

BASEBALL DIGEST



ALL STAR EDITION



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By Abe J. Shear
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Tim Hudson is a gentleman. He is introspective, thoughtful and integrated into the community. He has a loving family and is both polite and unpretentious. You'd never guess that he is an amazingly competitive baseball player.

I met Tim and his wife Kim not long ago for a wonderful lunch, one full of memories and storytelling. The Hudsons understand the importance of legacy and intend to continue their valuable off-the-field work in the Atlanta community. Their foundation (hudsonfamilyfoundation.com) is already well known for its quietly impactful programs.

We live in an era dominated by seemingly greedy and selfish people, athletic and otherwise, and it is simply refreshing to meet someone who is the antithesis of these self centered characteristics. Tim's stories are special and remind us all about how family and friendship are important and why drive and discipline are every bit as important as size and innate athleticism.

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I Remember When, a book which includes the first 35 interviews in this series, is available for \$20. A check should be made payable to Abe Shear and mailed to him at Arnall Golden Gregory.

Tim Hudson "All A's"

Abe: What are your first baseball memories?

Tim: I grew up in the country in southern Alabama, real small, one traffic light town in between Auburn and Columbus, Georgia. It would be playing ball in the front yard with my dad. We lived on five acres and there was kind of a little bit of pasture, front yard type of thing and you know I'd wait until my dad came home from work. He worked in construction for a lot of years and I just remember waiting on him to come home and bugging the heck out of him to go out in the front yard with me and play catch or to hit me some fly balls, that kind of thing. You know, every kid thinks about playing catch with his dad and he holds that special. I'm no different. I just loved baseball and there was no other place that I'd rather be than on the baseball field or playing baseball in the front yard.

What position did you play when you were little?

I first started playing in organized baseball when I was seven or eight years old in Dixie Youth in my hometown. That was the closest youth baseball that we had and I actually played first base. They were hard pressed to find a kid that could catch a ball from the infielders and, you know I'm not saying that I was any better than anybody else – but I was.

I was pretty good, so you know I played first base and then as I got a

little bit older I would play shortstop. As I even got older, at the high school level, I moved from shortstop and in the college level I started playing a little bit of outfield.

I know that's only partially true because I know you played a lot of outfield in college, but we'll get to that. When did you first realize you could pitch?

This is a funny story. I remember my first year ever playing baseball. I played on the Cubs and we were playing against a team called the Indians. It was funny because my cousin, who was about fifteen years older than me, was actually coaching the Indians. For some reason we didn't have any pitchers that day and our coach told me that he was going to let me pitch. I was fired up because I remember playing first base and looking out there and seeing the pitcher pitch and seeing how in control of the game he was. It just seemed like it was so much fun to do that and I hadn't had the opportunity to do it yet and so this one game, this particular game, he gave me the ball to pitch and it was one of the funniest times I'd had out there as a kid playing. I don't know whether I threw a strike. I either walked them or hit them and it was one of those things where even though I wasn't doing particularly well I was having so much fun. I remember the coach coming out there and saying they're going to have to take me out. We've got to try to get

an out here and I was like “You know I don’t want to come out”. I wasn’t exactly getting people out. That was the first time that I pitched and the last time that I pitched until I was probably about sixteen.

I just remember that it was so much fun for me and to this day my cousin laughs about that because he was in the other dugout. He has said he would have never dreamt that I was going to eventually be a major league pitcher after seeing me that day.

I’m guessing you’ve never been nervous pitching?

No, never have. I’ve never been nervous on the baseball field. There have been times when I’ve been really anxious and I’m not saying there were times when I’ve been out there and I haven’t been excited. I do get excited, but when people say they’re nervous about something, that strikes me as being a little fearful of being out there and, I’ve never once been nervous, because I feared something out there because I knew that it was a game that I loved. I knew that I was blessed with some ability to play the game and I was just confident of what I could do out there. You put me in a room with fifty people and I have to speak, I’m going to be scared. I’m going to be nervous. That’s were I get nervous, when I’m out of my comfort zone. When I’m on the baseball field, there’s no other place in the world that I feel more comfortable.

Did winning or losing matter when you played youth baseball?

Winning and losing mattered a lot to me as a kid growing up. When we would lose or if I would strike out, I mean I would almost be in tears. I just think that for whatever reason, God blessed me with a competitive spirit. I was really intense even as a young kid. I hated losing. I took a lot of pride in going out there competing and winning and I think, in fact, I remember the first year that I played. You know the league that I played in had an American League and a National League and at the end of the season we actually played the American League for the city championship. I remember we played

the Dodgers and we beat them and I got so much joy out of that and the emotions were so intense that even if I were to win the World Series right now, looking back on those emotions that I had then as a kid, it would be the same exact emotions now as it was then, just a bigger scale.

It’s still the same game.

It’s still the same game and the same emotions. For me it was the World Series. People look at kids and say you know it’s just a kid’s game, it’s just a regional championship or it’s just a state championship. Well it is, but it’s not for these kids and it’s not the way kids look at it. To them it’s a big deal and that’s how it was to me.

Did you ever go to minor league games in Phenix City?

I went to a few. It was actually in Columbus. They used to be the Columbus Astros. I remember going to some games with my dad and even going to some games with some friends and seeing how the game was. It was exciting to watch. Every kid dreams of being a professional baseball player, dreams of making it to the big leagues someday. Where I was from, I mean, you just didn’t get drafted. I mean it was one of those things where if somebody from my hometown got drafted, it was like hitting the lottery.

Did you try to get autographs?

No. I was a pretty shy kid growing up. I would have never dreamed of trying to approach those professional baseball players, I just sat there and watched.

Did you collect baseball cards as a youngster?

No. I just mostly wanted to play. I loved baseball, but I loved playing baseball more than I loved being a fan out there I guess.

Did you follow the Braves?

I did. When I was little, it was kind of tough to watch them. They weren’t exactly very good, but I remember being in high school in the early 90’s when they started making their run and it was like the most intense day you could ever be a part of, watching these Braves games and seeing how they were able to turn their seasons around and, you know, just the excitement

that this team brought, not just Atlanta but to the southeast and to America. They were America’s team, and it was fun for me because I felt like I was close enough to Atlanta and I almost felt like I was part of the team. It was like you watched them struggle for so many years and lose a hundred games and then all of a sudden it was, good Lord, we actually have a winner on our hands.

When you were in high school, who were your favorite players?

I was watching Greg Maddux pitch when I was growing up, when I was in high school. It was one of those things where I was always skinny and everybody was like well he’s really small and didn’t know if I was going to be able to play at the next level. For me watching a guy like Greg Maddux, who was a small guy, a small right hander, or Pedro Martinez or some of these guys, I mean it gave a little kid like me hope. You don’t have to be 6’5” or 6’6” to be successful in this game and that was just one of those things where every time I would go out there and see Greg Maddux. I was like, chalk one up for the little guys, that type of thing.

Your high school team won your state division. What was that like?

It was exciting. I went to a real small private school, Glenwood High School. We were known for being really good in sports, football, baseball and, it was just along those lines of having pride in your team and your teammates and going out there and trying to compete and win. We didn’t play against the best in the state because it was a small school, but we knew that we were really good enough to beat most of the people at our level and it was almost to the point it was like well everybody saying, the only reason we were winning was because we were playing teams that weren’t very good. I had so much pride in our team and confidence in our team that I wanted to play some of these big high schools just to see where we stood and to see if we could beat them. I really felt like we could have. It was exciting. I don’t think there’s anything that brings a group of kids together better

from a chemistry standpoint, from a friendship standpoint, than when you go out there and you win together. It was a lot of fun to do that.

I'll bet you're still friends with a bunch of the guys you went to high school with.

I'm still friends with a lot of them. When I go home to visit, it's almost like we haven't skipped a beat.

From high school, you weren't exactly recruited so you went to junior college and then you went from junior college to Auburn.

Yes.

You put together one of the all time college seasons your senior year in college. Hitting, pitching, probably sweeping the stands. What was your senior season like at Auburn?

Ask Kim. She was there.

It was a lot of fun, obviously a lot of fun because I transferred to Auburn. My junior year was average at best. They wanted me to play outfield and they wanted me to pitch and I was trying to do both and I was trying to prove to them and everybody else that I could play at this level because I went from a small junior college to all of a sudden now the best baseball conference in the country.

You still weren't a big kid.

No, I was 150 pounds. When I got there I wasn't pitching or playing outfield very well. Half way through my junior year the coach came up to me and says he really needs you to concentrate on pitching more than anything else, not going to hit, just worry about pitching and when that happened I was able to spend more time pitching and toward the end of the end of the season I really started getting confidence and believing in myself that I could pitch and be successful at that level. I finished the season really strong.

After the season they brought me in the office and they said they were expecting me to come back and be the number one Friday night guy to pitch which made me ecstatic. I was like "all right"! I finally got the vote of confidence that I needed. They said also they were going to be a little short

on outfielders coming into next year so I was going to get another chance to play the outfield. I was like "great".

My senior year was a lot of fun. I mean I think I hit third in the lineup and I pitched on Friday nights. When I didn't pitch, I played centerfield and it was a lot of fun and I got a lot of satisfaction out of it, not only for that reason but because my junior year our team was really bad. My senior year, we beat Florida State to go to the College World Series. Personally, it was a great year for me from a pitching standpoint and from an offensive standpoint playing in the field, but I think I had more pride in the fact that our team went from being really bad my junior year to improving to make it to the College World Series my senior year.

Well I think, in the interest of fairness, I know you were SEC player of the year. I know you were a first team All American, so you may have been a little bit better than you said you were.

I don't want to say exactly how excited I was because Kim's going to bust my chops when I leave from here.

[Laughter]

But you were all of 165 pounds.

No, 150-155. I mean I was skinny. Let me put it this way. I was so skinny that whenever it was time for the pitchers to run to do their conditioning, they told me not to run. Seriously, they told me not to run, they said just go eat a candy bar.

So you got drafted by Oakland and what was it like to get drafted?

It was a dream come true. I remember we were in Omaha at the College World Series during the draft and I knew that I wasn't going to be a big draft prospect. We had some guys on our team that I realized were going to get drafted in front of me, even though my numbers were probably better than theirs from a stat standpoint. But I was a little guy, you know I was 5'11", 155 pounds I thought. I was going to go anywhere from the 8th to 12th round, but you know you usually have a pretty good idea of where you're going to

get drafted and I got a call from my scout in Oakland saying that Oakland drafted me in the 6th round which was better than I thought, so I was fired up. I was like "yeah"! I got drafted in the 6th round! We had a couple of guys that were 1st round draft picks on that club and I was excited for them because they deserved it.

I was just glad for the opportunity. I mean I just loved baseball so much, I don't know what I would have done if I was a senior and didn't get drafted and came to the realization that my playing days were over. I was happy for the opportunity and you know I had a chance to play for Oakland.

I played about a season and a half in the minors and I was just blessed with a great opportunity with Oakland. At the time the pitching in Oakland wasn't very good and Oakland went out and made conscious efforts to draft a lot of good college pitching and I just happened to be one of those college pitchers. When I got drafted, they told us whoever does the best is going to move up. It's not going to be, you know, a first round pick is going to get all of the opportunities or the second round pick is not going to get all of the opportunities. If you get drafted and you're playing and you're performing, we're going to move you up. They said there's a lot of opportunity in this organization. For me, that was just what I wanted to hear. I started in Medford, Oregon, and pitched there for a short season and from there the next year I started in Modesto, California, which is the California League. Just about a month and a half later, I got called up to Double A in Huntsville, Alabama. I pitched I think about 140 innings in Huntsville. That was the first time that I could ever say that I struggled a little bit. I was 21 and I could tell that at that level the hitters were good. They knew what they were doing and that was when the learning process started coming for me. I'm not just going to go out there and throw all my stuff in and out of the zone and they're going to swing at it. You know, you've got to be able to learn how to pitch and you've got to be able to get guys out

within the strike zone.

What were your feelings when you went to your first spring training?

I was nervous. I didn't know what to expect. I knew that I was going to be there. A lot of people wanted to get to the big leagues just like me and, understanding we were all in the same organization, we were all on the same team per se, you're still competing against each other to get to the big leagues which is kind of a weird concept because, you know, I was raised to play the game as a team player and to do whatever it took to win.

Why is baseball so special?

Why is it so special? It's a sport where anybody can be successful regardless of your race, your age, your size. It doesn't matter. I think baseball is a game that everybody can relate to for that reason. You know, obviously not everybody can be an NBA basketball player. Not everybody can be a NFL running back or linebacker, but anybody can play baseball and anybody can have fun doing it. Baseball is a sport where you know a little five foot nothing, a hundred nothing pound kid from Alabama like myself can go out there and have fun and make a career of it and realize his dreams and have fun doing it.

And I know you used this as an opportunity to be a volunteer. Why is volunteering so important to you?

I've been blessed with a lot of things

and I have often wondered why did God bless me with the ability to play baseball and all the opportunities that He has given me along the way and, not only that, but why did I succeed you know most every time? It's one of those things where you know I'm starting to see that the reason I've been able to do what I've been able to do is that the pedestal I've been given with baseball is to help others. I didn't grow up with a lot. I knew what it was like to struggle as a family and to see your dad go out there and work hard every day. So I realized what it was like to have to work for what you've got and so I have a soft spot in my heart for people in similar situations, for kids who struggle with illnesses or parents who struggle because of that illness that their child has. Those are things that kind of hit home with me. I've been blessed and the least I can do is use what I've been blessed with to help others and to volunteer and we, Kim and I, started a foundation to help kids. For me, it feels like its just the right thing to do. The last couple of years I was hurt and I wondered if my career was going to end and I remember reflecting if I'd done enough with my career. I don't know if I gave back enough from a community standpoint, from a volunteering standpoint, from a charity standpoint and God's now blessed me with three more years to play. You know, it's one of these things where I'm going to take these three years as if its just another blessing from God and just

do whatever I feel like He thinks He wants me to do with it.

Kim, can I ask you one question? Sure.

What adjectives would you use to describe Tim?

"Honest, generous, faithful."

That's really the sign of a good listener and the attorney you are. I asked for adjectives and I only got adjectives. Tim, would you please tell me the funny story about your mom?

When I was a kid growing up, my mom used to take me to all my games and practices. I was really hyperactive. On the way to the baseball field, my mom would always stop at this gas station a couple of miles from where we were going and get me a Snickers bar and a Coke and for me that was like hitting the jackpot because she would never let me have candy, because, to be quite honest, I would drive her crazy. So I would eat that candy bar and drink that Coke and I would hit the ground running. When I got to the field, I was by far the smallest and the skinniest and it was just funny. All the moms were in the stands and they were asking what was she feeding me? How do you get him to hit that ball so far? How do you get him to throw that ball so fast? My mom would just laugh and she was like well "I just stop and get a Snickers and a Coke".

Thanks once again for the time and wonderful memories.

„All A's“

Tim Hudson

★ ★ 50th EDITION

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