

## Marc Hill

*Interview conducted by Mark Liptak in 2011  
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*It's a fact of life in baseball at all levels. Not everyone can be a superstar, not everyone can be a starter. In Major League baseball, when you play 162 regular season games you better have the ability to overcome injuries, slumps, selfish teammates, bad managing.*

*To do that you need a bench. "Glue guys," "pine sitters"... call them what you will but you better have them. Former Sox outfielder / DH "Bo" Jackson during his days with the team made it a point to emphasize what the guys on the bench were going through. He put up a handicapped sign in the dugout and only bench guys overcoming injuries were allowed to sit there.*

*Winning teams have guys who accept their roles... that they aren't going to play every day and when they do play, are ready and able to contribute. The best teams have combinations they can go to off the bench...some veterans who have been around and know the league, some younger players with speed, a guy or two who can hit the long ball, maybe a defensive replacement in the outfielder. They have a balance and it helps win games.*

*The Sox have had a few of these types of guys down through the years sitting on the bench wearing the uniform. Mike Squires, Jerry Hairston, "Smoky" Burgess, Charlie "Paw-Paw" Maxwell, Sammy Esposito, Ron Northey, Warren "the Deacon" Newson immediately come to mind. Guys, who could steal a base if needed, hit a home run if needed, play excellent defensive late in the game if needed. In short, the little things that win games...win enough of them and you're playing in October.*

*Both Sox G.M. Roland Hemond and All-Star catcher Carlton Fisk called Marc Hill the best backup catcher in the league during his days with the Sox. Hill, who was with the team from 1981 through 1986, was known for his arm and his ability to call a game. Fisk himself said he was jealous of Hill because every Sox pitcher always wanted to throw to him. And while Hill was with the team, the Sox had a boatload of top caliber pitching...LaMarr Hoyt, Rich Dotson, Floyd Bannister, Britt Burns, Jerry Koosman and Tom Seaver. In fact the Sox were so deep in starting pitching that two guys who had each won over 10 games in a big league season, Steve Mura and Randy Martz barely got into any games at all during the 1983 campaign.*

*While Hill was with the Sox, they had four winning seasons and won the Western Division advancing to the playoffs in 1983.*

*After his playing days "Booter" as he was called, spent 15 more years coaching and managing in various organizations at the minor league level. Now retired I caught up with him on a weekday afternoon from his home in Missouri.*

**ML:** Marc why the White Sox, when you became a free agent after the 1980 season and had been in the show for all or parts of eight years?

**MH:** I lived in St. Louis all my life and Chicago was only five hours away so I knew about the Sox over the years and I always liked them. I had gotten some interest from some other teams but Roland Hemond called and said he liked what I could do for a team and offered me a two year guaranteed deal worth 200,000 a year. I asked if he wanted me to come up to Chicago to see him and he said he didn't. That's when I said "just send me the contract and I'll sign it."

**ML:** Did you know though that the Sox were going to try to go after Carlton Fisk? If so, obviously that didn't affect your decision.

**MH:** Oh I knew, Roland told me right off when we talked that he knew about Fisk and that the Sox were going to go hard after him. I liked the situation though so I was going to sign anyway.

*(Author's Note: In 1981 the Sox had Fisk, Hill and Jim Essian manning the catching spot. No team in baseball had that amount of depth or quality at that position.)*

**ML:** 1981 was such a bizarre year because of the labor impasse which wiped out two months of the season. What did you do during that time period?

*(Author's Note: MLB went on hiatus on June 12 and didn't return to regular season play until August 10.)*

**MH:** I came back home and played golf, took a lot of batting practice, threw a lot and helped my dad who ran a lumber company here in the area.

**ML:** Was it hard coming back to play after that long of a layoff?

**MH:** Yes... absolutely. It got boring if you weren't actually in the running. And with that split-season type crap nobody even really knew what the situation was. I remember thinking during a game once, 'Jesus Christ this isn't baseball...this is stale, boring.'

*(Author's Note: Despite all the issues the Sox did finish the shortened season 54-52, the first winning season since 1977.)*

**ML:** You only played in 16 games in 1981, yet the Sox kept you, traded Jim Essian and actually gave you a raise if what I read was correct. How do you account for those situations?

**MH:** Mark I tried to be a good teammate and do what I could to help the guys win games, I think that resonated with Tony LaRussa *(Author's Note: the White Sox manager)* and Roland. Something happened in 1981, I spent 21 days with Great Falls back in the minor leagues, I did it because the Sox asked another guy on the team who wasn't playing much and was a little out of shape to go and he refused. I said, "Look I'll do it," packed up and went to Great Falls where I met Greg Walker. I tried to help him a little bit. After the season, again I think the organization remembered that.

*(Author's Note: The player who refused to go was Lamar Johnson.)*

**ML:** By 1982 the Sox were considered an up and coming team. They had some good young players in guys like Britt Burns, Harold Baines and LaMarr Hoyt. They had veterans in guys like Fisk, Greg Luzinski, Jerry Koosman and they brought in more talent that off season with Steve Kemp and Tom Paciorek coming into the fold. The seeds of the 1983 championship I think were being sowed; you guys were a close bunch weren't you?

**MH:** Yes we had a good group of guys. Players liked each other, players helped each other, and there was no jealousy. "Pudge" *(Author's Note: Carlton Fisk)* and I were close... he treated me like a king. He once said, "I'm helping you earn more money and you're helping me earn more." Steve Kemp was one of the best guys you could have on a club, just a great guy. Had a dog, a retriever that became the team's mascot. We'd let him run around on the field before the game, you could do that stuff in those days. Tommy (Paciorek) was one of the funniest guys I've ever been around and he could play.

*(Author's Note: The Sox would end 1982 at 87-75 the first time the franchise had back to back winning years since a run of 17 straight seasons from 1951-1967.)*

**ML:** Tell me about the young Tony LaRussa. He was still learning the ropes of how to be a manager but he already seemed to know how to treat the players.

**MH:** Tony would hang out with us and do stuff with the players as much as he was allowed to since he was the manager. We (the players) liked Tony; we protected Tony when the media started to come after him. Tony always let us handle things if something came up in the clubhouse. He studied and learned the game. If we had a night game at Comiskey Park, Tony would be at his office around 10AM to prepare and get ready. He treated everybody on the team well...it didn't matter if you were the top guy or the 25th man. He was one of the finest managers I ever played for no question.

**ML:** 1983 is one of the most beloved and remembered seasons in Sox history and it started in spring training where the 20-7 Sox record was the best in baseball. But according to Roland Hemond, Tony LaRussa told him that the front office shouldn't expect a quick start to the season because adjustments still had to be made. I've never figured out what Tony was talking about, do you?

**MH:** I think so. That spring some of the veterans missed time because they were hurt. Greg Luzinski was out; Harold Baines I think missed two weeks with an injury. Kids were playing a lot and they were trying to impress people so they played hard and we won games. But when the regular season was ready to start those veterans had to get back into the mix and that takes time, there was even some talk if those guys were going to be ready for the start of the season.

**ML:** The season did not start well; the Sox dropped three in Texas. The team fell behind the eight ball from the get-go and by May 26, the Sox were eight under at 16-24. Talk was floating that Tony was going to be fired. When it was all over "Hawk" Harrelson *(Author's Note: Sox*

*broadcaster*) said the key to the season was that Tony did not get paranoid in the dugout. "Hawk" said if he did, it would spread right down to the players and the season would be lost.

**MH:** I think that's right. One of the biggest keys that season was that Tony kept his cool. When the season started badly he told us, "you guys just keep playing, and I'll take the pressure." We looked around at each other and told ourselves Tony wasn't going to get fired... we weren't going to let that happen.

**ML:** The Sox finally got back to the .500 mark on June 22 when Jerry Koosman beat the Mariners. It would still take some time for everything to fall into place but just getting back to the breakeven point had to take some of the pressure off everybody didn't it?

**MH:** When we got back to .500 we thought things were going to be OK. I thought that really helped us and the veteran guys were there to keep pushing and helping everybody. I'll never forget "Wimpy" (*Author's Note: Tom Paciorek*) spoke in the club house and said, "we've got the best team...we've got the "Bull" (*Author's Note: Greg Luzinski*) and the "Dozer" (*Author's Note: Coach Joe Nosssek*) and we're just going to bulldoze everyone!" Right then you could feel the tension just go right out of the room and we were off and running.

**ML:** One of the issues that I've had with the White Sox since they won the World Series is the lack of vocal, veteran leadership in the clubhouse. That's not saying a thing against guys like Mark Buehrle, Paul Konerko, Jim Thome or Jermaine Dye...class individuals, great players, but they lead by example. Breaking a toilet into pieces or getting in somebody's face because of a bonehead play just isn't their way. With the Sox teams you played on though that wasn't the case...that club had strong clubhouse guys and they weren't afraid to tell someone how things needed to be done.

**MH:** We definitely had leadership guys...Paciorek, Fisk, Koosman, and Luzinski. Dave Duncan the pitching coach was an ex-military type guy. Art Kusnyer, another coach, was as tough as they come. Koosman would work with pitchers, I remember Luzinski talking about hitting with guys. After games at times, we'd close the door to the clubhouse, bring in food and drinks and talk baseball all night. There were many nights we'd actually sleep in the clubhouse because we'd have an afternoon game the next day and stayed up late talking so rather than drive home we'd sack on couches.

At those meetings guys were allowed to say anything they wanted to about anybody. You could point fingers and say anything you wanted to say. It was all done constructively...we'd talk about the game that we just played, talk about how we should be playing the game, talk about what was on our minds. Everybody was expected to be there for those, it was kind of 'we're having a party and you're in it, be there...' that type of thing. And we made room for everyone, guys would have a beer or two, guys like Scotty Fletcher or Vance Law, who didn't drink, we'd call them the milk shake guys...that was fine too. No one was pressured into saying anything at the meeting, but we expected it to be a team / baseball thing. If you were part of the team, you participated by being there.

**ML:** One of your personal highlights that season came on May 15 at Yankee Stadium, You went 3 for 5 with three RBI's and two runs scored, one of them coming on a sacrifice fly....when you were on second base! How in the hell did you pull that one off?

**MH:** "I don't know either! (laughing). Seriously Greg Walker hit a deep, deep drive into center field that was caught. I got a good read and was tagging up when I picked up Jimmy Leyland, our third base coach about halfway to the base. Jimmy was halfway down the line towards home plate and he kept waving me around. I made it home by hook sliding to get in. Afterwards I was really proud when Jim was telling the media that he decided to wave me home because, "he ran the bases the right way." That's what I tried to do for the team; little things that help win games.

*(Author's Note: The play came in the 7th inning of a 7-3 White Sox win. Walker's blast into deep left center field was caught by Jerry Mumphrey. His momentum though was taking him away from home plate. Mike Squires scored easily from third base and Hill beat the relay home giving Walker a rare two RBI's on a sacrifice fly.)*

**ML:** It took time like I said earlier but finally things fell into place for you guys and the team went on a run, certainly one of the best in franchise history and maybe in baseball history after the All-Star Game. The Sox went 59-26 after the break and they went an astounding 46-15 from August 1 to the end of the regular season. That's just incredible. Even more unbelievable was the performance of the three starting pitchers...Hoyt, Dotson and Bannister. Those guys combined to go 42-5 after the break...42-5! That's better than any stretch even the great Sox staffs of the 1950's and 1960's ever did.

*(Author's Note: Hoyt was 9-8 at the break and ended the year 24-10. Dotson was 8-5 at the break, he finished the season 22-7. Bannister was 3-9 at the All-Star break. He ended the year 16-10.)*

**MH:** 42-5...show me anybody who ever did that. It was an amazing run, we won something like 17 in a row at Comiskey Park and when we finally lost we got back to the club house and couldn't believe it... that somebody beat us, and at home yet. It was a great ball club I'll never forget that season and those guys.

**ML:** "Booter" let me ask you about the starters, I'll give you a name. Why don't you tell me a little bit about the person and the pitcher.

I'll start with LaMarr Hoyt, the eventual American League Cy Young Award winner.

**MH:** When I caught him we were the heaviest battery in baseball (laughing.) LaMarr had a good slider and a great sinker. He never shook you off. That year especially in the second half, he could throw, at will, to any spot you wanted. His control was incredible. He just could not lose. He also had a bit of a temper if he wasn't pitching well.

**ML:** How about Rich Dotson?

**MH:** Dot-Man as we called him had the best change up in baseball. He could throw two or three

pitches for strikes, had great control. He was also the meanest pitcher on the club. I know he was a handsome kid but man if somebody messed with the team; he was the guy that would take care of things. Remember in the playoffs when the Orioles were hitting our guys left and right, it was Dotson who went after Eddie Murray and Cal Ripken.

**ML:** Floyd Bannister got off to such a horrible start that year; I've got to think he was pressing trying to justify that contract.

*(Author's Note: The Sox signed Bannister as a free agent on December 13, 1982 for the "unheard" of figure of 4.79 million over five years. Bannister was the 1982 A.L. strikeout leader and 16 teams were after his services. After signing with the Sox, Yankee owner George Steinbrenner lashed out at Eddie Einhorn and Jerry Reinsdorf saying that he regretted voting against Edward DeBartolo when he attempted to buy the franchise from Bill Veeck.)*

**MH:** I used to ride to the park a lot with Floyd, sometimes Dave Duncan was with us. Floyd was an even tempered guy and I know the contract was something that he was trying to deal with. Both Duncan and I kept telling him to relax and just pitch. Remember I caught him in Seattle. He had a 90 plus fastball and a curve, I'm telling you that was Blyleven-Ryan like. In the first half that curve of his was flat and that was part of the problem.

**ML:** Britt Burns also had issues at the start of the year. That shoulder / arm injury that ended his 82' season flared up again and his father passed away early in the year. He was really struggling for the first few months.

**MH:** The veterans on the team got him back in order, that's another example of how Tony would let us take care of things in the clubhouse. Yes, his dad's passing was really bothering him at the start and I know his hip was killing him the entire season. What helped Britt was he developed a split finger pitch that he'd throw 30-40 times a game. It looked like a fastball and then just dropped off the table the last few feet. He was always around the plate.

**ML:** Another one of your personal highlights in 83' but also I think indicative of the team's attitude happened on September 10. The Sox trailed the Angels 6-1 in the 9th inning. The club scored two runs and had two out when the game was delayed by rain about an hour and 40 minutes. Remember this was a night game; the Sox basically had the division wrapped up... yet after the rain delay Tom Paciorek doubled home a run and then you came up and took a John Curtis pitch into the gap in left center to tie the game at six. Serious question Marc, why did you and the other guys care? It was late, it was wet, nobody was still in the stands and again the division was basically clinched.

**MH:** You don't give up; you're there to win the game. My dad told me early in life you don't quit on anything. We still had a chance and that's the attitude I took. John, who I played with in San Francisco, threw me a fastball and I was able to drive it. I remember lumbering around the bases into second base. (laughing)

*(Author's Note: The Sox would eventually win the game 7-6 in 12 innings when Harold Baines homered into the first row of seats in right field after two out.)*

**ML:** In the postseason the Sox behind Hoyt went to Baltimore and won the first game. You got shutdown in game #2 but you did what you wanted... you got the split and were coming home. But when the Sox got back to Comiskey Park nothing went right, the team just couldn't hit. I've heard some folks say that maybe the Sox lost the edge since you clinched so early and had that huge lead in the division.

**MH:** That may have been part of it. It's really hard to turn it back on when the situation gets tight. I know that second half we just were in a great rhythm...come to the park, play the game, win the game, get back to the clubhouse. Suddenly that was gone. And with Baltimore hitting our guys I think maybe we lost our focus a little bit. When Ron Kittle got drilled in the knee all of us including Tony were on the top steps of the dugout. We were ready to go, all of us.

*(Author's Note: Kittle got hit in game #3 by pitcher Mike Flanagan then had to be restrained from charging the mound. Tony LaRussa was extremely upset with the umpiring crew over it. The injury was such that Kittle and his bat were lost for the rest of the series when the knee swelled up.)*

**ML:** Game #4 was unimaginable. From Burns pitching a shutout into the 10th inning to Jerry Dybzinski's base running mistake...it was gut wrenching. One run wins that game and sets up a Game #5 at Comiskey Park, winner take all, with Hoyt on the mound.

**MH:** Exactly and we knew to a man that if it got to Game #5 we weren't losing, not with Hoyt out there. Game #4 was one of those games that create men and that's what happened to Jerry. After the game, he stayed and answered every question from every reporter in the clubhouse. He didn't alibi, didn't make excuses.

*(Author's Note: In the 7th inning of a scoreless game with Vance Law on second and Dybzinski at first, Julio Cruz ripped a single to left field. The ball though was hit so hard, Law couldn't score and was stopped at third base. Dybzinski never saw him stop, continued past second and was caught in a rundown. Law then tried to score and was out at the plate. Rudy Law then flied out to end the inning.)*

It was very quiet in the clubhouse. Some guys you couldn't find, some guys went back out and sat in the seats. Certain guys just wanted to be alone. All of us were just devastated. Players went to players to encourage them. Everyone had time to cool off then Tony spoke to us and said that he was very proud of us and the season and that the best team didn't win.

**ML:** In 1984 the Sox were the consensus favorites to at least win the division. Tom Seaver was added to a terrific staff in the off season; yet again the Sox started off slowly. By the All-Star break the team had won seven straight and was in first place. Things were starting to come together. Yet after the break the Sox were terrible dropping six of seven and going into a death spiral for the rest of the year. It was one of the most disappointing seasons in franchise history. Ron Kittle told me the Sox quit in the second half. What happened that year... was that team overconfident?

**MH:** We could have been. I don't remember anybody quitting we just didn't play up to our standards and the trade of Jerry Koosman that off season also was an important factor. "Kooz" just knew what to say and when to say it.

**ML:** The Sox rebounded in 1985 with 85 wins. Baines and Walker had great seasons but all eyes were on Seaver and his quest for 300 wins. He got #298 against Cleveland at home, #299 in Boston and then he went for #300 in New York. Before we get into that game why don't you tell me a little about Tom.

**MH:** Tom actually lived at my house. My family went back to Florida and he didn't want to live downtown. Tom liked to play golf on the day after he pitched so he lived with me in Naperville. Tom loved to grill in the backyard. He'd love to grill any kind of fish, have some vegetables and pop open a cold Heineken. He was a very good person to be around, very class guy too.

I think Tom was a better pitcher when he was with us then back in the day when he was with the Mets. He couldn't throw as hard as he used to, I'd say he threw about 88 tops but he was a lot smarter. He knew how to pitch hitters and set them up. Tom had a good curve ball and a change up.

Certain pitchers, the Seavers' the Bob Gibson's, if you're a hitter and you know you have to face them on that day, it does something to you mentally. Only the great hitters find a way to overcome that.

**ML:** You and Tom were close and you caught him a few times, were there ever any issues about who was going to catch him when he went for #300?

**MH:** "No, not from my end. I knew that there was a chance that I'd be behind the plate for it. Tony came up to me and then later Tom himself and both asked basically the same thing, "any problems if Pudge (Fisk) catches this one?" I said, "I've got no problems with it."

I watched the game from the bullpen, it was just a great performance and on the last out, you remember Reid Nichols caught the ball in left field. We were in the bullpen yelling out as he was getting ready to catch it, "you better not drop it..." things like that. We were giving it to him.

*(Author's Note: Sever went the distance in the 4-1 win on August 4 before over 54 thousand at Yankee Stadium. Many of those in attendance were Met fans rooting for Seaver and against the Yankees.)*

**ML:** 1986 was the last season for you and the start of a dreadful period for the White Sox, four straight losing seasons, talk of moving to Florida and Ken "Hawk" Harrelson as G.M. which led directly to Tony LaRussa getting fired. What was that year like?

**MH:** That was a bad situation; you could feel the tension in the clubhouse. I got along with "Hawk" and I got along with Tony but it was just bad. With Tony gone it just wasn't any fun anymore for me. I know "Hawk" didn't get along with Dave Duncan. I remember "Hawk" came up to me in Texas and asked if I'd had enough and I did. I realized in 1986 that this was a

business, that it was dog eat dog. It was no fun and there were a lot of pissed off players in that clubhouse.

*(Author's Note: Harrelson had different ideas of how an organization and a coaching staff should be run and that clashed directly with LaRussa. Ultimately Jerry Reinsdorf approved the firing of LaRussa on June 20. Later Reinsdorf would publicly admit that firing LaRussa was the biggest mistake he made as Sox co-owner and chairman. LaRussa was hired by the A's three weeks later as manager.)*

**ML:** "Booter" I'd like to get into a little of the science of catching, the philosophy of catching. You spent 13 years catching in the big leagues and I'm sure you picked things up along the way. Tell me about the pregame preparations between a pitcher and a catcher. I know you had meetings and probably went down to the bullpen to at least watch them warm up before you went out on the field to start the game.

**MH:** You'd have team meetings before the start of a series but yes we'd have a meeting between the starting pitcher and the catcher every day. Tony would be there, Dave Duncan, the catcher, the starting pitcher. Sometimes the guys in the bullpen who might be used that night would be there and even occasionally the next days starting pitcher. We'd go over in detail how we wanted to pitch to hitters and what we were going to do in certain situations. Dave Duncan would always remind us that pitchers don't have the same stuff every time so you can't call the game the same way every time.

Dave was right; I can remember Hoyt was a fastball / slider guy. He lived on those pitches. Sometimes I'd call for a slider early in the game and it just wasn't there...he didn't have it right then. But that didn't mean I abandoned it. I might call for it two, three innings later and there it was right like it should be.

I'd always at least for a few pitches, go down to the bullpen and catch the starter warming up for that night. I wanted to see what was working, what wasn't how his pitches were moving. It gave me a sense of what we could work with during the game.

The other thing I was taught early in my career came from Tim McCarver when I was with the Cardinals. Tim told me "don't catch a pitcher into trouble." You have to be smart calling a game, you have to know your pitcher, what he has and what the situation is and go with what is working.

**ML:** Do you miss playing Marc...miss the game?

**MH:** Oh gosh I miss the game from when I was playing, but today's game? No, I don't. None of the guys I played with are playing anymore; none of the guys I managed in the minor leagues are playing anymore. I don't follow it. Someone asked me yesterday about the Cardinals and what happened in a game and I said, "What happened?" I didn't even know what was going on. They couldn't believe it.

I dream about the game a lot and most of the time the dreams are about my days with the White

Sox. When I dream, I dream about how the Sox win a game but it's funny I'm never the guy who's doing it! (laughing)

Today's game is just different from when I was playing, you'd never see the guys stay in the locker room after a game to talk baseball like the Sox did. These guys are out the door and on their way as soon as the game is over.

**ML:** Any good baseball stories for us?

**MH:** Oh man, I remember one with Roland Hemond. He and I were talking during batting practice at Comiskey Park by third base. Fans forget that I played third and first at times for the Sox so I worked out there too. "Bull" Luzinski was in the cage and I could see out of the corner of my eye that he was going to pull some shots down the line.

Sure enough he hits a line shot that's headed right for Roland's head. I stick my glove out and catch it right before it hit him. Roland jumped in my arms! I carried him off the field and sat him down in our dugout! Everybody was laughing about it...Roland was the greatest G.M. I ever played for.

Another story was when I was only 20 or so playing for the Cardinals. It was in spring training. I was catching Bob Gibson. I think it was in the 5th inning, I give the sign for a fastball and Bob shakes me off. I thought, 'we'll he's just doing that because he wants to screw up the hitter' so I give the fastball sign again. Bob shakes me off then motions me to come out to the mound. I run out there...Joe Torre comes out there too, it's just the three of us.

Bob looks at me and says, "Son, I know you don't know this yet but my slider's almost as good as my fastball.

So I go back behind the plate and call for the slider.....and Bob shakes me off! (laughing) He wanted the fastball!

After the game I went up to him and asked why after he told me about his slider, he shook me off again. Bob said "hell everybody in the ballpark knew why I called you out there and that the slider was coming! (laughing)

**ML:** Marc can you wrap up your days in Chicago with the White Sox for us?

**MH:** It was the best six years I ever had in the big leagues. I had so much fun playing with the White Sox, so many good memories... from Roland to Tony to all the guys on the team.

