

# ONE-ON-ONE BASEBALL

★ FUNDAMENTALS MADE SIMPLE FOR PLAYERS AND COACHES ★



**DOM SCALA**

*with* **JAMES CAIN**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRUCE CURTIS



*Foreword by*

**WILLIE RANDOLPH**

FORMER NEW YORK YANKEES ALL-STAR

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PLAYERS AND COACHES



**DOM SCALA**  
*with* **JAMES CAIN**



New York Chicago San Francisco Lisbon London Madrid Mexico City  
Milan New Delhi San Juan Seoul Singapore Sydney Toronto

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# Acknowledgments

I would like to take this time to thank some very special people who were instrumental in my life and gave me the inspiration to write this book.

First would be my father, Dominic “Doc” Scala. They called him “Doc” because he worked as a longshoreman “on the docks”—the Brooklyn piers. He was the one who introduced me to the game that I learned to love. A pretty fair athlete in his own right, he was an amateur boxing champion in the Golden Gloves middleweight division. He always had time to take me to the park and play ball. He was also a master at getting the local sportswriter to come to the games and write about me. The funny part is I always gave them something good to write about after the game was over.

To this day I well up when I think of all my mom put up with in our Brooklyn household. She was the glue that held the family together. I think of her constantly washing baseball, basketball, and football uniforms. I think of her tending to my injuries, cleaning cuts and bruises that I couldn’t get to. And cooking great food and, of course, serving me wherever I wanted to eat it.

They are both gone now, but their memory will always be with me. God bless you both, and I will always be thankful for the way you guided me.

To George Steinbrenner and the New York Yankees organization for being the family that they are and making me part of that family for nine straight years. I learned so much from so many legends and use that knowledge today in teaching my kids. Being a Yankee is forever, in any capacity on the field. Hell, even Whitey Ford sees me and calls me “Coach.” Now, that’s a compliment.

To my daughter, Shana, who just graduated from New York University. She is such a joy: smart, beautiful, and independent. She knows what she wants in life, and I have no doubt that she will be a great success. Her passion for life comes out when she does things for people. Thank you, Shana, for making me strive for the next level.



I would like to say a special thanks to my mother-in-law and father-in-law, Lucyann and Joe Cimino. They were always there for me and rooted me on. Oh, and they always bragged about their son-in-law who was a New York Yankee.

To my sisters-in-law Joann, Toni, and Susan, whom I have known for more than 35 years and are more like my sisters.

And, last but not least, to my wife and life partner, Yolanda. She has been there through the good times and bad: Picking me up at the airport at 3 A.M. from a road trip with the Yankees. Coming to Modesto, California, to watch me play in the minor leagues. The sleepless nights when I was sick. The birth of our child. The day she found our first house and brought me in and I looked and said, "Are you kidding me?" She always had vision. Then there was the day she designed a gold- and diamond-encrusted Yankees logo. That one vision became a business that gave us security for many years.

The one thing that we have and will always have is that love that never dies. We are always there for each other and, most important, we enjoy each other's company. We love spending time together, and I am very proud of that after 35 years of being together. I love you, Yolanda, and I will enjoy spending the rest of my life with you.

# Foreword

I've known Dom, it seems like, pretty much forever. After our childhood days spent playing against each other on Brooklyn's famous Parade Grounds, I met up with him again, joined in pinstripes, when he came to the Yankees in 1978 to work in the bull pen. There was word that there was this new character out there with maybe more than his fair share of knowledge about the game. Catchers are the field generals, they say. So I went to look, and there was my old buddy, Dom. If we hadn't been before, we've been good friends ever since. "To this day," he would say in his familiar Brooklynese.

Dom stayed on with the Yankees, while I played second base. We won the World Series in 1978. Dom was still a young guy, but stuck with the Yanks nine years, coaching out of the bull pen, when we had a host of ex-Yankees helping out, including such catching greats as Elston Howard, Jeff Torborg, and Yogi Berra—not to mention our ill-fated hero Thurman Munson. But Dom stood solid among these giants, and I visited him frequently for advice and a little camaraderie, whether it be around the batting cage, in the clubhouse, or going out to dinner.

He and I are the same age (days apart), and from the Brooklyn neighborhoods, so it was natural we'd become very close friends—"to this day."

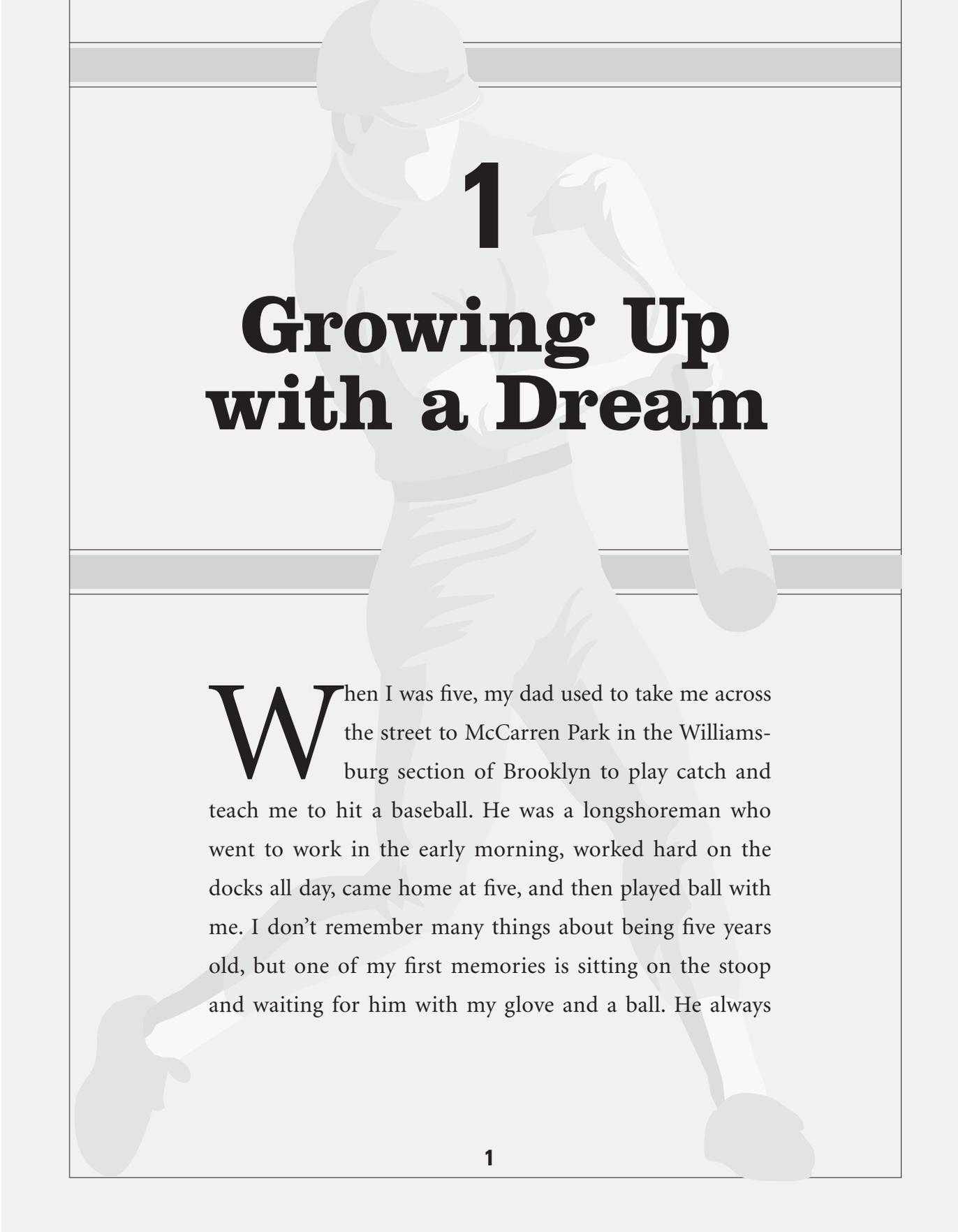
It's no surprise to me that Dom has become such a successful baseball coach at Adelphi University and has had so much support for his baseball camps for youth in the summer. Whenever I was in need of advice about the game in general, even times when I was a free agent and left the Yankees for the Dodgers, I knew I could count on Dom.

With that bit of introduction, let me tell you that I have known and worked with Dom for many years, and I can tell you he is second to none in working with kids and teaching them his great knowledge of the game of baseball. He preaches the fundamentals, and over the years he has developed many great drills and simple techniques that get his point across.



But, ultimately, the key is that Dom cares about kids, and you can see that just watching him work with the children at his camps. He's got a number of other professionals working with the players, but Dom stays right in the middle of it, preaching his mantra—"fundamentals, boys, always fundamentals."

—WILLIE RANDOLPH



# 1

## Growing Up with a Dream

**W**hen I was five, my dad used to take me across the street to McCarren Park in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn to play catch and teach me to hit a baseball. He was a longshoreman who went to work in the early morning, worked hard on the docks all day, came home at five, and then played ball with me. I don't remember many things about being five years old, but one of my first memories is sitting on the stoop and waiting for him with my glove and a ball. He always



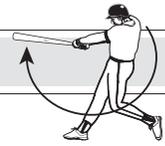
seemed to have time to teach me to play the game. I was still a little guy then, but I think that's when the dream began.

Maybe I ought to take a minute to explain what the dream is. Guys who try to make the big leagues know—if you ask a young kid scraping his way through the minors what he's doing, he'll just say, "You know, chasing the dream," and he expects you to understand that—but maybe it's not so crystal clear to everybody else. It really is as simple as it sounds, but for some guys it is a dream that can come true. Why not chase that dream for as long as you can?

Of course, the dream is what every kid starts out with. He watches a big-league game on TV, and he sees the crowds cheering home runs and great plays. He sees the accolades that a ballplayer gets, the celebrity he has. The kid wants to someday be that guy. He dreams that he can be someone people look up to and say, "There he goes." He dreams of making good money and doing something he loves to do. After all, it's a kids' game. Big-league players are playing a kids' game and making really good money these days. They don't have to punch a time clock or get up at six o'clock in the morning and go catch a bus. No, this is something where you're outdoors, and you're in the spotlight at the same time. People love you, they get to know you. What kid doesn't dream of growing up and making money playing a game? It's a daydream that ends pretty early for most everybody, but that's what makes it special. I grew up with that dream.

The Brooklyn we lived in then, when I was a kid, just as the '60s began, was a different place than it is now. I lived in an Italian neighborhood in Williamsburg. Houses and apartment buildings, anywhere from two to six stories high, crowded the tree-lined streets. Most people lived in apartments with railroad rooms, one right after the other in a row. You had no real privacy; you used a folding screen if you were going to change your clothes, like in the old movies. We had to shower in the kitchen. My dad only put in a shower when I was 10 years old; before that I had to wash in the sink. It was pretty tough, where we grew up.

We owned our own "eight-family" house, though, where our family—me, my sister, Dad, and Mom—lived with seven other families. The people in the house came from all over: they were immigrant



families from Ireland, Italy, and Germany. Folks of many different ethnic backgrounds lived in Brooklyn at the time, so in that sense, it wasn't too much different from the way it is today. Our immediate neighborhood was Italian, but across McCarren Park, the neighborhoods were German and Irish, and if you went 10 blocks the other way, it was Puerto Rican people; another 10 blocks, you had Hasidic Jews.

The neighborhood was mixed with small businesses and shops; you didn't have to get in the car to get a loaf of bread or a glass of beer. Just on the corner from our house was the Miami bar. There were corner groceries, ice cream parlors, and a lot of candy stores, like Trotta's and Stevie's Candy Store. Joey Pepe's Ice Cream Parlor was right across the street. You would go up the steps and in the door, past the big plate glass window and the red neon lettering that flashed the store's name, and on the right was a counter with stools, to the left stood red vinyl booths, and next to them was a refrigerator box full of iced soda. Ice would slide off the bottles into your hand, which was especially good on a hot summer day after a game. I was always playing something. My favorite soda was a Manhattan Special. It's espresso in a bottle. You can still get it today. It's made in Greenpoint, in Brooklyn, by the fourth generation of a family that came from Naples, by way of Ellis Island.

At Joey's, I'd go into the store, slide onto a stool, and say to him, "Hey, Joey, can I have a sundae? Would ya put it on my mother's bill?" Every day, I walked six blocks to school at Annunciation, and we'd get lunch at the famous Bamonte's Restaurant; it's a Brooklyn landmark, a real New York Italian place. Typically, I would get a meatball sandwich, and I would say, "Put it on my mother's bill." I would split it and give half to my friend. My mother would go around and pay the bills at the end of the week. Everywhere we would go, she'd pay the bills at the end of the week. That's the way we lived, and you knew everybody.

Next to Joey Pepe's was a triangular park, with benches around the sides where people would go to get a breath of fresh air and sit. I remember that when I was kid, all the teenagers would gather there in the evening, and they would sing a cappella in groups. I was a little boy, and I would sit at my window and watch them across



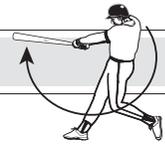
the street as groups from different parts of Brooklyn would compete with each other. They sang songs like “So Much in Love” and “Under the Boardwalk,” songs that were popular on the radio. I used to sing a little bit, too, when I got older.

Our parish, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, was and still is famous for the “Festa del Giglio,” where they “dance the statue.” It’s a festival where hundreds of men lift and dance a 65-foot statue and an immense *barca* (a boat in Italian, but it’s a float for the festival) through the streets of Williamsburg on Giglio Sunday, with games and food, bands playing, and crowds singing and clapping—all the things that make a summer festival. It’s part of the southern Italian culture that honors San Paolino (Saint Paulinus) and the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

My mom was a short Italian lady who grew up in the Corona section of Queens. She was the person who always watched out for me, because my father would work, of course, from nine to five, and my mom was home. She was always there for me. Let’s say I’d get a bad grade in school. She’d say, “I’m going to tell your father when he gets home. You’re not going to be able to go out”—and this, that, and the other thing. And of course, my father would come home, the bell would ring, and I would say, “uh-oh.” Maybe she would tell him, and maybe she wouldn’t. She kept me on my toes.

Of course, she was always a great cook—putting food on the table seemed an indispensable part of her life. Every Sunday morning, I woke up to the smell of meatballs, sausage, and gravy (in an Italian home, “gravy” is a tomato sauce with meat that spends half a day on the stove, best enjoyed by dipping a ripped-off piece of bread into the pot when no one is looking). My father would go out and get a couple of loaves of Italian bread, and that’s what I would have for breakfast: a fabulous meatball sandwich.

Anyway, as I said, from the time I was five my dad would take me across the street to McCarren Park and play catch with me and make me take batting practice for two hours at a time. My friends would come, and my dad would pay them 10 cents apiece to shag balls in the outfield while I hit. I remember a drill that I use today at my camps in which he would throw me plastic golf balls with holes in them that were not only smaller than a regular baseball, but they



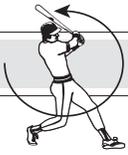
moved in all directions. It's a drill that makes you concentrate and forces you to keep your eye on the ball. Then he would throw me a regular-size Whiffle ball. It's the same size as a baseball, of course, but looks huge after the little golf balls, and I would crush it. This drill sounds very simplistic, but I can tell you it works.

## My First Team

Though we lived in Brooklyn, then the home of the Dodgers, my favorite team was the Yankees, so my first uniform number was 5, just like Joe DiMaggio, my father's favorite player. When I got older, I played for Our Lady of Mount Carmel's team in the Catholic Youth Organization, where I had a coach I will never forget. Nick Marino was an ex-marine, and he was built like the famous TV fitness guru Jack LaLanne. He was a short guy with muscles, short black hair, and a square chin. Nick's energy was unbelievable. To this day, when I have reached his age and consider myself in good shape, I can't believe that he coached almost all the teams we had at Our Lady, both in baseball and basketball.

The one big lesson he taught me—which I always stress to my players and students—is to give 100 percent at all times. Nick made us hustle in every drill that we did. It's no coincidence that we won championships almost every year. With the hustle that showed the other guys you cared, Nick taught us that your teammates can be your friends for life. When you're still a kid, you think you'll always see those guys you've grown up with and played ball with. But friendships grow stronger through shared hardship, or I should say shared struggle. When you play together as a team, you have to give up a little bit of yourself for the other guy. You don't realize it at the time, but when you see each other years later, and you've met so many people who pass by without affecting you, then you really cherish those shared moments. Seeing those guys that you haven't visited with for a while, the first thing you talk about is your playing days together.

For instance, years later when I'd get together with guys I played baseball with at St. Francis Prep, we'd always talk about when we



had to walk to McCarren Park for practice, and we would have to walk past the public high school, Eli Whitney, right down the block. The old story in those days, you know, was that the kids from public school were dumber than the kids from Catholic school, dumb as that sounds. I doubt any of us really believed it, but it made for some solidarity. They had a lot of tough kids, and they used to make fun of us. So we would always fight them. Every week, there would be a fight. So that's what we always talk about.

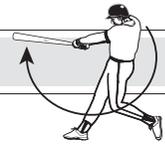
On the streets where we ran around then, there were drugs. Some kids I knew, that I played ball with, I knew they were doing stuff. You could see when they were out of it. I told myself that I didn't want to ever get like that. I guess athletics kept me away from some of the bad stuff around me. Some of those guys I knew then are dead now, and some others aren't much better off.

At times, Nick pushed me more than my father did. And while I sometimes had to stop and gasp for air, I saw the improvement. I'm not saying I didn't listen to my father. He started me on the right path. He retired from his job early so he could watch me play ball my last two years in college. When he died I was in spring training with the Yankees, in 1982, so he got to see my World Series ring.

But Nick was a real coach. Sometimes you need that other person. A lot of kids come to my camps now, and their fathers say to me, "I'm sending him to you because he listens to you more than he listens to me." Nick was a real coach, and he was involved with us around a lot of other players. So we had to do it as a team, rather than as an individual. A father is interested in just his child, mostly. He loves his kid, and he goes to games to watch his kid. A coach has to mold a team, and there's a difference. As a player, you're more a cog in the machine, and you have to be to be a better ballplayer. It helped that Nick knew what he was talking about.

## **Number One at Eight**

While I was in grammar school, I must have had newspaper articles written about my accomplishments daily. I'll never forget when I was in the Greenpoint youth league and the *Greenpoint Star* reported



that I was the number one pick in the draft of the players after tryouts. I think I was eight years old. I first made the newspapers in 1962. It was a proud day in the Scala household.

It wasn't just that I could play that made me a number one pick. During the tryouts, we were playing a simulated game and I was playing third base. There was a man at third, and the batter hit a swinging bunt that I grabbed. I glanced at the guy on third, turned and faked the throw to first, and the man on third broke for the plate. He ran right into my tag. He was right there. They said, "Not only can this kid play the game, but he's got game smarts—at his age." I can remember that play still. I fielded the ball and the coach at third yelled, "stay, stay, stay," and then, when I faked the throw, he yelled, "go, go, go." I actually faked the coach out, too.

I played in three summer leagues every year in those days, taking myself to games sometimes. I would go from an afternoon game to a late afternoon game to a night game. I played with kids two and three years older than I was and was still the best player on the team. Some parents ask me if I believe in their kids playing up, above their age group, and I tell them as long as they can handle it, why not?

After playing baseball, football, and basketball at St. Francis Preparatory School in Brooklyn, I went to St. John's University on a full baseball scholarship and played four years.

My path to St. John's wasn't a very direct path, although it could have been. I took a little detour. At St. John's, I met two people who became instrumental in my life. The first was my wife, Yolanda. The other I'm getting to.

I was in my sophomore year at St. Francis when Jack Kaiser first indicated he wanted me to play for his prestigious baseball program at St. John's University, one of the premier schools in the East. The thing was, I was also playing high school football, and I was a pretty good all-around athlete. I was offered scholarships to some big-time schools, like Notre Dame, the University of Maryland, North Carolina State, Ohio State, and many others. I was overwhelmed, but I eventually chose to play football at Maryland and signed a letter of intent early in 1972.

I had yet to play baseball that spring as a senior at St. Francis Prep, and I had a tremendous season, breaking Joe Torre's offen-



sive records, including the highest batting average in New York City Catholic High School history (.682). (You no doubt know Joe as the longtime manager of champion New York Yankee teams, but he was also an All-Star catcher, third baseman, and first baseman, a Most Valuable Player in the National League, and one of the best clutch hitters in major league baseball.) With that kind of season, I had to start thinking again. Should I play football or baseball?

I even got a call from the Atlanta Braves. They said they were thinking about drafting me, even though I had said I was going to play college football. The situation got muddier. Remember, I was only a high school senior, with my whole life ahead of me. My father told the Braves that they would have to do better than my college scholarship—and then some. The Braves passed, and I wasn't drafted out of high school.

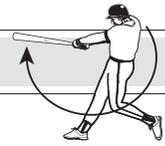
So I headed off to College Park, Maryland, that August after senior year for my first college football practice. After a week, I knew I'd made the wrong decision back in the cold of January. I quit and headed back to Brooklyn. I decided that baseball was my true love. I came home, and that's when Jack Kaiser reentered my life.

I was home for a few days, and my father and my uncle knew a guy named Jimmy MacElroy, who was the baseball coach at St. Francis College. (Jimmy still sends me players. He's no longer at St. Francis, but he's still a figure in Brooklyn baseball.) He knew I was home and said to my father, "Why don't you bring him over" to an end-of-the-season all-star baseball game at Victory Field in Queens. Jimmy was there, and so was Jack Kaiser, scouting players for their college programs.

Jack came over and said hello, and then later said to me, "Why don't you come to my office, tomorrow?"

I said, "Yeah, sure, why not."

So I went to his office. I guess he checked my eligibility and made sure I had an NCAA release from Maryland and was eligible to play in the regular season. He could have said to me, "You know what, Dom, how about you come to St. John's, you pay for college this year, and we'll see how you do." But he respected the way I played the game. And, it could be, he felt that other colleges had begun to pick up that I was back—for instance, Jimmy MacElroy at St. Francis



might be sniffing around. Jack Kaiser had been sending me letters since my sophomore year, to go play ball there, and I always liked St. John's. It was an offer I couldn't turn down.

Coach Kaiser became my mentor. He is the man who represented St. John's in baseball like Lou Carnesseca did in basketball. Both men are legends. To this day, they are both good friends of mine, and I speak to them often.

Coach Kaiser taught me that every situation is different in its own way. Anything can happen at any time. Every at bat is very important. Every pitch a pitcher throws is important. Each moment counts. A player may not get any hits in the game, but may make an important play in the field that will save two runs. So as a player, you never know what you're going to do to help the team win.

Now that I am a college baseball coach I've learned to be more patient—pretty patient, anyway. I can understand physical mistakes, but when a player keeps making mental mistakes, especially after the coach has been over them many times, that's the only time I get impatient. Physical mistakes you can't do much about. If you play the game, you know it's not easy, and nobody's trying to make a physical mistake. But mental mistakes are nothing but concentration, as far as missing signs or not understanding a play, and that means the player is not thinking about the play beforehand. Players must stay focused and try not to be detrimental to their team. They must think where they need to be given any possible outcome of the next pitch, and then they can be there.

Coach Kaiser was always positive and tried to help his players in all our many situations and youthful dilemmas. He believed that all of a team's players should be an asset to the team. I was very fortunate to be around him. I'm a better coach and person because of him.

In college, I was elected captain my senior year and led the team in all offensive categories. I was 15th in the nation in batting average (.420) and was selected as a third-team All-American. I also received the Peter Smith Award as St. John's Most Valuable Player. Unfortunately, we were beaten in the regionals of the NCAA Tournament by Seton Hall University, who then advanced to the College World Series. (That team was led by Rick Cerone, a catcher who became

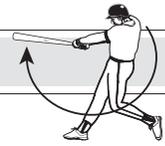


my teammate and good friend a few years down the road when he took the place of one of my good friends and teammates with the Yankees—captain Thurman Munson, the All-Star catcher who died in a plane crash far too early in life.)

All the years of hard work and dedication, of playing in the hot summer weather when many of my friends were at the beach or going to barbecues, finally paid off.

I'll never forget the date: it's like my birthday almost. On June 5, 1976, I was at St. John's, taking batting practice with some teammates, getting my licks in. My father called the school and asked for me. Someone came out to get me, and my father said that I had a phone call from Ralph DiLullo, the area scout for the Oakland A's. I'd been drafted by the A's in the sixth round of the amateur draft, the 125th player selected. I was numb. I knew I had a chance to make it as a professional ballplayer.

I jumped in my car, and I don't remember driving home. I was on a cloud. The only thing I remember is speaking to Charlie Finley, the legendary owner of the A's. I signed for \$15,000, plus incentives. How's that for a dream come true?



## Lee Mazzilli

*I've known Lee since our high school days, and we are still good friends today. Lee played at Lincoln High School, so we didn't play them in the spring, but all the great players played in the infamous Parade Ground League. Many greats, such as Joe Torre, Joe Pepitone, Rico Petrocelli, John Candelaria, and Willie Randolph graced the spacious diamonds there. This was the Cape Cod League of Brooklyn for high school players.*

*There are some great stories out of this league, and I have one that involves Lee Mazzilli. Lee was a slender speedster who had all the tools to be a future big-league player. He was not only a switch-hitter, but he was ambidextrous. He played first base lefty and center field righty. When I saw this, I said, "Wow, he is unreal."*

*He was a great line-drive hitter and, for his size, hit the ball as hard as anyone in the league. And he could fly around the bases with ease. You can attribute that to his championship-caliber speed skating on the ice. He had great legs, and that's why he hit the ball so hard. It is what we teach in this book: use your back side (legs) to get your power to hit.*

*On a very steamy Sunday, we played Lee's team on the famous Diamond 7 in the Parade Grounds. There were more than 20 scouts in the stands that day, and I was on the opposite end, playing third base. It is funny, but I remember that the scouts were no big deal; we'd just go out and play the game that we loved so much.*

*Lee had a great game, hitting, running, and sliding so gracefully. But that day I happened to open some scouts' eyes also. In the doubleheader (two seven-inning games), I laced two home runs and two doubles and had eight runs batted in.*

*After that game, 10 scouts came up to me and had me fill out cards for the upcoming draft. I was on the map. The Atlanta Braves wanted to draft me, but I had already committed to the*