

**MH:** It certainly helped and the other thing was that the farm system was kicking in, producing guys like Don Buford, Al Weis and Gary Peters.

**ML:** One of the oddities about that season took place in spring training on April 8 when two youngsters, Bruce Howard and Denny McLain had a 'pitch-off' to determine who would stay in the organization and get promoted to Double-A. Do you remember anything about that game or about McLain in general when he was with the White Sox.

*(Author's Note: Howard would win the game 2-1 and get promoted to Lynchburg, Virginia. Because of baseball rules at the time concerning bonus babies, McLain had to be released. He was claimed by the Tigers a week later.)*

**MH:** Well the pitch-off was only part of the reason the Sox let him go. He was a cocky kid. His high school used to get tickets to Sox games and I can still remember him sitting by the dugout yelling “I can beat those guys.” He was hard to handle and his attitude was something that Al Lopez and the organization just wasn’t going to put up with. In spring training he ran up a 700 hundred dollar phone bill talking to his girlfriend and he refused to pay it.

*(Author’s Note: White Sox manager)*

Howard was a clean cut kid. Never gave anyone any trouble. Unfortunately he didn’t turn out to be much of a pitcher and in that respect you have to give McLain his due, he turned into a great pitcher. I mean he won 30 games one season.

**ML:** One other notable game that season was in Washington on July 29. Joe Horlen pitched brilliantly and was leading 1-0 with a no-hitter going into the 9<sup>th</sup> inning. With one out, a seeing eye grounder by Chuck Hinton spoiled the no-hitter, and then with two out, Don Lock blasted a home run to win it. When I spoke with Joe he was very matter of fact, about it but I know that had to be just a devastating and outrageous loss. Do you remember anything about that night?

**MH:** Nolan Ryan had a number of those type games where he’d have a no-hitter late and lose it and sometimes the game as well. It was devastating at the time. You have to remember though to pitch a no-hitter you have to have some luck involved. I remember Don Cardwell’s no-hitter with the Cubs and he had to have a great catch with Joe Cunningham of the Cardinals at the plate in the 9<sup>th</sup> inning to get it.

**ML:** The freak injury to Cunningham and Johnny Buzhardt’s arm injury ruined any chance the Sox had of staying with the Yankees but it was a very good year and set up what would be a dramatic 1964 season. Let’s talk about that momentous season. I guess the place to start would be perhaps the longest home run ever hit. Do you remember Dave Nicholson’s blast off Moe Drabowsky of the A’s?

*(Author’s Note: Cunningham broke his collarbone tripping over the first base bag in Los Angeles in June. He was trying to avoid colliding with the Angels’ Charlie Dees due to a wild throw. Buzhardt, a Yankee killer, was off to a 9-4 start with three shutouts and a 2.42 ERA when he was lost for the rest of the year.)*

*(Author’s Note: On May 6, Nicholson hit a ball that cleared the left center field roof at Comiskey Park and landed in Armour Square. The ball cleared the 375 foot sign and was found 135 feet from the base of the left field wall. Some fans in the upper deck said they heard the ball hit the roof, but it showed no signs of tar on it. Nicholson would blast three home runs in the double header that night with the Sox winning both games.)*

**MH:** That night Dave hit two home runs off him. That wasn’t the longest ball I ever saw Dave hit. In spring training one year the Orioles used to play in Miami and he hit a ball out of the park over the light tower in left field. If ever he could have found a way to cut down on his strikeouts, what a player he could have been.

*(Author's Note: Nicholson fanned 341 times in 828 at bats with the Sox from 1963 through 1965.)*

**ML:** What turned out to be a real issue for the 1964 White Sox was the fact that they lost their first 10 games of the season to the Yankees. Four of those were by one run. Sometimes no matter how good a club you have, a team just has your number.

*(Author's Note: That streak was finally broken on August 11 when the Sox took a pair in New York. They then swept a four game series at Comiskey Park the following weekend to move into first place.)*

**MH:** Well look at the Astros. For years they couldn't beat the Braves especially in the post-season. The Sox just never had the type of team that could deal the knockout punch.

**ML:** Things stayed tight as the stretch drive hit. The Sox picked up "Moose" Skowron and "Smoky" Burgess and coupled with their pitching it was a three team race. On September 16 the Sox were tied for the lead with 13 games left, all against second division teams. Take us down the stretch those final two weeks. In that type of situation do you change the way you call a game for example?

*(Author's Note: To their credit the Sox didn't wilt under pressure. They finished up 10-3 in those games including a nine game winning streak to close the show.)*

**MH:** No. The game describes itself. You don't need to explain the situation because the fans know how important every play, every pitch is. Every game matters.

**ML:** The problem was that after sweeping the Yankees in late August, New York caught fire.

*(Author's Note: After getting swept by the Sox, on the bus to O'Hare Airport came the Phil Linz 'harmonica incident'. Linz started playing his harmonica which some of the Yankees felt was inappropriate at the time. Reportedly manager Yogi Berra told him to knock it off. Linz couldn't hear what was said and asked Mickey Mantle about it. Supposedly Mantle answered that Berra said to play it louder. Linz did. Berra blew a gasket and confronted Linz over it. Many Yankee players say that was the incident that crystalized the team.)*

They went 23-7 starting September 4 to win the pennant by one game. It included an 11 game winning streak. They clinched the pennant on the next to last day of the season when they beat the Indians. The White Sox meanwhile were sweeping the A's but still came up short. That final day did you go into the clubhouse afterwards? If so what was the mood like?

**MH:** What killed the Sox that year was two disastrous weekends against the Senators. The Sox played them in a double header around Labor Day. They had just finished a twin bill with the Indians, with one of the games going into extra innings, when they flew to Washington. Washington started Bennie "Voodoo" Daniels and Dave Stenhouse. These were two guys who hadn't won a game in months yet they swept them. Then the next weekend they played them in Chicago and those guys won again!

*(Author's Note: The double header was played on September 7. Daniels started the first game and won 3-0, upping his record to 6-10. Stenhouse then took the nightcap 6-2. It made his record 2-7. 10 days later, the Senators, a team that lost 100 games in 1964, took two of three with Daniels winning one of them on a complete game, four hit shutout in 10 innings, 1-0. Daniels ended 1964 with an 8-10 record. Three of his wins came against the Sox.)*

When you lose a pennant by that small of a margin you find guys sitting for a long time by their locker. Generally there isn't a lot being said and guys usually take a very long time to change clothes. Most of the time they come in, take off their spikes and that's it. That was the year when Yogi Berra won the pennant but got fired after the World Series.

*(Author's Note: The Yankees lost the World Series to the Cardinals in seven games.)*

**ML:** A 98-64 record is nothing to sneeze at and in 1965 the Sox were the favorites of many especially after the trade that netted them Johnny Romano, Tommy John and Tommy Agee.

*(Author's Note: On January 20 the Sox, Indians and A's completed a three team trade. The Sox got the above mentioned players; Cleveland got Rocky Colavito back and Cam Carreon while the A's got Jim Landis and Mike Hershberger.)*

The Sox started great but injuries to Peters and Juan Pizarro robbed them of the two top left handers in the league. The other controversy erupted in August when Tigers pitcher Hank Aguirre accused the Sox of freezing the baseballs. You were around the team every day...did you notice anything funny about the balls?

**MH:** They did freeze them. I'd imagine they had a refrigerator somewhere where they kept them. It was Al Lopez's idea. His thinking was that 'if we (the White Sox) couldn't hit them out the other team wasn't going to either.' That wasn't all the Sox did. They sloped the baselines so their bunts stayed fair and they watered the area around home plate. That slowed balls down.

**ML:** Once again the Sox came up short, this time to the Twins, and after the season, despite a 95-67 record, manager Al Lopez decided to retire. My memories of Al are of a grandfather like figure whom the fans and the media liked a lot, but some of his players have told me some different stories about Al...basically that he could be a tough SOB. You were around the man for four seasons. Can you tell us a little more about Al Lopez the manager and Al Lopez the person?

**MH:** Al would never pop off about his players especially to the media, but if you did something wrong you heard about it. He expected you to play the game the right way. Al always wore a suit and tie except when he was in the dugout, he looked more like a Wall Street guy than a manager.

In all my years in baseball I've never seen a better manager / pitching coach combination than Lopez and Ray Berres. Both of those men were former catchers and part of the reason the Sox pitching staffs were so successful was because Berres used to go out in the bullpen and catch the guys himself. It wasn't like today where you have a bullpen coach, Berres would do it himself between starts and sometimes prior to the game. He wanted to see what the pitcher had that day so he could tell Al.

Lopez was a quiet guy but there were some umpires that he just ate up during a game and some of his players just drove him nuts from time to time because of what they did. Nellie Fox was one of them. "Foxy" would take the throw on a double play in front of second base. Al would continually tell him not to do it that way, but Nellie did it the way he wanted to. Cam Carreon, the catcher, drove him nuts because he'd catch with his glove hand pointing down. Another guy was Ray Herbert, "the Hawk." Ray got that nickname for a few reasons, one of which was because he had eyes like a hawk when checking out the stands for the ladies. Lopez would tell him "there's plenty of time for that stuff after the game."

**ML:** After the 1965 season you left for Atlanta. Why did you leave? My memory is a little fuzzy here but I seem to remember that you liked the city and the fans liked you because you were more enthusiastic in your delivery than Bob.

**MH:** I wanted to stay and I was being told that Bob was going to retire soon and that I was going to replace him. Bob decided to keep working however and the Braves came after me hard. They wanted me in the catbird seat. What if I had stayed with the Sox in the second chair? I would never have had the chance to do some of the things that I did, never had the chance to call Henry Aaron's home run for example. #1 jobs in the announcers' booth in Major League baseball don't grow on trees. I had to take the opportunity.

*(Author's Note: Bob Elson would go on announcing White Sox games through the 1970 season.)*

**ML:** Milo let's switch gears and talk about the business of broadcasting baseball. The changes you've seen are incredible but perhaps none bigger than the pressure today on announcers to tell the truth to the fans without upsetting team management and risking their jobs. At least when you started and through the 60's you guys had some protection because the stations were the ones who had the most say in announcers. How do you walk the fine line between telling the fans the truth and not offending management?

**MH:** Nobody has ever told me in all my years what to say on the air. One time the Astros were playing Colorado and they lost a 7-0 lead. The next day I'm in the coffee shop and Drayton McLane, the owner, came up to me and said that it was an ugly game. I agreed. Then he asked how I called it. I told him I called it honestly because the newspapers covered the game as well and their story was going to come out. McLane said "that's the way you're going to do it as long as I own the team."

You have to be honest, but at the same time my philosophy has always been, 'every day is a new day.' You simply can't keep ripping on a guy or the team day after day after day for something that may have happened last week. That was the big problem with Harry Caray. He'd get on a guy and never let up; he'd get on the team and never let up. You can't keep ripping guys for the same thing after it's happened. Eventually you get the players upset with you and the organization gets upset with you.

**ML:** Speaking of Harry Caray, you worked with the man in the early 80's with the Cubs. I remember Harry as a fan and he provided me advice when I got into the business, but the picture

that I've gotten from the people who had to work with him seems a lot different than the image the fans saw. I don't want to do a character assassination of someone who can't defend themselves but the sense that I've gotten through interviews is that it was tough to work with Harry. I know J.C. Martin went through some unfortunate incidents working with Harry. Can you talk about working with him and what your relationship was?

**MH:** You'll have to get my new book that's coming out because I bury him in it.

*(Author's Note: Ironically when this interview was scheduled back in January, I had no idea that Milo was coming out with a book. Milo's comments about it to me on February 4 were the first I knew about it. I read with great interest the story on it that Ron Rapoport of the Chicago Sun-Times had in the February 9 edition of the paper as well as Milo's comments about Harry.)*

**ML:** Unlike some of your contemporaries, like Caray and even Vin Scully, time hasn't seemed to have affected you. Your voice sounds as strong as 30 years ago. Like the analogy to Dorian Gray, do you have a broadcast tape hidden away in a closet instead of a picture?

**MH:** That's what people have said to me. I've always taken care of myself and I've always felt that the greatest strain is put on your voice when you try to fake enthusiasm.

**ML:** Milo as we start to wrap up I've got to ask you how you've done it. I mean decades of work, at least 185 games a year counting the spring, endless travel, sometimes bad weather. I know you love the game but my God, what you've done is incredible.

**MH:** You've got to love it to do it for this long. I've always done my homework, I feel preparation is very important for this position and I'm dedicated.

**ML:** Can you sum up the four years you spent on the South Side of Chicago?

**MH:** I had some wonderful years in Chicago with Bob Elson. The White Sox were a good team to be with and I was back broadcasting Major League baseball. I had the best of every world!



ELSON, HAMILTON TO REPORT EVERY INNING



MILO HAMILTON  
WCFL

