

Bob Grim

*Interview conducted by Mark Liptak in July 2008.
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Ask a White Sox fan to name some of the front office members and you'll get the usual answers... Kenny Williams, Brooks Boyer, and Scott Reifert. But naturally a front office of a major league franchise is composed of more than three people and sometimes the folks who are very important are the ones that you hear the least about.

Such is the case with Bob Grim, the Chicago White Sox Senior Director of Business Development & Broadcasting. Bob is one of the longest tenured members of the organization, coming on board in January 1990, just in time for the final season at the original Comiskey Park.

Grim comes from a baseball family. In fact it's safe to say the Grim family is to baseball what the Bush family is to politics. His uncle, also named Bob, was a former American League Rookie of the Year, 20-game winner and a member of the dynasty Yankee teams of the 1950s (in addition to being involved in some of the most "colorful" moments in the Yankee/White Sox rivalry). Bob himself was a catcher at St. John's University and caught future big-league pitchers Frank Viola and John Franco. One of Bob's sons, John, was drafted in 2007 by the White Sox and is now playing at Madison Area Junior College, coached by Mike Davenport, a scout for the Sox.

As his title suggests, Bob's duties and responsibilities for the White Sox are wide ranging. A lot of his time is taken up with the day to day operations of White Sox broadcasting, from dealing with the game announcers to working with the Sox radio and TV affiliates. When the national broadcasting companies come calling, Bob is the liaison between what they want and the Sox players and staff. He's also the contact man between Major League Baseball and the White Sox regarding the schedule and setting game times.

If that wasn't enough he's also the man to see on any issues related to the use of the club logos, name and marketing from a retail standpoint. He oversees the marketing and promotion of the two custom T-shirt shops at U.S. Cellular Field and also finds time to oversee the Sox Alumni Association.

Needless to say, Bob has very few "slow" days, in season or out of season.

Before coming to the Sox, Bob worked as associate athletic director/media relations director at DePaul University and also for Major League Baseball in their New York offices as a public relations administrator for all American League clubs.

I caught up with him on a late July afternoon as the Sox were off on their most important road trip of the season.

ML: Bob, why don't we start first with your family and their long connection to baseball. I know your uncle passed away in 1996 and by then you were working for the White Sox. Tell me about him, what he taught you and what he told you about baseball back in the 1950s?

BG: “Growing up in New York City and having a relative who pitched for the Yankees, it doesn’t get any better than that. After he retired, my uncle stayed in the Kansas City area. He loved being able to hunt and fish so he didn’t stay in New York. But he’d come back to visit every year for two or three weeks in the summer and it was great!”

“My uncle didn’t have any kids so we basically became them ... he’d take us fishing, to a ballgame, and he’d pitch to us. That really helped because even though my uncle had a bad arm he could still bring it when he had to. He still had a great slider and a good curveball and when he’d throw to us he show us those pitches. As a player until you got higher up in the chain, you just wouldn’t see kids who could throw like that and it really helped develop you as a player.”

“Also my uncle taught me how to look at things through an athlete’s point of view. Moose Skowron and my uncle both came up with the Yankees in 1954. Moose, as you know, works for us and he’s told me a lot about my uncle. Basically he was a “hardass” the type of guy who went out there to beat you. He played the game right and he expected you to play it the same way. And he taught me that attitude ... that if you are going to do something, to do it the best that you can and to play to win. He made all of us in the family a little tougher.”

ML: Bob was involved in two of the more famous incidents in the Yankee/White Sox rivalry, including a fight on the field and hitting Minnie Minoso in the head with a pitch. But to leave the story there would be doing him a disservice. Apparently the next day, after hitting Minoso, your uncle did something that wasn’t usually done in those days. Tell me about that.

(Author’s Note: The date was June 23, 1956 when Grim threw one high and tight to Sox outfielder Dave Philley in the home half of the sixth inning. The ball glanced off Philley’s shoulder and bounced into his batting helmet knocking it off. Philley charged the mound as the benches and bullpen’s emptied. Both players swung at each other as the rest of the teams held each other back. Order was restored after about 20 minutes. Philley was tossed from the game. Grim allowed to stay in, but perhaps shaken, he was tagged for two runs...the only runs of the day in the Sox 2-0 win.)

BG: “I see Minnie almost every day and he still tells me about the time my uncle hit him in the head but that the next day my uncle went to see him in the hospital to make sure he was O.K., to apologize and to let him know that what happened wasn’t intentional.”

“Minnie says that my uncle was a good man and both Minnie and Moose, two guys who played against him and with him called him a good teammate.”

“And I personally know he was like that. When I was young I was catching in a Little League game when there was a collision at home plate and I hurt my left knee pretty bad. My uncle was visiting at the time and for the next few days he’d keep getting hot towels for my knee to keep it from stiffening up.”

“He was well liked in his old neighborhood in New York as well. He’d come to town and stay at our house and the phone would start to ring from his friends in the area, they’d want to get together to see him. He grew up in what was Brooklyn Dodger territory in New York and in 1955 after the Dodgers beat him and the Yankees in the World Series, the neighborhood got together and had a victory parade right in front of my uncle’s house!”

“They actually hung him in effigy, a dummy in a Yankee uniform. We actually have film that they took of that and we still break it out every so often just to watch it. He really enjoyed that.”

ML: It sounds like, Bob, you've been around the game your whole life.

BG: "Yes, without a doubt. Baseball has always been a part of my life. The only time I ever actually saw my uncle play, I was young, only about six or seven when we went to Yankee Stadium to see him and the Athletics. I don't remember much except before the game we went down to the bullpen and he was there in his sleeveless Kansas City uniform and he gave us a big hug. I do wish sometimes that I was a little older and could have actually seen him play."

ML: Bob, you had a nice position at DePaul when the Sox opportunity came open. Why were you interested in it?

BG: "I had been at DePaul for a few years after I was hired by a friend who I went to school with. He was the A.D. (athletic director), but he left and was replaced by another person who had a different management style. I had worked in the American League office before going to DePaul and I always wanted to get back into the game in some capacity."

"I went to DePaul in part because they offered to triple my salary. Lee MacPhail, who was then President of the American League and I spoke and he said that he'd love me to stay on but that they just couldn't match what DePaul offered. At that time I was only making about \$12,000 working for the league and I just couldn't turn down that opportunity. So I left baseball, but the folks that I worked with in the league office remembered me and put my name in circulation. I got a call from the White Sox asking if I'd be interested in a position that came open."

"So I interviewed for it, but it went to Chuck Adams. It was a public relations position. I was one of the three finalists. I must have made an impression because about nine months later after I had interviewed for another position with the Brewers and Bud Selig, the Sox called back and said they had another opening, thought I'd be a good fit, and asked if I was still interested. I was, interviewed again and got the position of Director of Advertising and Promotions.

ML: Let's slide into one of your main areas of responsibility these days, that of dealing with broadcasting issues. I guess the best place to start is to bring up what Bud Selig said a few months ago, that it was time for baseball to look into issues involving blackouts and territory issues. Do you have any insight into specifics regarding what Bud was hinting at? It seems that Major League Baseball really has been behind the curve in these areas for a long time.

BG: "Well, outside of adding expansion teams, the rules regarding team territories haven't really changed even though technology and the population base has. It is a factor for the White Sox and I'll give you an example. Southern Michigan is only 60-70 miles or so right across the lake and in those counties right on Lake Michigan there are a lot of White Sox fans."

"The state of Michigan is Detroit Tigers territory and we're all professionals, I certainly don't want to infringe on the Tigers' area, just like I wouldn't want them to start broadcasting into Chicago, but because those areas are so close to Chicago and in the past have gotten Sox games, we'd like to see if something can be worked out where they can start getting them on TV again ... maybe have both the Tigers and White Sox be allowed to show games in that area."

"I've looked into this area in the past and have wanted to start reexamining these issues only to be told that I really 'don't want to go there.' 'You don't want to start tackling them.' ... What was meant by that was because the issues are so complex and because there are so many legal issues involved that to try to make any changes requires both teams getting involved, their lawyers, the league office, it is just very hard."

“So I’m glad the commissioner thinks it’s time, I know that fans are frustrated over this.”

ML: I’ve seen comments from fans living near Chicago but still a good 75 to 100 miles away talking about how they can’t get WCIU-TV for example, yet when they try to sign up to watch the Sox through MLB video on their computers they are told the game is “blacked out.” It doesn’t make sense to me to alienate fans who are willing to pay to see the games yet are told, “no can do.”

BG: “I know first-hand that you really can’t get the WCIU signal if you live outside of Chicago and that’s an issue. Every time we show a game on WCIU, the next day I’ll get a few calls or e-mails from fans that finally got up the nerve to want to talk about it. You were in TV, Mark; you know the saying that if someone finally contacts you on an issue there are 10 more people who feel the same way, so yes it’s a big concern.”

“What we’ve done and are still working on this, is to try to do what we can, when we can. What I mean is that when ESPN for example, is doing a Sox game and that same night WCIU is showing the game locally, normally what happens is that ESPN is “blacked out” in all areas that are considered White Sox territory. Naturally we want our fans watching the game on our stations but realizing the limitation with WCIU we got ESPN to lift what they call the “second tier” blackout area ... that’s places like South Bend, Indiana, and we’re trying to get that into Rockford. We want our fans to at least see our games through *someone* even if it’s not our network.”

ML: Speaking of WCIU, Bob, I’ve seen a lot of messages complaining about the technical issues and the overall quality of the signal when Sox games are on that station, far more it appears, than when WGN-TV or Comcast Sports Chicago is doing the game. What is the problem with WCIU?

BG: “At this point in time WCIU ownership can’t make the upgrades needed to bring their signal more into line with WGN and Comcast. We’ve discussed that with them. That’s why for example, the MLB Extra Innings package can’t show Sox games with our announcers, when the game is on WCIU. The satellite that WCIU uses simply isn’t strong enough for the satellite that DirecTV uses for the Extra Innings package to pick it up.”

ML: Is there any chance of the Sox pulling the games off WCIU in the future and moving them somewhere else?

BG: “Mark, that’s part of the issue, there are no other options. When we put this together a few years ago, WGN went to every other TV station in the market and asked if they would be interested in being a part of it and the only one who said yes was WCIU.”

“And that doesn’t mean that the other stations don’t like the Sox, it’s a matter of business. A network station, for example, gets their programming free from ABC, NBC, CBS, or Fox. They sell the advertising and get the profit. To carry the Sox they’d have to bump that programming and to be a part of the Sox Network they have to pay us a fee, so it’s just not practical for them.”

ML: Well, that’s been an issue since the Sox originally left WGN before the start of the 1968 season. The Chicago market, unlike New York or Los Angeles for example, just doesn’t have and never had the number of independent stations that had the flexibility to do something like show a lot of ballgames in prime time. I mean, WLS-TV for example, isn’t going to take off their

“prime time” fall shows in September to show White Sox games although they might do it for day ones.

BG: “That’s exactly correct. What we hope happens, we’re watching it, is the situation at WGN after the Tribune Company sells them. It’s possible the CW Network just goes away or new ownership wants to go back to the way things used to be at that station, namely showing a lot of games from all sports. We’ve talked to WGN about picking up more Sox games and on nights other than Saturday, but they only have a certain number of times they can bump the CW Network throughout the year so right now they just don’t have the ability to take on more games.

ML: Have you thought about starting a regional type network, for example, like the St. Louis Cardinals have?

BG: “The issue there is that a lot of the area cable operations just don’t want to take on a channel that’s just going to show ballgames especially if they have to charge a premium rate for it.”

“And the issue we have with a regional radio network is that a lot of the “mom and pop” stations that used to be around and aired Sox games in the past just don’t exist anymore. They’ve all been bought up by national corporations and they simply program via satellite from Dallas or Chicago or someplace. The stations simply don’t want to have to pay someone even though it’s probably not a lot, to run the board and insert commercials between innings and such.”

ML: Well, taking it a step further have the Sox ever had any discussions about starting their own TV network, a la the Yankees’ YES Network? I mean Jerry Reinsdorf owns the Sox, he owns the Bulls, and he has a good relationship with the Wirtz family; they both built the United Center. That gives you three major sports and you don’t have to play second fiddle to the Cubs anymore.

BG: “I’ve never personally been involved in any discussions like that but I think it probably has been talked about. Even with those three teams that you mentioned, Mark, we’d still have an awful lot of time to fill. You’re talking about 24 hours a day, seven days a week.”

“Right now to be honest, the Sox simply don’t have the amount of video, classic games, and stuff that could be used to do something like that. We’re getting closer, though. Major League Baseball now requires all teams to tape every game and send the copy to New York where they archive it for us. So as time goes on we’ll be getting more and more material that we could use if something like this happens but now unlike the Yankees, we just don’t have material from the ’20s or ’30s that we could use, say, as a documentary to help fill time. When Jerry and his group took over in January 1981, they looked and any material that the Sox may have had was gone. No one knows where it went or who got it.”

ML: One final area to discuss regarding satellite coverage of baseball. A few years ago, I read about a lawsuit filed by some Cleveland Browns fans living in Florida against the NFL and DirecTV over their Sunday Ticket package. Now I don’t know if said lawsuit was dismissed or if it’s still going through the legal process, but what those fans were suing over was the fact that they had to pay for the entire package even though the only team they wanted to watch was the Browns. Do you think there will be a time where if a Sox fan living in New Mexico, for example, just wanted to get the Sox games, they could?

BG: “I think satellite companies would be a la carted to death if something like that happened so they probably won’t do it. And today with so many options I think most fans can probably find the game they want to see somewhere. In this area there was a lot of controversy over the cable companies not picking up the Big Ten Network but really there wasn’t a lot of backlash with it because fans were able to find most of those games somewhere.”

ML: Bob, you also deal with the White Sox announcers. I know when we interviewed Brooks Boyer, he explained what his role is with them and what he tries to get across to them. Can you talk about what you do with them?

BG: “I have to listen to what they are saying, so I’ll go back and forth between the TV and the radio on every game. I have to know what’s being said so that if a fan e-mails me or Jerry (Reinsdorf) asks, ‘Did you hear this?’ I can explain what went on.”

“I’ll interact with the announcers every day, even if it’s just sitting down to talk to them and it doesn’t have to be about baseball, we’ll talk about anything. To me, and I listen to other baseball broadcasters, I don’t think you’ll find a better group on any team than ours.”

“I hear a lot of tapes, I listen to satellite radio of other games and I know that some folks may not like Hawk Harrelson or some folks may not like Ed Farmer, but collectively who’s a better group? And I tell that to fans or anyone who contacts me.”

“The only thing I’ll tell guys like Hawk is that, say they mention Bill Freehan or Jake Gibbs during a broadcast, that they have to realize not everyone is from the age that knows who those guys were. I do, but there are people who don’t, so they have to take the time to explain who they played for, what position and when they played. But that’s about the only area that I really try to let them know about.”

ML: Teddy Greenstein of the *Chicago Tribune* broke the story last month regarding Darrin Jackson’s situation. According to Teddy, D.J.’s contract is up and the organization is going to wait until the end of the season to make a decision on him. What more can you tell us on this?

BG: “Like I said, I think collectively our guys are the best and we’d love to keep all of them. It may happen that they all come back and that would be great. D.J.’s deal is a mutual option and we’d love to keep him. Hopefully we can work something out.”

“I know I have been researching and there are two clubs in the A.L. and eight in the N.L. who rotate their announcers during a game between TV and radio and that is something we may wind up doing.”

ML: I’m sure a lot hinges on Steve Stone and what he wants to do next season.

BG: “Steve hasn’t let us know yet what he wants to do next year. I think Brooks (Boyer) and he are going to sit down soon and talk about that.”

ML: You and another longtime White Sox employee, Howard Pizer, are the contacts between the Sox and Major League Baseball regarding the schedule and I know a lot of fans post about the strangeness of it the past few years, just some really crazy things. What’s going on with that?

BG: “There have been some strange things and we can’t get an explanation from baseball on them. I know Jerry has asked me to do a lot of checking on things, comparing schedules, which I did and provided him with that information. He is very involved in trying to work out the best possible schedule for our team and our fans.”

ML: What issues do the Sox have with the schedule?

BG: “There’s been a few. We can’t seem to ever get the Yankees here at home during the summer on a weekend anymore. We’ve been getting them during the week in April or in September. The Indians, meanwhile, have gotten them twice in Cleveland on a weekend during the summer months just in one season. I know that baseball likes to try to help teams that may be hurting at the gate but the Indians led the league in attendance in the ’90s, they aren’t struggling.”

“Another issue that we have is these short West Coast road trips. Twice this season we’ve had to go to the coast just for three games. We played the Dodgers three times then came back to Chicago and in the middle of August we have to go to Oakland just for three games. And last year baseball was so late in bringing out the schedule that we lost valuable sales time in September trying to get season tickets sold. Folks like to know who the Sox will be playing and we try to give them an idea in September. Last year baseball kept revising the schedule so much that we couldn’t do it because we didn’t have the information. We were told for example that the Mets were going to come to Chicago on a weekend which would have meant a big crowd, and then when the final schedule came out, the league sent the Mets to Detroit.”

“And the interleague schedule now just has no sense to it. We’ve played the Pirates three consecutive seasons but we haven’t played the Brewers, a team only 90 miles away, since 2000.”

“I know a lot of people thought the issue with the schedule was due to the husband and wife team that was putting them together so baseball changed to different folks. Then the thinking was that the issue was because many of the people working on the schedule spent the majority of their time in the National League, that maybe they didn’t understand the A.L. or the rivalries but apparently that’s not the issue either. I honestly think though that baseball does favor certain teams regarding the schedule.”

ML: I think we talked about this in the past, but when Fox Sports or ESPN decide to pick up a Sox game, say at home. How does that affect you?

BG: “It does in a few areas. This year for example Fox picked up an August game of ours in Kansas City and an August home game with the Rays. That meant that we aren’t going to have enough games being shown by our local rights holders so ‘make goods’ have to be issued and no one really wants to do that.

(Author’s Note: ‘Make goods’ refer to commercials that were supposed to run during the game. Either money has to be refunded to the sponsors because they weren’t shown or the commercials have to be shown at another time. Often in this case additional commercial plays will be given to the sponsors for free because of the trouble that was caused them.)

“The other area is regarding game times. I try to be proactive with this, I’ll call Major League Baseball and just try to get an idea of what they are thinking, and could ESPN or Fox be picking up one of our games? They have to let us know at least 23 days before the game and I try to narrow down what games they might be looking at. That way if they pick one up and change the game time, we have time to get the word out to our fans and season ticket holders. In a case like Fox you are talking about a three o’clock start instead of six and I’ve seen it happen where fans say from Iowa will show up at the park as the game is ending because they never got the word about the game time being changed. Naturally they are upset and they blame us but it wasn’t our

doing. The last week of the season the time frame is only five days advance notice so already I'm looking to see what games they may be looking at."

"I've learned over the years in this area. I used to assign specific game times to every one of our games but now when I look at next season's schedule, if there are any games that I really think may be picked up I'll just put TBA on the schedule. That gives everyone notice that we don't know what time we'll play the game yet."

ML: I don't know if you have a "typical day", but what is your day like? And does it change in the off season?

BG: "The question I get asked the most about the offseason from fans is, 'Do you still go to the office every day?' (laughing) The offseason is actually the busier time for everyone because that's when we have to do the work for the following season. We have to do everything from make a spring training schedule to getting our advertising lined up to figuring out what station is going to do what games. You can't wait until March to start on those things. In the off season the hours are shorter but that's really the only difference. During the season I have to be at every home game because of the broadcasting end, so the hours can get pretty long, but you can't get any better than having to "work" watching 81 home games in the broadcast booths with guys like Hawk or Ed or Moose or Bill Melton."

ML: Bob, I know you also work with the Sox Alumni Association that was brought back a few years ago, in large part because of the efforts by Roland Hemond and Bill Melton. Tell us about that, what goes on, how many members and so forth.

BG: "The purpose is to reconnect with our former players and that means everyone from the former All-Stars to guys who may have only played for us for a single season. We want them to feel welcome anytime they come to Chicago, if they need tickets ... whatever it may be. We publish an alumni newsletter every quarter and we always update our database. We are always looking for information on former players; we don't have a contact for everyone so that's a work in progress."

"This all stems from Jerry's belief that the White Sox are a family. I know I'm getting more calls all the time from former players about things and they are always great to talk to. And they help us out ... Robin Ventura was able to fill in for us in the broadcasting booth; Jack McDowell will be helping us when we go to Oakland because Steve Stone is taking a few days. We appreciate it. And we feel that down the road you just don't know where this could lead. By treating our former players as family, when they have sons or grandsons and maybe they are trying to decide if they want to play pro baseball and if the White Sox are in the mix, that 'family' approach may be part of their decision to sign with us. That through their fathers or grandfathers they'll hear that we are a good organization to be with."

ML: How did it feel to get a world championship ring (in 2005)?

BG: "It was awesome. I started to wonder if it would ever happen and what made it more special was the fact that Jerry personally presented them to all of the members of the organization. The only thing that I have — and I'm not really into memorabilia that has more sentimental value — is that when my uncle died he willed me his 1956 World (Series) championship ring. Because of the relationship that I had with him all those years that is the only thing I have that is more important to me than the Sox championship ring."

ML: Bob, sum up your years in the front office of the White Sox for me?

BG: “Mark, it’s a phenomenal place to work. You can’t find a better place in sports to work. And one way that’s borne out is because the Sox without question have the longest tenured staff in Major League Baseball. Jerry gets good people and lets them do their job. He treats everyone very well and as long as you treat others the same way and do what you are asked to do, you never have any trouble. All of us follow Jerry’s lead with each other and with our fans, he wants us to respond to every e-mail, every phone call. If any fan ever has an issue, he wants us to react to it. Like I said, you can’t do any better than this organization.”

