

# Al Michaels press event 12-9-20

## **Jon Shestakofsky**

Hello everyone, and welcome to the National Baseball Hall of Fame's conference call with Al Michaels. My name is Jon Shestakofsky. I'm Vice President of Communications and Education at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. Please note that this media session is being recorded and a transcript will be posted to the Hall of Fame's website, baseballhall.org within the next 24 hours. As you know, moments ago, it was announced by the Hall of Fame that Al Michaels has been selected as the 2021 winner of the Ford C. Frick Award for broadcasting excellence. Congratulations to you, Al, and thank you for joining us on this call. Al's going to be formally honored in Cooperstown at Hall of Fame Weekend's Awards Presentation, taking place Saturday, July 24, 2021, along with 2020 Ford C. Frick Award Winner Hawk Harrelson, as well as Dick Kaegel, the 2021 winner of the JG Taylor Spink Award for baseball writing excellence and Nick Cafardo, the 2020 JG Taylor Spink award winner, who will be honored posthumously. So again, congratulations, Al. We're very excited to be honoring you and your career and are looking forward to July. Before we open up for questions, happy to turn it over to you for an opening statement.

## **Al Michaels**

Well, Jon, I'm very excited trust me on this because, you know, I think back to, I've had a pretty nice run in my career, a lot of great breaks and a lot of fun and not too many regrets. But the one regret I might have is the fact that having started in baseball, and building my career around it beginning in the 60s, and going through the 70s, and 80s. And all the years on Monday Night Baseball on with the Reds and with the Giants and getting to do the World Series in 95. And then that kind of was the end of it. And because I was never at the network that had the rights. So I really miss it a lot. And this is able now to take me back to the beginning because I really feel in a way, since it's been so long since I have done baseball that it's like an out of body experience, like somebody else did this. But it takes me now back to the beginning to the formative years to doing all of that all those games through the decades. And it's like the circle is complete. And believe me when I was named as the winner of the Ford Frick Award, it was very special and I'm deeply honored by it.

## **Jon Shestakofsky**

That's wonderful Al. Thank you. And now we're just about ready to take questions from the call participants. So to the call participants, if you would like to ask a question of Al Michaels, please first click the participants button on your screen and then click the raise hand button. When it is your turn to ask the question you'll be asked to unmute your line at that time. And we can begin with our first question which will come from Ryan Leong at NBC Radio. Okay, go right ahead, Ryan.

## **Ryan Leong**

Okay. Al congratulations. I know that you mentioned you started your career with both the Reds and then later of course the Giants.

## **Al Michaels**

We lost Ryan.

**Jon Shestakofsky**

Ryan, we can't hear you. So if you'd like to ask that question again. Raise your hand a little later. We'll go to Christopher Heidel. Christopher, go right ahead.

**Christopher Heidel**

Hi, Mr. Michaels. Thank you for taking my question. I grew up watching you a lot on ABC. Did Chris Schenkel teach you a lot broadcasting? I know you filled in a lot for the Professional Bowlers Tour in the early and late 70s. What did you learn from Chris Schenkel?

**Al Michaels**

Well, I learned that... first of all, Chris was one of the finest human beings I have ever been around and I was part of that whole group of broadcasters of ABC in the 70s when I joined Howard Cosell, Jim McKay, Keith Jackson. Chris was just a man of style and class and he was just a mentor in a way in the sense that he was just so calm and cool. And he was a very comfortable listen. And when I think about Chris that's how I hear him in my mind's ear as a guy who was always in control, very calm and people just enjoyed him. And, you know, in those years, you know, this is before social media and all the rest of we have right now. So I don't know that it could ever exist again, but I really can't think of anybody who ever said a cross word about Chris Schenkel. Certainly nobody who, who knew him. So those are my memories of Chris Schenkel.

**Christopher Heidel**

Thanks.

**Jon Shestakofsky**

Wonderful. Hey, let's try Ryan again. Ryan.

**Ryan Leong**

Yeah, let's see if this is gonna work this time. Can you hear me okay, now?

**Jon Shestakofsky**

Yes.

**Al Michaels**

I can.

**Ryan Leong**

Oh, great. Excellent. Thank you so much. Well, Al congratulations. And I know you mentioned again, you got your start first with the Reds and then the Giants. And I read somewhere about how, you know, of course, the Giants had some really lean years when you broadcast in the mid 70s. What did you learn working with a guy like Lon Simmons, who's also of course in the Hall of Fame?

**Al Michaels**

We lost him again, but let me just... I lost you, but I understand. It's a bad line. Simmons. Fantastic man. The story was after the '73 season, I've been with the Reds for three years. And I was offered the Giants job. And I'm leaving one of the great teams in the history of baseball. They go to what turned out to be an almost more of a franchise that was saved at the end by Bob Lurie. Lon had retired, even though he was only his I think early 50s, his wife had died. And he needed time. And that opened up the

vacancy. And that's when they called me and said, you know, Lon is gonna step aside. They thought, you know, forever. But it turned out that I did the first two years with a guy by the name of Art Eckman, who is in Atlanta now and Lon, and I worked together in '76. And we had so much fun. I mean, he the driest sense of humor, the driest guy I've ever met. And frankly, when I got offered a full time job at ABC, beginning in 1977. One of the hardest things in accepting that job was to think that I was leaving Lon, because we had such a blast in '76 with a terrible team, basically. And a terrible ballpark. And, you know, it wasn't a lot of fun, necessarily describing what was going on the field. But Lon had this fantastic sense of humor. I'm so glad that he's in the Hall of Fame too, well deserved, and a guy who is iconic in the Bay Area. But as I say, you know, the last thing that was tugging at me before I went to ABC was to leave Lon, but it kind of worked out and but I'll remember that year 1976 very fondly.

### **Jon Shestakofsky**

That's great. Our next question will come from Richard Justice at mlb.com.

### **Richard Justice**

Hey, Al, two questions for you. One apparently you knew pretty early in life that you wanted to do this. I want to ask what drew you to it and why do you think broadcasters are so enamored with doing baseball? What is it about the sport that broadcasters love so much?

### **Al Michaels**

Richard, first off, I grew up in Brooklyn. And I grew up in Flatbush and the Dodgers were still there. And my father loves sports. So the first thing I ever remember in life was my father walking me over to Ebbets Field to go to a game I was probably six years old. Dodgers were playing the Cardinals. I remember walking in and I was just enamored with the colors. Then Ebbets Field was a bandbox. All of the signage on the right field scoreboard, just the way it looked. And we sat in the upper deck behind the broadcast booth, and I looked down and I saw these guys announcing the game and I thought to myself, you know, I want to be here like every day for the rest of my life, and get in for free. And those are the first thoughts I ever had. So that's where it all started with me. And as a kid in Brooklyn, when you can walk the Ebbets Field, you have to be a baseball fan. So that got me started. And I think, why broadcasters are enamored with baseball. It's so unusual in the sense that there's a rhythm to it a pacing to it, that no other sport possesses, because you're going to have x number of seconds between pitches. It's kind of like you know, it's a leisurely pace as you know, it can get extremely frenetic and dramatic which also is fantastic. You know, as the game gets hot in the late innings, but you don't have that in in football, football is four seconds of action. And you know, 20-30-35 seconds of inaction. Basketball is a flow. Hockey has a flow. They're continuous. I think baseball enables you to stop and start and reflect and tell stories. And that's why it's so different. And I think that's why people are enamored with baseball, it got me started. And, and, you know, I was able to do it for a lot of years, Richard, and it's the one thing that I do best to this day,

### **Richard Justice**

I want to ask you about the (1989 Bay Area) earthquake. And you made the transition that night from being a sports announcer to a news announcer how proud are you of that night on your resume?

### **Al Michaels**

Well, I look at it this way. I grew up, you know, and went to school in Arizona State specifically to major in radio and TV and minor in journalism. And like anybody in the journalism business, when you start out, it's who, what, when, where, and how. So, those are the basic tenets. And I knew that night, that

clearly, we had a very dramatic, unforeseen occurrence. And I just had to remain very calm. And I remember thinking, just talk about the things, you know for certain, don't speculate, don't guess, don't receive outside information that's not been corroborated. And so that was, I think, the hardest part, in a way, but I just had to, you know, in a way, Richard, slow it down, because it was highly dramatic. The pictures that we had, obviously, the aerial views were highly dramatic, the chevron section of the bridge, the fire in the Marina, and eventually the collapsed freeway in Oakland, as the major sites. And all I remember doing is just, hey, here's what I know, here's what I see. And the viewer assess it from that point. So it's a moment that yes, I'm happy that I was proud I guess that I was able to pull it off and a lot of people really appreciated the coverage that night. On the other hand, you know, there's no way you can exalt over a tragedy and you know, people lost their lives that night. And it was just so damaging in so many ways to that area. So you know, it's a two-sided coin for me. I look at it, and I go, okay. I'm pleased with the job I did that night, but I wish it had never happened.

**Richard Justice**

Congratulations.

**Al Michaels**

Thank you, Richard. Thank you.

**Jon Shestakofsky**

Again, to anyone looking to ask a question, please click participants at the bottom of your screen and then click the raise hand button. Our next question will come from David Edelstein at WUTR. David, go right ahead.

**David Edelstein**

Mr. Michaels, congratulations on the award.

**Al Michaels**

Thank you, David.

**David Edelstein**

With the award as the most recent example of, obviously a successful and storied career all the way up to this point. I'm wondering from, you know, break a journalism rule here kind of a two parter. And one. One is, as you're going through the different stages of your career, and you think back from Arizona State on was there ever a moment where, you know, you thought that this kind of moment now with winning, receiving such a national award could be possible for you in your career? And could you be able to tell the story of maybe what one piece of advice you got from someone was that really helped influence your career path to get to this moment?

**Al Michaels**

Sure. Uh, the second one first is that I loved Curt Gowdy. I love Vin Scully. I love Jim McKay, you know, growing up listening to these men, and kind of modeled myself in many ways after them. And Curt Gowdy told me that at one point, early on, I got to do the 1972 World Series in the mall, crazy things and I'm 27 years old. (That was one of) those years that team announcer would supplement. Curt Gowdy and Tony Kubek on NBC and he said to me, at one point, he said: "Listen, kid, you know, you're gonna do very well. He said, just remember one thing is you get a little bit older, you've been in the business for a while. Don't get jaded." I didn't understand it at that time, but I do now because I've seen

others in this business who become jaded for one reason or another, they've been around too long. Don't get the breaks they want, whatever. It could be any number of reasons for them to become jaded. So I see that now. I didn't see it then. But that made me think that I am doing something that I dreamed of doing as a kid. That got to do got to do it at a very high level, obviously, and appreciate it, appreciate it, don't sit there and lament, something that might have happened could have happened should have happened you, you felt like you've been wronged. And those words have always been paramount in my brain. So I will never get jaded, I promise you that it's too late for me to get jaded right now I'm more appreciative, maybe than ever, along the way. I think anybody starting out in the business, I had big dreams when I started out. And I think back that was more a product of naiveté than anything else. Because when you're young, you think that a lot of things are possible. And it turned out that they were, but then you look back and go Holy mackerel, how in the world that I get the break to be here at that point in time to be hired by somebody. So I know, I talked to, you know, young people who want to get into the business who were just starting the business. And I tell them, hey, dream big. Why do you want to limit yourself? Why do you want to say I only want to, you know, be go this far. Dream big, keep going and use that as impetus. So I hope that answers your question. And, you know, look, you need luck, and you need breaks. And believe me, I have had my share of them. Not too many regrets, as I say very, very few. But so appreciative of, of all of the things that have happened over the years.

**Jon Shestakofsky**

And our next question will be from Bill Francis here at the Hall of Fame. Bill, go ahead.

**Bill Francis**

Congratulations, Mr. Michaels.

**Al Michaels**

Thank you, Bill.

**Bill Francis**

I missed the first few minutes, some computer problems, but what were your thoughts when you got the news about this prestigious award? You were being honored with it. Do you remember what your feelings were? Your thoughts were?

**Al Michaels**

I thought it was fantastic. I mean, I knew I was one of the eight finalists, I thought, I mean, Joe Buck's got to get it sooner than later. I mean, he's fantastic. And some of the other people who are on that list, from many years ago, up until currently, are going to wind up getting this award, there's no question. So when I was the anointed one, it was just a wonderful feeling. It was, and I said at the beginning of this call that I had done a lot of baseball in the 60s 70s 80s and some in the 90s. But it's been so long, it's the one thing that I really miss and this kind of takes me back. I thought, well, this really completes the circle because I've had a lot of wonderful moments in my career with a number of sports, obviously. But it all revolved around early on baseball. So in that sense to think back of how it all began, and what the cornerstone was, that made this award that much more special.

**Bill Francis**

And some of the names you are joining, legendary names, Scully, Mel Allen, Red Barber, Ernie Harwell, Dick Enberg just to name a few. Joining a list like that must be kind of overwhelming in a sense.

**Al Michaels**

Fantastic. I got to know a lot of those guys, Ernie Harwell. You mentioned Ernie's name. When I was a kid, and I was probably maybe a junior or a senior in college, and I'm looking for a job and I'm looking for advice and I had written to a number of announcers. Did not get a lot of responses, but the best and the most meaningful and impactful to me came from Ernie. Ernie sent me a handwritten note. And so when I got to meet Ernie when I was doing Major League Baseball, and obviously we were different, I was doing the Reds and the Giants. He was doing the Tigers, but we did cross paths. I'll never forget that. Growing up listening to Vin Scully, and I know Vinnie, and we've become great friends. To this day, I still talk to Vinnie every month or so. Phenomenal. Curt Gowdy loved him. Just love the way he went about it. Loved him as a man and as a friend. Dick Enberg. Knew Dick extremely well through the years. So, I look at that list and I'm thinking man, oh man, that's pretty good. That's pretty exciting. And I get it, in a way it kind of takes me back to my youth, hearing some of these people and then when I got into the business and became a major league broadcaster and doing Monday Night Baseball to get to know a lot of these men it's special. I look down that list and I go, damn, this is exciting. It's great.

**Bill Francis**

Great. Can you paraphrase the Harwell note that was so meaningful?

**Al Michaels**

It really was a fairly extensive one, but the premise of it was work hard. You know, you've gotten a lot of enthusiasm, I can see that in the letter that you wrote to me, you really want to do this. Keep plowing ahead, don't lose your enthusiasm. Put in the grunt work, and sooner or later, that break's gonna come for you. And he was right on all levels.

**Bill Francis**

One more thing. Have you been to Cooperstown?

**Al Michaels**

I have been to Cooperstown once when I was doing the Giants. In 1975. We played the Red Sox in the Hall of Fame game. And what I remember about that is we played a Sunday game at Shea Stadium against the Mets. We had a Tuesday game in Pittsburgh, against the Pirates. And so we flew up to Cooperstown on Sunday after the game in New York. And the one story I can tell you about that, I'm glad you just reminded me of this. So we had two pitchers on that team on the Giants team in those years. And those two pitchers and Art Eckman, who is my partner. So we go there and we're having dinner at whatever hotel we're staying at in the dining room, and it's me Art Eckman my partner, and these two pitchers. And I started to talk about there's nothing more exciting in baseball than a no-hitter. And I got them excited about it. Fast forward. Later that season. One of those pitchers Ed Halicki pitched a no hitter a Candlestick Park against the Mets. The other pitcher sitting at the table, John "The Count" Montefusco, who pitched a no-hitter in late September of '76 against the Braves. I mean, you talk about unbelievable occurrences. There you have it.

**Bill Francis**

Great story...

**Jon Shestakofsky**

Bill, we're kind of losing you here. We can't hear you at the moment. Bill, try that one more time.

**Bill Francis**

Any thoughts about Hawk Harrelson?

**Al Michaels**

Oh, what a character. I love hanging around him. I got to know Hawk when I was doing Monday Night Baseball. And in fact, one year he became the general manager of the White Sox. What a character. It'll be great sharing the stage with him next year.

**Jon Shestakofsky**

Perfect. And our last question, we'll come back to David Edelstein. Go right ahead, David.

**David Edelstein**

Oops, you know, technology in 2020. Here we are. That's kind of what I want to ask you about too Mr. Michaels to conclude is obviously this year has been wildly different than any other and I know some others who asked you questions touched on some of the other challenging events you've been part of including the earthquake. I'm wondering from you, as someone who obviously talked about always learning and continuing even at this successful point in your career. What have you learned as a broadcaster during this pandemic and with how sports have gone and how has that changed maybe your way of thinking as a broadcaster even at this point in your career?

**Al Michaels**

Well, I'll say that this has been obviously the most unusual circumstance ever. Nobody could have predicted this. A lot of things are still being done on the fly. I can only speak to it from the football sense of it doing Sunday Night Football. You walk into a stadium. Nobody's there. It's quiet. It's so different and it's really distressing in a way but I understand the circumstances. You really can't put people except for a few stadiums are putting in a limited amount of fans. And what I've tried to do this year is eliminate looking at anything but the field. Just concentrate on the field and I've used this expression before, but I feel like I'm a horse with blinkers the trainer puts blinkers on. So the horse won't look left and won't look right, he will won't look into the stands won't look into the infield, he's looking straight down the stretch for the finish line. And that's what I feel like this year and Chris Collinsworth my partner and I have talked about this a lot about, you know what we get it, we understand, it's not the same, we miss the fans tremendously. You miss the buzz, you miss everything that comes with 75,000 people in a stadium, but you just have to concentrate on the job, and just call the game. But look, the bottom line is, unlike every other broadcast, I can't wait for the fans to come back.

**Jon Shestakofsky**

Wonderful. And with that, Al thank you again for joining us on this very special day. Once again, we all congratulate you on your selection as the 2021 Ford C. Frick Award winner, and we look forward to celebrating your exceptional career right here in Cooperstown during Hall of Fame weekend in July.

**Al Michaels**

I do too. Thank you so much, Jon.

**Jon Shestakofsky**

Thanks.