

MLB Winter Meetings

Monday, December 4, 2023

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Jane Forbes Clark

Jim Leyland

Jon Shestakofsky

Josh Rawitch

Hall of Fame Press Conference

JON SHESTAKOFSKY: Good morning. My name is Jon Shestakofsky, vice president of communications and content for the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, and welcome to the Hall of Fame's Contemporary Baseball Era Committee Introductory Press Conference.

Joining me on the dais are Josh Rawitch, President of the National Baseball Hall of Fame; and the newest member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Jim Leyland; as well as chairman of the board of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Jane Forbes Clark. And also joining us today is Jim's lovely wife, Katie.

To begin, I would like to invite Jane to give a few opening remarks.

JANE FORBES CLARK: Thank you, Jon, and thank you all for being here today. As you know, the National Baseball Hall of Fame's 16-member Contemporary Baseball Era Committee for Managers, Executives and Umpires met yesterday to consider eight candidates for Hall of Fame election. And their ballot was selected by the 11-member historical overview committee of the BBWAA.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Hall of Fame, I would like to sincerely thank both committees, their members, for their very thoughtful and very insightful work. And

you heard the results of that work last night on MLB Network. We are so happy to have Jim here today on the dais.

He was a remarkably successful Major League manager, steering his teams to three pennants and a World Series championship across 22 Major League seasons at the helm of the Pittsburgh Pirates, Florida Marlins, Colorado Rockies, and the Detroit Tigers. A three-time Manager of the Year Award winner, he led his team to six division titles, twice winning the division in three straight seasons, with the Pirates, from 1990 to '92, and again with the Tigers from 2011 to 2013.

Between those, he piloted the 1997 Florida Marlins to the team's first World Series championship. Twenty years later, in 2017, he led Team USA to its first World Baseball Classic championship. And today he now joins the Baseball Hall of Fame team and our Class of 2024.

Congratulations, Jim.

(Applause.)

We are looking forward to our induction ceremony in Cooperstown on Sunday, July 21st, where Jim will be celebrated again, along with any electees who emerge from the BBWAA voting which will be announced on January 23rd, from Cooperstown, from the Baseball Hall of Fame Plaque Gallery on MLB Network.

And now, Jim, if Josh and I could give you your new team jersey and your new team cap.

JIM LEYLAND: This really feels nice.

(Laughing.)

JANE FORBES CLARK: It looks good.

JON SHESTAKOFSKY: Before we get going with questions and comments, I would like to point out that here to congratulate their new Hall of Fame teammate are a number of Hall of Famers, including Ted Simmons, Jim Thome, Joe Torre, Tony La Russa and Alan Trammell.

And now I would like to welcome Jim to give a few opening remarks. If you like, you can do that from your seat.

JIM LEYLAND: First of all, thank you very much. I want to thank several of the folks that were on the committee that stayed here today. They're dying to get home, and I

certainly understand that. But out of respect, like true Hall of Famers, they stayed here to pay their respects to me for getting in the Hall of Fame and, ladies and gentlemen, I appreciate that.

Excited to be nominated. Ecstatic to be elected. When I got the call, which I really wasn't expecting to get, to be honest with you, I got the word that it was going to be possibly from 6:30 to 7:15 was the timeframe. And about 10 minutes to 7:00 I left the family room with my family and went up to lie on the bed a little bit, thinking about it, figuring that I probably did not make it.

My wife and my son were coming up the stairs just when I got the call, and my wife and my son heard a lady's voice on the other end. My wife said, "Who is that?"

I said, it's "Jake from State Farm."

(Laughing.)

Anyways, I had 294 texts last night from friends and people all over the world, really. And I don't know if any of you have ever tried to respond to 294 texts, but when you text like this (indicating), it takes a long time to get through 294 texts, believe me.

So I'm looking forward to it. Certainly we will open this up to questions. I can't tell you how fortunate a ride it's been. I had a lot of help on the way. Several of those people are here today.

I talked earlier about me thinking maybe down the road about my speech. One thing I'm going to try to do is I'm going to try to group more people together instead of talking about 78 people that helped me. I want to pay my respects, but I think people get a little bored when you do that; so I'm going to try to figure out in the next couple months how to try to group that together where I can still pay my respects to the proper people but not bore everybody in the audience. So that's what I'm going to try to do.

So without further ado, if you have any questions at all, feel free to ask. I'm ready to go.

JON SHESTAKOFSKY: Perfect. Just raise your hand if you would like to ask a question and wait for a microphone to reach you.

Q. Can you talk about your singing career and your nickname Humperdinck? That's something that I think people should know how much you enjoyed that part of your life and something that might be interesting.

JIM LEYLAND: Well, believe it or not, when I was a kid, I was in the choir, and I loved to sing. I had a brother that played the piano, two sisters who played the piano, and we

hung around the piano every Sunday night and we sang, and that's what we did. So, maybe if you had a couple drinks, I didn't sound too bad at times.

Yeah, I love to sing. I still do. But I can't hit the high notes anymore. Anybody that ever saw me hide in the dugout can finally figure out why I can't hit those high notes anymore.

But, no, my singing career was very amateur.

Q. You referenced your siblings and your home in Perrysburg, and I wonder if you could speak to the importance of growing up in a big family around a lot of siblings and how that helped you relate to players as you went through your career.

JIM LEYLAND: Well, there was seven of us in my family. Nine counting my mother and father. My father was one of 16. He had 15 brothers and sisters. They always said the first one up was the best dressed. So I was used to that. My wife's one of 11. So I'm still around quite a few family members, although I have lost two brothers and two sisters in recent years.

So, I actually think, this is probably going to sound a little corny, but I actually think coming from a big family helped my managerial career because all of my siblings, all my brothers and sisters had a little different personalities. You had to learn how to understand each one of them and to take each one of them.

I think it was beneficial when I had to handle players that had different personalities, different styles. So I think it actually was very beneficial during my managerial career.

Q. You may not agree with me, but I always thought, and this is two questions, separate, that your tour de force was managing Team USA to that title, considering all the hoops you had to run through and all the rules you had to deal with. I wonder what you think of that in your career and what your recollections are of it.

JIM LEYLAND: Obviously it was a totally different scenario than managing a regular team during a regular MLB season. I've always said I've had a lot of good general managers in my day, some of them are here, several of them are here today. And Joe Torre was the general manager of that club, and what a job he did putting the right pieces together. We might not have had the most popular names, but he got exactly the right type of player.

I've said this, it was probably the best/worst job I ever had because the players had to amp up so soon in Spring Training and you're dealing with other teams' players, and you're paranoid about getting somebody hurt. You have to be very, very careful.

I don't think anybody would believe some of the phone calls that you get: Hey, my pitcher can only pitch 14 pitches tonight or my pitcher can pitch tomorrow.

It's a very trying experience, but it ended up being a very rewarding experience because we won for the first time for the United States. What a proud moment.

I will say this, a bunch of guys from different teams that competed against each other during the regular season got together and became a team in two weeks. I have never seen a team that got that close together in that short a period of time. They were hungry and they meant business and they wanted to show the world where the baseball belongs.

Q. Secondly, having been through this process, what did you think of the process of getting elected to the Hall on this committee?

JIM LEYLAND: Well, obviously it's a very great process. You never know how this is going to work out. You respect the process, you respect the people that are going to make their decision. There's one thing about this, for sure, the Hall of Fame carries so much integrity that it's going to be done right.

That's why I'm so proud today. This is not an easy place to get. It's not an easy place to get for a superstar player or manager or a broadcaster or anybody. This is a tough place to get. To end up here and to light here at the end of the career, it's awfully special. It's very tough to get here.

Q. You've been out of the game for a while now, you get the announcement yesterday, there's the time in between. As we all get older, there's time to reflect on your career. Since then and now, has there been anything that you reflected on since you've left the game, anything that has maybe changed how you view your career and how things have been and ultimately with your induction today?

JIM LEYLAND: Well, I think that there's always some things that you might alter a little bit. But my career has always been what it is. I'm smart enough to know, like all good managers, that it's all about the players, you try to be there for them, you try to handle them the right way, you try to show them the respect that they deserve.

And you also have to show leadership because, contrary to what a lot of people believe, I believe that young people and young baseball players, no matter how talented they

are, there can be a slight bit of insecurity there: Am I really good enough to be here? Do I really belong here? Can I really stay here?

I think that it takes somebody to show leadership to get them over the hump. In a lot of cases, I'm not saying he's the only guy, but in a lot of cases, it has to be the manager, because you live with them every single day. So I think that's very important for players, and I think it's very important for a manager.

Q. I wondered, coming out of Colorado and then spending that next six years with the Cardinals as a scout, what that did for you from your perspective of the game, having a new perspective of the game as a scout, working closely with Tony and Walt, and then were you different as a manager when you came back from that to the dugout?

JIM LEYLAND: I left Colorado because I just didn't feel I could make a difference. I stepped away for six years. A friend of mine, Walt Jocketty, then the general manager of the St. Louis Cardinals and of course a great manager himself, and my great friend Tony La Russa was manager of the Cardinals, so they hired me to go over there and go to Spring Training and do some scouting for them during the season. I scouted all the National League teams when they came through Pittsburgh.

But the first year or so there wasn't much difference, I was ready to stay away. Then about the third year or so I saw what was going on with the St. Louis Cardinals in the clubhouse, the camaraderie, I knew what kind of ship Tony ran, but I got anxious again. I said, you know, they were having fun, they were good, they practiced hard, they played hard, there was a good spirit in the clubhouse. I said, you know, I might want to try this again.

And when I left Colorado, I really did not think that I would manage again. But I thought that I might want to try this again. So fortunately and unfortunately, when the Detroit Tigers job became open, Dave Dombrowski, who I had worked in Florida with him and was fortunate enough to be on a team that won a World Series, called me at some point and said, "Do you think you're ready to get back in," and I said, "Yes."

It was kind of ironic because I actually signed with the Detroit Tigers in 1963. I ended up getting to the Detroit Tigers in 2006. So it took me a hell of a long time to get there, I can tell you.

Q. When you headed upstairs last night and waited for that call from State Farm, what were some of the thoughts that were going through your head at that point before you got the call?

JIM LEYLAND: I was just kidding about that, but, you know, it was just a special moment because, like I said, I wasn't really expecting it, and it was almost the fastest 12 hours or so during the day that I've ever spent in my life.

But when it got 6 o'clock, it seemed like the whole world stopped. I would look at the clock and it seemed like it would be 15 minutes and it was only one minute after 6. So I never went through anything like this. Like I said, 6:30 went by, 6:35, 6:40, 6:45, I figured it was over. My son felt it was over. My wife still believed that there was a chance. I was trying to figure out every scenario, how possibly, Well, they're just late calling me, maybe they're getting a flight for me or something. I was trying to make all this stuff up in my head. But when I finally did get that call, believe it or not, you people, I did cry a little bit. I did.

I'm not going to cry today, but I did cry a little bit. I had a few tears of joy. I don't know, is it the greatest moment in your life? I don't know. Was winning the World Series the greatest? Who knows what the greatest moment was. But certainly proud to be here today, and, like I said, to end up in this place, I've been there a few times with Tony winning, and to end up in Cooperstown, after starting as a not very good player and minor league manager, I don't want to get corny, but it's unbelievable. I mean, I never had any thoughts of going to Cooperstown, unless my son was playing at the Field of Dreams place out there where they play.

So, you know, it was just, it's a remarkable accomplishment. I guess I'm bragging a little bit, but I'm very proud of it and I'm very humbled by it, but I am extremely proud to have gotten that call. Not many people get that. That's hard to get. It's hard to get that call.

Q. From all the decisions and all the games and all the crisis over the years, what moments do you look back at and think these were my best moments?

JIM LEYLAND: Probably the Red Sox game in 2013. I had Cook warmed up, as well as Benoit, and I decided to go -- Cook was pretty good against Ortiz, but he hadn't pitched much lately, and I was afraid of him being a little bit wild. I ended up going with Benoit, who was my best pitcher, and he threw the right pitch, he just didn't locate the right pitch. But that's the one that I have tossed and turned a little bit about.

You know, Napoli was on deck, and at that time you could still bring pitchers in and out, so that was not a problem. It was on me. I'm not sure today if I made that right decision or not. I think I did, because I went to my best relief pitcher, and the guy that I felt had the ability to make the best pitch. But it could be a question.

Q. Curious, how would you describe your tenure with the Marlins, and how do you think it might have helped your Hall of Fame case?

JIM LEYLAND: My tenure with the Marlins, everybody knows, was not very long. It was very exciting. We went there in '97. I managed, once again, for Dave Dombrowski. They went out, they got a few players that winter, obviously. That team came together very quick. That team went on to win a World Series. I think the most unbelievable thing about that team was, you folks can check it, because I'm not exactly sure if I'm totally right, but I think I'm close, we were 26-5 in Spring Training.

And I hate to say this, but I was almost hoping we would lose a couple games, because this is crazy. I mean we would be behind three runs in the 9th inning and some kid from A ball would come up and pinch hit and hit a grand slam home run and we would win the game.

But, fortunately, we got out of the chute well and we ended well. So it was obviously a great experience. And then everybody knows the sale of the team and all that, and that's all part of it, that's fine. But, you know, winning a World Series, there's no greater experience than that.

Q. I want to take you back to the early '80s when you managed in Venezuela before becoming a big league manager, and how managing in winter ball, dealing with a different culture, different language, helped you to understand better what the Latin players go through and how much it helped you in your managerial career?

JIM LEYLAND: That was a trip for me. I managed Caracas in 1980. It was a great experience for me because at that time when I was over here in Spring Training we had a lot of Latin players that they didn't understand English. I really should have taken more time to understand how they were handicapped because they couldn't really understand some things. Now they have the schools and they have the English lessons and everything like that, which has been great for baseball. But the shoe was on the other foot when I went to Venezuela.

I had a book, I was looking at this book, like, hey, I was on the field like I knew what I was doing, (Speaking Spanish.) And these guys would look at me like I was nuts. And by the way, if you people notice that I don't listen too good, I don't hear too good either, so that's why I'm having him, he's helping me with these questions.

But, no, it was a great experience. And, seriously, the shoe was on the other foot. It was a great experience for me. So, I think it helped me. I always had a very good relationship with the Latin players. Now most of 'em speak English or have been tutored or most organizations have some avenue for them to learn the language, so it's worked out great.

Q. What kind of pride does it give you now to see Patrick following your footsteps and becoming a manager now in the Minor Leagues with the White Sox?

JIM LEYLAND: Yeah, well, I'm here today because several people gave me an opportunity. There's no free lunch. Once you get that opportunity, you got to earn your keep. Fortunately, the White Sox have given my son Patrick an opportunity. He managed Kannapolis Cannon Ballers last year, his first full affiliate season job, and did a very good job. I only went to three games, I stay away. He's on his own. He's got to earn it on his own. We talk a lot. He's a little more modern than I am when it comes to some of the strategies and stuff that goes on in today's game. I'm not going to sit up here and brag about my son, I'm not going to do that, but he's a baseball junkie like his dad. I think he's pretty good. But he's going to have to earn his own way and I think there's a possibility that he might.

Q. Have you given any thought to which team's logo you want to have on your plaque?

JIM LEYLAND: Thank you for reminding me of that. I was going to start out today by explaining that. I'm not really sure. I'm going to end up -- I think, I'm going to be discussing that with the Hall of Fame Committee. I'm going to take their advice on something like that. When you manage several teams, I do not want to disrespect anybody that I managed for. So I'm hoping that the Hall of Fame will help me along with that, possibly with no logo, I'm not sure just yet, that's a bridge we'll cross a little later. But the one thing I won't do is I won't show disrespect to any team I managed. So we'll see how that plays out. Not decided yet.

Q. You talked about your son managing and how managing has changed a little bit. How have you seen the job of manager change from the time that you did it to today?

JIM LEYLAND: Well, I think everybody talks about that question. I'm not sure it's changed as much as everybody thinks. I will say one thing, I don't know if I agree or disagree, the managers are playing their infield in quite a bit more than they used to. I played my infield in with one out in the first inning since I've been managing since 1971.

But they have changed now where there's some of these guys on second and third and the managers are playing their infields a little bit different. I'm sure there's some information out there, most people call it analytical information, which is fine. I call it information, which I had as much of that as you could possibly have when I managed. There's more of it today, there's some modern stuff. I'm old, but I'm not old school. I'm still willing to learn.

But it has changed a little bit, from what I understand. But I will tell you this, I've never ever had a general manager come down and hand me a lineup. I don't know if that goes on today or not, and I don't want to get into that because it can be controversial. I don't know if that happens or not, there's rumor that it has happened, I don't know. I've had general managers come down and suggest things to me, or maybe say they would like me to play a particular player, which is fine.

I, at lunchtime, I used to talk to Dave Dombrowski and my coaches every day, Hey, I got a tough call tonight, this guy or that day. And I would listen and then at the end of the day, because I was the manager, I had to make the decision. But I don't know that it's changed that much. Maybe it has. I'm not sure if that's just good reading material or it's actually changed.

Q. I remember you would always take pride and some emotion in watching some of your players reach individual accomplishments over the years. What are the emotions like, not only getting so many texts from former players and coaches, but also seeing some of the tributes publicly from guys who played or coached with you?

JIM LEYLAND: I'm very happy the last 24 hours because I've gotten so many texts from so many great players. But I can tell you this, I've also got a lot of great texts from former minor league players, and that means a lot to me. Guys that never made it. Guys that you had to tell 'em their career was over. That's not easy to do. You know, some of the players that I got texts from have been big leaguers, have been MVPs, they have had great careers, maybe a world champion, maybe a batting title. So when that career's over, they made money, they had a successful, great career.

Certainly you hate to see the end come for anybody, but when you're telling a 18-, 19-year-old kid it's over, that's a little tougher than people think. So I have appreciated everything I've gotten, from Justin Verlanders, to the Barry Bonds to, I could go on and on. But also some Mark Wagners and some minor league guys that people might not know about today, that means something special, too.

JON SHESTAKOFSKY: We want to thank you all for joining us today as we once again congratulate Jim Leyland, who will be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame on Sunday, July 21st, 2024 in Cooperstown, along with any electees that emerge from the BBWAA balloting process, with those results being announced on January 23rd. We hope to see you all in Cooperstown. Thank you.

(Applause.)

JIM LEYLAND: Thank you very much. And thank you guys all for coming. I appreciate it.