

Interview with Joe Adcock (1967)

*Clips of Cleveland Indians manager Joe Adcock's radio show with Bob Neal of WERE in 1967.
Transcribed by J.G Preston in March 2018.*

BN: Joe, tonight I'd like to start off by asking you what you consider the most difficult part so far of being a major league manager.

JA: (laughs) You should have given me time to have thought about that question before you asked it! Everything. It's a 24-hour-a-day job, on the field and off the field, watching after 24 – I say 24 players, there's something like 45 ballplayers in camp. Up until this year, I only had to worry about Joe Adcock, right now I'm worried about all of them, so that's the most difficult part.

BN: Joe, you know, over the years and all the years that you played, and you played with some great teams and under some great managers, have you found yourself reviewing Joe Adcock as the manager at night and thinking back on a day's efforts and what you might like to try to do as a manager? What I'm trying to say is, are you going to try and take some of the good things that you experienced from managers that you thought were good and encompass them with your own ideas?

KA: Definitely, there's some things that I think are basic, that are sound, and are just common, ordinary facts in baseball, and that's one thing that I have tried to install and will continue to try to install, with myself and the players. This is a game that I say no one really knows, and if they do, well, go find him for me, 'cause I need his help. Common judgment plays a big part, and that's what I intend to try to use is common judgment.

BN: Now I know that as a player, Joe, that there was never any problem for a manager with you. I know that at any time you get 25 or 30 men together, whether it be a baseball team, a football team, a ballet, an organization, a manager is confronted with some problems. And I suspect that you'll be equal to any occasion that might arise.

JA: Sure, the environment of all the individuals, which some 25, 30 or 40 ballplayers, are definitely different, Bob, and I don't see how everyone can be treated the same, and there's times a guy needs a pat on the back, there are times when you got to goose him and get him going. In fact, to me what really bugs me is to see a guy standing around killing grass. (chuckles) I never was one to stand around, and when I see one standing around, I just pick up a ball and say, "Hey, go get it." (laughs) To me, showing a little life and like you want to play, even if you don't, will show me that you do. That's one thing that I want the fellas to do, and I think I've pretty well gotten that across to 'em so far.

BN: Amen, I'd say you certainly have. Thanks to you, Joe.

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BN: Joe, as we get closer now to the opening of the American League season, I would expect there are many questions running through your mind, many running through the minds of fans. I know that, I'm sure that one of the strengths of the Indians is pitching. Now you've had a good chance over the years to study a lot of pitchers, and I want to ask you whether the philosophy that the Indians have some great young pitchers is merely a myth or is it a reality.

JA: No, it is not a myth, Bob. I faced the Indian pitching staff, the fellas that are here now, three years when I was an Angel. They're tough, they're good pitchers. The ability is there. Now, I don't believe that they have pitched up to their ability. Fellas like Sam McDowell, I know is a better pitcher than a nine-game winner, which he won in 1966, I don't think Sam is satisfied with that. Sonny Siebert, to me, should be a better pitcher than a 16-game winner. Maybe Luis Tiant, Gary Bell and Steve Hargan, which they're 12-to-14-game winners, I think those fellows could improve. Yet let's go back to the defense that they had behind them, that might be a reason. Again, let's go back to that common judgment. These fellas, especially here in spring training, some of them have tried to change, I don't see why they should try to change. We all want to improve, I know they want to improve. You've got to have good ability all the way around, other words, if you have good pitching and you don't have the defense, you're making the mental mistake behind these pitchers, well sure, they're going to be losers. There'll be times when they'll go out and their ability will excel, and good pitching always stops good hitting, and therefore they will win their share of the ballgames, but this year, if I can stress one thing for the pitcher to try to pitch each hitter, and our infield and outfield play that hitter according to the way he's being pitched, I think we can improve their pitching ability.

BN: That makes mighty good sense, Joe, and I think it's interesting for a manager, a man now who's a major league manager who was a mighty good hitter, and I know that in your career, you studied pitchers and the way the defense is playing you very carefully, didn't you.

JA: Sure, every time I walked to the plate I would take a look at the outfield, take a look at the infield. Knowing the pitcher also. I always hated to face a pitcher for the first time, I figured he had the better part of it. Somebody's either told him that I was a high-ball hitter or a low-ball hitter, but yet, I don't know if he's a fastball pitcher, how fast, if he's a breaking ball pitcher, what kind of breaking ball, or if he's a knuckleball pitcher, what his knuckleball will do. So I figure a pitcher facing a hitter the first time has the advantage, and yet, after you face him three of four times, then you see the speed of his ball, you've, you have seen his best fastball, you know that he cannot throw any harder, and that's the way a hitter hits, he judges the speed of the ball. And once you see his best fastball, then you should pretty well have him timed. Of course, his motion has a lot to do with it, somethin' that you have not seen, he might be herky-jerky, he might be smooth. Personally, I always liked to hit at the guy that was smooth and threw over the top, you seemed to pick up the ball better, but then, up comes a guy maybe like Sam McDowell, herky-jerky, all arms and legs flyin' at you, you don't pick up the ball and you have a tough time. Again, good hitting...good pitching stops good hitting.

BN: And certainly the Indians should have good pitching. Thanks to you, Joe Adcock.

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BN: And Joe, the other night we were talking about Indian pitching, and I think you described it perfectly and what your hopes are for it. This spring now we've seen a number of fellows playing in the outfield, and this is not directed at why so-and-so played in any position, because I think that's a manager prerogative, to take a good look and see what he can do to put on his best outfield in a certain given situation. Would it be fair, Joe, to ask you whether you're going to go with an outfield corps rather than individuals who might be designated as my left fielder, my right fielder, my center fielder.

JA: It will be an outfield corps, more or less, Bob. When you say that so-and-so is your center fielder, or so-and-so is the left fielder or right fielder, I think the ballpark will have a lot to do with it, I think maybe who's pitching will have something to do with it. Yet on the other hand, I would like to be able to say that I had three guys that would play the outfield every day until one of 'em or all three of 'em played their way out of the lineup. I don't think that is this type of ballclub.

BN: Well, you know, that's refreshing, Joe, and I'm not saying this to you because you're sitting here, but it's refreshing for me to talk to a manager who has this philosophy, because I think ballparks and pitchers are a substantial possibility for the Indians to generate some runs.

JA: Well especially lefthanded pitching against our ballclub right now. I don't mind telling you that I, that...that worries me. And also I don't mind telling you I'm a righthanded hitter (chuckles) and I won't have the bat in my hand. To me, I'd like to know that we could go out and knock any lefthander that started the ballgame out of the box, say, by the fifth or sixth inning against our ballclub, but lefthanded pitching, the way I see our ballclub right now, has got to give our ballclub trouble, and, and I can't see any help for our ballclub in improving their offense against lefthanded pitching.

BN: Joe, that brings me to the next question, now you as a hitter faced lefthanders, righthanders. As a righthand batter, do you believe a righthand batter had a better chance against a lefthander?

JA: I don't say that. I think a lefthanded batter has a less chance against a lefthanded pitcher, and one reason is that there are fewer lefthanded pitchers, and not to say that there are not as many in number lefthanded hitters. But a righthanded batter would definitely see more righthanded pitchin' over a course of a year, 162 ballgames, than he would see lefthanded pitching. And I think that would be true with any ballclub, whether it be the Yankees or Minnesota or Baltimore or Washington or Kansas City. Take Kansas City, for an example, they have five starting pitchers, all five righthanders. Our ballclub, five starting pitchers with only one lefthander. So there are more righthanded pitchers than lefthanded pitchers. And the lefthanded pitchers that are starting pitchers in the American League, they're top pitchers, take the two pitchers with the White Sox, John and Peters, there are no two better pitchers in baseball, of course Whitey Ford's been with the Yankees a long time...

BN: The guy with Minnesota [*unitelligible*]... (laughs)

JA: Jim Kaat's top lefthander in the league, top pitcher in the league you might say. So my ballclub right now, the way it looks to me, we're going to have an awful lot of trouble with lefthanded pitching.

BN: Well, let's hope that we can generate some power against these lefthanders. Tomorrow night, I want to ask Joe about his philosophies on hitting.

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BN: Joe, this spring you have conducted what I consider, at least in my opinion, a really solid, constructive move in the right direction, and only because I believe that a man can improve his golf swing if he takes lessons from a pro, I believe a bowler can improve his bowling stroke if he takes lessons from a pro, and why shouldn't it be that a ballplayer can improve, I don't say make a .300 hitter out of a .220 hitter, but why is it that so many people feel that a ballplayer can't be improved with some instruction.

JA: Let's go back to the golf first, Bob. (chuckles) I never played golf in my life, and of course today you have a lot of ballplayers playing golf. I'm firmly against it, if baseball is your profession, that golf should be secondary, and if you have that much time to go out and improve upon your golf swing, you should have that much time to go out and spend in a battin' cage and improve upon your hitting. That's my theory about hitting, I think anybody or anyone that wants it can improve upon his hitting, and that's what it takes is practice, to go in there and stay 30 minutes or 40 minutes or until you get blisters on your hand. I did that all of my career, especially the early part of the year. Up in the summer months, in August, July and August you might say, I don't think you need as much batting practice as you do the early part of the season. But after a long layover of five months during the fall and the winter months, when you're on vacation, you get old, you get stale, you get rusty, you lose your timing, and it takes a while to get it back. Also on the other hand, if you're hitting the ball good, you're hitting the ball sharp at the early part of the year, I don't see where extra batting practice can help. But I am a firm believer that anyone can improve that's willing to go out and put in the time and the effort to learn to improve. I think fellas can be helped with their stance, I think they can be helped with the grip of the bat, I think that you can help a hitter maybe by just talking to him. But no one can swing it except the individual, that's what makes baseball the game that it really is.

BN: And that means, of course, he's gotta work at it.

JA: That's right, that's what it takes.

BN: Joe, you know, the other day I noticed Vic Davalillo batting against a lefthanded pitcher, and for the first time I can remember in several years, he stayed in there real tight against him, as a matter of fact he came up with a base hit, and I think the whole ballclub got only five. Are you encouraged by the way he looks?

JA: I think Vic has tried his best to stay in this year, and then there's been occasions where he bails out. This is, could be caused from a habit that he has formed, and you get into bad habits and you keep 'em, that is, bailin' out, that was his bad habit. Again, it's hard to break yourself of a habit, regardless of what it is, and I think that's been Vic's biggest trouble is trying to break hisself of this habit of bailin' out. When I see him bail out, I come out of there myself and holler at him right there, "Get back in there and stay in there." Let's, let's go even a little bit further and

say that when this ball starts flyin' up around your head or your body or under you or behind you, it sometimes is tough to stay in there, Bob, but then, ask yourself one question, you either stay in, swing the bat, hit the ball or go home. Now which, what do you want to do?

BN: Right. There's, really it boils down to one of those two choices, Joe. Well, I want to thank you, this week has been a very refreshing one, I think the fans are really gonna enjoy, not only the Cleveland Indians, but the fact that you're the manager of this ballclub, because if anybody really wants to prove something and is desirous of giving the Indians and Cleveland a very exciting ballclub, I know it's you, Joe. And we'll be with you all year and rootin' for you and we hope things work out.

JA: Thank you, Bob. It'll take time but I think we'll make it.

BN: Thank you, Joe Adcock.