



Sigma Summaries

Vol. 31, No. 10

October 2004

The Building of a Team

On a beautiful day in August, I was invited to play golf with some great friends and clients, Lance Parrish, Bill Adlhoch and Alan Trammell. My golf game was somewhat muted by the fact that I had some questions I wanted to ask Alan. On about the third hole, I asked Tram if he would mind talking about his life in baseball in between some of his shots. As is always the case with Tram, he obliged. There were times that we talked under a tree

What made you decide to stay in baseball after your playing days were over? There was never a doubt in my mind that I wanted to be a baseball "lifer". As a kid, I thought about baseball from the time I woke up until I went to bed. Through high school, I would dream about being a great player in the major leagues. I suppose many kids dream about this type of life, but I was fortunate that my dream turned into reality. I don't want to bore you about my high school career, even though I was a pretty good basketball player as well, so I will jump to the Detroit Tigers where I spent my entire professional career.

My first year was a year of adjustments, and then along came Sparky Anderson! He taught me how to play the game and what it took to be a winner. That included your field presence! We were to act like professionals and if you didn't like what he had to say he would have you out the door in a heartbeat. As Sparky would say, my way or the highway! We thought it best to do it his way.

As it turned out, he was the master at getting his players to work

together as a team and really learn to respect one another. Sparky taught me the right way to go about your job. I could go on for hours on what that man taught me, but back to why I wanted to stay in baseball.

As an everyday player who played in All Star games and a World Series, I felt I had the knowledge of the game. My only concern was my ability to relate to the players. My personality is somewhat laid back, but when I have to I can turn it up a notch and be firm. Patience has always been an asset, and my ability to learn from mistakes has always been part of my repertoire. Now the question was, could I be the "captain of my ship" (Sparky phrase)? Many of my teammates and coaches encouraged me to give it a shot, and I did.

What has been the biggest difference between this year's team and last year's team?

That is an easy question to answer. The players!!! Last year, many people felt we had a minor league team. I would suggest many of our players needed to be playing in the minor leagues to gain more confidence and experience. It hurt

to see those players get beat on day in and day out, but I knew there were some potential major league players on that team. Many of those players got the opportunity to play in the big leagues and I can assure you they liked it. That being said, competition at the major league level is very cruel and many of those players will never see the major leagues again. The ones that survived, like Mike Maroth and Brandon Inge had a learning experience they will never forget. They know what it is like to go to the ballpark and hope that they can win versus going to the park and feeling like they have a real good chance of winning. We still aren't where we want to be, but I can assure you the clubhouse mood is night and day from last year.

Now to the most obvious reasons we are better, Pudge Rodriguez, Carlos Guillen, Jason Johnson and Rondell White! Those free agents are the cores of our new team! From there we can continue to build. I almost forgot about the Fernando Vina signing. Without his commitment, it is possible that none of the other signings would have taken place. I tip my hat to him for getting the ball rolling. I am hopeful he can recover

from his injuries, but from what I am hearing it is a long shot.

With the new additions to our team, we were able to have a quarterback behind the plate, a quarterback in the middle of the infield and a very solid outfielder to strengthen our team. This new backbone allowed the younger players to learn, relax and just play the game. Pudge took over the pitching staff and the young pitchers have responded to his authority. It only makes sense because he may be the best catcher that has ever played the game! Carlos Guillen has had a year like he has always thought he could have, but has been bit by the injury bug for most of his career. This year he has been able to stay healthy for most of the season and the numbers he has put up have certainly been impressive. What I admire about him the most is his ability to talk to the young players and lead by example. He has taken Omar Infante under his wing and to a new level of play that even Omar couldn't have imagined. All in all, we have a good mix of young players along with a good mix of older players.

What needs to be done with this team to get them into a position of competing for the divisional crown next year?

That is a tough question because we have some young players that have really started coming on since the All Star break. I was concerned with Carlos Pena, but all of a sudden he has really shown he can play at this level. We have others doing the same thing. Another player that comes to my mind is Craig Monroe. He has really shown us that he has a chance to be an everyday player next year.

These situations can really cloud your mind from week to week on what needs to be done for next year. I suppose, if I had to, I would love for us to get a solid starting pitcher. Jeremy Bonderman has the potential to be our number one guy, but I would really like for him to be a number three or four starter so he can just go out there and pitch without all of the added pressure of being our number one guy. Jason Johnson has done a nice job of taking over our number one starter position, but in my mind he would be better off as our number two or three starter. Our infield is in pretty good shape so I don't feel anything dramatic will take place there. Our outfield is still kind of up in the air so there could be some changes out there.

The biggest change that I would like to see going into next year, is for our players to believe in themselves and their teammates. We have lost too many games because we just didn't make the necessary adjustments to win. We talk so much about hitting the fastball, but there are times when we have to look for a breaking ball and crush it! We still are a young team and I am hopeful that our young guys are starting to learn what it takes to win. The thing that really confuses me is there have been times this season, when I feel we are starting to "get it" and then all of a sudden it is gone! This is what makes managing so difficult.

How has your position of managing the Detroit Tigers affected your family? Anytime your job takes you away from your family, it is tough. The most valuable player on my team is my wife Barbara!! She is the captain of our

ship! She has tolerated my dreams for many years. Our three children have adapted well to our baseball life. Like all families, there were times where it would have been nice if Dad were home, but my job is what it is. It requires me to be gone for most of the year. My family now is older and I see them often. My son is actually working here in Detroit and that has really been nice. He is living with me and that is cool because I just sleep there when I am in town and when I am gone, he is on his own. My two other children are still in school back in California, but old enough to take care of themselves so Barb can spend some time with me when she can get away.

My life is baseball and that is all that I know and love. I have tried some other jobs, but every minute I was doing non-baseball work, I would be thinking about what I needed to do to prepare myself for my current job. Sparky always told me that managers are hired to be fired and my goal is to make it really tough for them to get rid of me! I have passion for my job and I am going to work as hard as I can to bring Detroit another World Series Championship team. I also want you to know, that I love my family dearly and I make a conscious effort to spend quality time with them when they are here or during the off-season in California. I love taking my daughter to school, stopping to get a bagel and just talking with her. I am so lucky to have the family support that I have because there are so many marriages and families that get destroyed because of the imbalance of job and family. I know my family knows how much I love and appreciate them!!!!

How have your coaches handled the last two years?

My coaching staff is a team and I really want to stress that point. I hired each of these men to be on my team. I want them to feel free to express themselves even if it is totally against what I am thinking. This is how we have made it through the really tough times.

Gibby (Kirk Gibson) has been a rock! He has always maintained that championship spirit. His energy is electrifying and it is seen everyday by the players.

Big Wheel (Lance Parrish) has that calming, strong spirit that doesn't waver when things aren't going very good. He has been my friend for so many years that he knows what to say to me and when to say it.

Cluckie (Bob Cluck) has been a long time friend of mine since we started our baseball school in California. He knows pitching and how to handle

pitchers. He has taken this young staff and taught them how to believe in their abilities. All of these pitchers have "big league stuff", but many of them don't even know it yet. He feels that all of these pitchers are going to be great and what a wonderful feeling it is going to be when it happens. At times, I thought he was crazy, but that is the way Bob thinks.

Sammy (Juan Samuel) is the most consistent man I have ever met. He is my third base coach and that is the job where the reporters jump all over him when he sends in a runner from third base and the runner is out. The players really respond to his million dollar smile and his calming presence. It also helps that he is bi-lingual. There have been times where I have lost my cool and the non-English speaking players look at me with a blank stare that can put even more coals on the fire. Then Juan jumps in and interprets my most sincere sentiments!!!

Killer (Mick Kelleher) is the master. He is in charge of my infielders! He works with those players every day. He moves the infielders during the game depending on the situation and he is known throughout the league as having an added sense that most don't have. When he moves a player, I don't even think about second-guessing him.

Mr. Hitter (Bruce Fields) is my hitting guru!!! There were times last year where I thought we were going to have to admit him to the funny farm. This year has certainly been different! He is constantly working with our hitters and the improvement has been very noticeable. He has the attitude, much like Cluckie's attitude with the pitchers that these hitters are going to take us to the World Series, once they start believing in themselves. If we can continue to make the necessary adjustments he might be right!

Alan Trammell and I have been friends since 1984. I knew from the first time I met him he was someone very special. His career speaks for itself. The way he carried himself on and off the field is something I will always admire and respect. I am absolutely confident in his ability to captain his ship and steer it in the direction of bringing another World Championship to Detroit. Talking with Alan was absolutely more rewarding than our scores on the golf course!

Alan Trammell was my first professional client at Sigma and I thank him for the many years of working together. We, too, have gone through some very difficult years together because of market conditions, but our confidence in one another has never wavered.

Written by: David B. Bergman

* * * * *

