

## Tim Kurkjian Press Conference 7-23-22

**CRAIG MUDER:** Mr. Kurkjian, Welcome to Cooperstown. What are your thoughts today? We're talking about three hours before your big moment.

**TIM KURKJIAN:** Well I'm scared to death. I don't know about you. I'm as nervous as I've ever been. Um, this has been the most overwhelming, overpowering experience of my entire life and it started on December 7 When I won this award. The day after I won the award, Johnny Bench called me at my house, Johnny Bench and said 'Congratulations, Tim, welcome to The Club you're one of us now.' Let's be clear now. I'm not one of them, not in their club. But the greatest catcher of all time called me to congratulate me. It doesn't get any better than that but all sorts of amazing things have happened in the last seven months and I can't even begin to put all this into perspective.

**CM:** We're proud to welcome you to Cooperstown Absolutely. We're gonna take questions and answers now. Katie and Evan are gonna run mics for us. So if you have a question for Tim, please raise your hand. Wait until the mic arrives and then state your name and affiliation and ask your question.

Hi, Tim. Evan Thompson, last word on baseball. Who are some people along the way that you can attribute your success to?

Well, when I worked at the Washington Star, our baseball writer was Dan Shaughnessy, who also won this award several years ago. He became my mentor. He showed me how to do this job. And from him, I went to Peter Gammons, who for me is the greatest baseball writer of all time. And he taught all of us how to do this job. Jason Stark, my dear friend, he taught me where to look for and to find great notes and stats. So those are just three of hundreds of people have affected my career. And yesterday on the veranda there, I got a picture taken with Jason, Peter and myself. And it doesn't get any better than that.

You're probably used to covering events like this. What is it like being the main kind of the main attraction event? Like this?

I must tell you I've been very uncomfortable for the last seven months that this is all about me at least part of it and it's usually the other way around. By yesterday, Cal Ripken went into a room to be interviewed. About me instead of the other way around. That was surreal. It's been an amazing experience. It's made me wildly uncomfortable. But at the same time, I'm just so deeply honored to be a part of this that I need to recognize that I love baseball and that's why I'm here today. That's the only reason I'm here today. There's no great talent involved here. Trust me, okay, look at me. I'm no great writer. I look terrible on television, and an awful voice and four feet tall but I'm here and I will always be because of my love for the game. It's the only thing that I've ever had

What has the game meant to you over the course of your lifetime?

Well, it's meant everything to me. This isn't something I got interested in. After high school. This has been with me my entire life. Baseball was the primary language spoken in my house growing up. My dad was a really good player. And he loved the game. He taught us three boys how to love it how to play it gave us a great feel for the game. My two brothers are in the Baseball Hall of Fame and Catholic University. And all three of us went to Walter Johnson High School in Bethesda, Maryland named after greatest pitcher of all time. I worked for the school paper it was called the pitch. I did some work for the

yearbook. It was called the wind up. So this has been with me my entire life. And I've always felt there was a little bit of Destiny involved that I went to a high school named after the greatest pitcher ever. And somehow miraculously, I made a career out of baseball and I was a terrible writer in high school. Trust me and after one especially bad story, one of my teachers said Tim that might be the worst story I've ever read in school paper. I hope you're not planning on making this your life's work. And yet somehow I did. So Dan, this has been with me my whole life. And I've loved every second of it and I hope I have a few years left.

Revelations obviously, tell me about the first person that ever interviewed first player. First time you ever were like this guy has played in the major leagues and I took her to interview.

Yeah, I think the first really big story I did was on Pete Rose in Philadelphia. It was 1980 I want to say and it was a rain out and it was rain delayed game last night. And Pete Rose. The game restarted and like 130 in the morning in the rain in Philadelphia at the old bet and I'm covering this game and Pete Rose gets on base at 130 in the morning. It feels second. He steals third. I mean scores on a fly ball. To win the game. There are like 20 people left in the stands because it's now two o'clock in the morning. And I'm thinking everyone in this ballpark wanted to go home except for him. And he's the oldest guy on the field. And he won the game all by himself. And I want to talk to him after the game as part of a feature I was doing on Pete Rose, talk about going to a game at the perfect time. That's the first story that I ever did on a real player and it was perfect because Pete Rose wrote my story for me

Advice you have for upcoming broadcasters and journalists?

Well, obviously, you got to be prepared. You got to show up and you got to try. That's pretty obvious, but you got to be curious when you go into a game. You got to watch the game. We've kind of stopped watching the game these days. Unfortunately. Watch the game and see what you see. Keep your ears open and your eyes open and be curious. Ask yourself. When's the last time that happened? When's the last time you read the box flourish you look at and go boy, this looks weird. When's the last time that happened? And then you check it out. And the last time it happened was a 1912. That's pretty cool. So this one I tell all young journalists is show up on time. Do your job and ask as many questions as you can for all the young people is this one I did when I was young. Watch the Great Ones do the job. I tell Dan Shaughnessy around for months watching him interview players watching him write game stories. I would go home and write the game story of the game. I went with him even though it wasn't published anywhere. And then I would compare it to his game story. Naturally, his game story was always 1000 times better than mine. So just be curious.

To me I remember being on a beat and there were always guys like at the edges of the roster who were great like teaching me about baseball because they had more time to talk and those Ranger years. Oriole years maybe towards some of those maybe non superstars who helped you learn that.

There were so many those are my favorite people are the fringe guys. The best players aren't always the best guys to interview like Rene Gonzalez who used to play for the Orioles for number 88 Because he couldn't wear number eight because Cal Ripken wore number 88 So he ate it so before ADA as he once told me it's infinite and it's consistent. And that's why were you also you used to carry his glove around in a wonder bread bag. Anyone old enough to remember Wonderbread when I see why you carry your glove in a wonder bread bag, at least said you know their slogan is no holes. And that's the way he wanted to carry his glove with him. Those were the moments and I've had I have a million of those of

guys on the periphery. I went to opening day 1982 with the Texas Rangers and George Wright, a rookie in his first game that he's ever played in the major leagues. I said to her George, did you have a good time today? If you got three hits in that game? I said did you have a good time today? He goes, Yeah, I've never been to a major league game before. So the first major league game he had ever attended. The got three hits. This is why baseball is the most beautiful game ever. Is stories like this happen all the time and getting back to the Orioles. Your second Cal Ripken I wrote more words about him than anybody who's probably my favorite player that I ever interviewed. My best stories I've ever written were about him. But when I really, really, really needed something after a game, I went to his little brother Billy, because Billy even though he was a great defensive player was not the best player on the team. And when I really so know something Billy would tell him and those are the guys always cheering for vector

Hi, Tim, congratulations, Spencer Davis WKTV down the road in Utica. You mentioned earlier, it's important for young journalists to watch the greats. You're sitting up there right now and you're being recognized as one of those greats. No, what does that mean to you to have put together the type of work to be recognized in this way?

Well, again, it's an overwhelming experience. And I look at this award that I won, and at least now I can acknowledge at all those days away from home, all those weekends that I work, and I'm still working weekends nights and away from home all the time. That it was all worth it now. I've made some huge sacrifices at home and family misses me for weeks at a time in October every year. But in the end, I look at this and think this is as good as it gets for me and I look at some people on the list of writers Grantland Rice. Oh, my goodness, the great Ring Lardner again, Roger Angell, Shirley Povich, my favorites, Dan Shaughnessy and Peter Gammons and Jason Stark recoverable it's just unbelievable to me. You know, when Cal Ripken broke the record for Lou Gehrig, he told me that night with tears in his eyes. He said, This can't be happening to me. And I can't even begin to tell you how many times I've woken up in the last seven months saying This can't be happening. To me. And yet it is.