



CSN Chicago trio get Holtzman Award for '5 Outs'

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When Dr. David Fletcher, president and founder of the Chicago Baseball Museum, saw the screening of Comcast SportsNet Chicago's "5 Outs" on Oct. 14, the production hit him squarely between the eyes. He was stunned.

Just like the collective senses of Cubs fandom was hammered by the eight-run Miami Marlins eighth inning exactly 10 years ago previously on that night, one of the incidents depicted in the grand scope of the 2003 Cubs season depicted in "5 Outs."



Ryan McGuffey and Sarah Lauch proudly mark the completion of production of "5 Outs" in the editing bay Lauch calls "the bunker."

Sometimes the creative work of artists in any field jumps out at you so resolutely, you have to take action immediately. Such was the case with the three co-producers of "5 Outs," Sarah Lauch, Ryan McGuffey and David Kaplan – the latter serving double duty in front of and behind the camera. They truly proved that past is prologue, which too many people forget or choose to ignore in the game of baseball.

The three airings of "5 Outs" on Chicago's sports cable outlet in Oct. 2013 coincided with the naming of award-winners at the forthcoming Pitch and Hit Club Banquet at the Carlisle in Lombard on Jan. 26. On behalf of the Chicago Baseball Museum, Fletcher spearheads the granting of the Jerome Holtzman Award, given in recognition of achievements

cataloguing Chicago baseball history. He acted immediately. Lauch, McGuffey and Kaplan were named co-winners.

“Sarah, Ryan and Kap put together a stand-out documentary with ‘5 Outs,’ capturing the roller-coaster tragic events of the ’03 Cubs play-offs that is forever seared into the collective memory of Cubs fans and part of the franchise DNA,” said Fletcher.

“The Comcast team truly emulates the spirit of the Holtzman award, which is presented to the person(s) who has made the most significant contribution to the preservation of Chicago baseball history and tradition.”

‘5 Outs’ longest-ever CSN Chicago documentary

Lauch, McGuffey and Kaplan put together the longest-ever documentary in the nine-year history of CSN Chicago. All put their heart and soul into the telling of the story of the agony and ecstasy of the 2003 Cubs, the star-crossed team that boosted passion in Chicago baseball to an all-time high.

Veteran producers Lauch and McGuffey worked 12- to 15-hour shifts, until the wee hours many nights, to winnow down the 12 to 13 hours of interviews and highlights into the 90-minute program. Kaplan used his contacts and political savvy to snare key interviews, most notably exiled Cubs icon Sammy Sosa at his Ft. Lauderdale office.



David Kaplan used his connections to line up key interviews, including Sammy Sosa.

“5 Outs” was named after the distance to a World Series berth the Cubs found themselves, with a 3-0 lead in the eighth and a 3-2 edge in Game 6 of the NLCS. Fan Steve Bartman deflected a ball that left fielder Moises Alou had tried to catch. All hell then broke loose, reverberating through Cubs annals to this very day.

The oral history assembled by the 2003 journey’s top participants put the season and its denouement into a perspective that only a decade’s distance could provide.

Broadcast comments by Alou and third baseman Aramis Ramirez about buying airline tickets out of Chicago for the morning after Game 7 immediately after the Game 6 collapse set off another round of anger, with the Chicago Tribune calling the pair “losers.”

“5 Outs” ought to eventually win at least one Emmy Award, adding to Lauch’s 13 Emmys already garnered. In the meantime, the Holtzman honor thrilled the trio.

“I think what’s so beautiful about winning an award like this is, I’m getting to win it with two of the people I’m closest to in Sarah and Ryan,” Kaplan said. “They were the backbone of putting this show together. To be able to work with them as closely as I did, I’m humbled to be getting an award with the two of them. You couldn’t have scripted it better.

A great way to start the day

When the award was announced, Kaplan quickly called Lauch and McGuffey, while CSN Chicago publicist Jeff Nuich sent out the good news via text messages. That was the right way to start the morning for Lauch, who had worked the night shift at CSN Chicago.

“We’re honored,” said Lauch. “I couldn’t believe it when I got a text from Nuich. It was very, very nice. It was a wake-up call basically (from Kaplan). I’ll give my speech to ‘Guff’ or something.”



Phil Bedella, VP and GM of CSN Chicago, was happy at the first of what should be a number of awards for "5 Outs."

The news put Phil Bedella, vice president and general manager of CSN Chicago, in a celebratory mood.

“Having Sarah, Ryan and Kap receive the prestigious ‘Jerome Holtzman Award’ by the Pitch and Hit Club of Chicago is a tremendous honor not only for them, but for all of us at Comcast SportsNet,” said Bedella. “Their brilliant work on the Cubs documentary ‘5 Outs’ was highly-acclaimed throughout the country and I couldn’t be prouder of the amazing efforts by these three standouts.”

McGuffey and Lauch went into the project enjoying baseball history. Through all the grueling hours, “5 Outs” was a labor of love.

“I remember watching the old ‘Home Run Derby’ on TV at (Los Angeles’) Wrigley Field with Hank Aaron and Mickey Mantle,” McGuffey said. “Some of the clouds that have hung over baseball the last 15 to 20 years, I think you really get a little bit more appreciation of the guys who played before that.”

“The new generation is sometimes just blind about the history of baseball, or maybe they just don’t know about it,” Lauch said. “The goal of the show was to teach something about that year and humanize it and make it really relevant now to how it’s still (affects) the Cubs now.”

“5 Outs” won’t be the producers’ last venture into long-form depictions of Chicago sports history. Another show appears in the works for 2014. But McGuffey refused to crack when asked the subject matter. He hinted it could be about an individual rather than a team.

Kaplan, Lauch and McGuffey came from three different career and geographical directions to pool their talents for “5 Outs.”

Different paths to show’s collaboration



(From left) Ryan McGuffey, Sarah Lauch and David Kaplan are all smiles after the preview screening of "5 Outs" the day before airtime drew rave reviews.

Kaplan has had the longest run in Chicago. The Skokie native broke into sports as an assistant basketball coach at Northern Illinois University and an NBA scout. Later, he switched to sports broadcasting, working at AM-1000 before starting his 7 p.m. nightly show on WGN-Radio that is still running 18 years later. Kaplan dabbled in TV work before beginning regular shifts at CSN Chicago in 2008. He has been a reporter, and host of “SportsTalk Live” and the pre- and post-game Cubs programs.

Lauch recalled being interested in TV as far back as kindergarten in Lancaster, Pa., when a reporter from NBC affiliate WGAL-TV visited. She worked her way up the ranks of CSN Philadelphia, working in the broadcast booth with Phillies icon Harry Kalas, a Naperville native. When CSN Chicago signed on in 2004, she moved west. She and McGuffey have worn every single production hat at the station.

Like Kaplan, McGuffey is a local-kid-made-good. A native of Portage, Ind., he played wide receiver and returned kicks in high school – and, yes, he ran one back all the way.

Breaking in as an intern at the old Fox Sports Chicago in 1999, he survived a brief layoff in 2002 to become a producer at the CSN predecessor. Like many of his behind-the-camera colleagues, he switched over to CSN Chicago in '04. One recent duty was racing to the Mart Apparel Center studio at dawn, after working all night, with tape of the Blackhawks' celebration at Harry Caray's in Rosemont after the freshly-crowned Stanley Cup champs had flown back from Boston.

The CSN Chicago trio will receive their awards at Chicago's longest-running off-season baseball banquet. The Pitch and Hit Club was formed in 1942 and has far outlasted the old baseball writers' Diamond Dinner. Tickets are \$75 per person or \$750 for a table of 10. They can be ordered from Pitch and Hit Club Treasurer Bill Motluck at 708/805-1928 or MotluckW@SBCGlobalNet.com.

Holtzman, nicknamed "The Dean" for his seniority in Chicago's baseball pressboxes, was certainly at home in the off-season baseball dinners. Kaplan grew up reading Holtzman, who chronicled Chicago baseball history as it happened starting in 1957 in the Chicago Sun-Times and later the Chicago Tribune. So receiving the honor in his name was doubly gratifying.

"He is a legendary name in what you and I do," Kaplan said. "To have an award that has the name 'Jerome Holtzman' on it is the ultimate."

The trio of winners follow in the wake of 2013 Holtzman Award winner Paul Dickson, author of "Bill Veeck: Baseball's Greatest Maverick," the biography of the colorful two-time former White Sox owner who started his career in Wrigley Field and supervised the installation of the ivy on the walls.

Other honorees at the Pitch and Hit Club Dinner include:

- ◆ Lynwood native Curtis Granderson, a free agent after four years in the Yankees outfield, recognized with the Paul "Dizzy" Trout Ambassador Award for his extensive charitable work.
- ◆ The Braves' Fredi Gonzalez, Major League Manager of the Year Award.
- ◆ Wheaton's Kim DeJesus (wife of former Cubs outfielder David DeJesus), the Mary Frances Veeck Woman of the Year Award.
- ◆ Harvey Kuenn, Jr. of the Milwaukee Brewers, Nick Kamzic Scout Award.
- ◆ Pat Salvi of the Schaumburg Boomers, Organization of the Year Award.
- ◆ Pat Disabado of the Daily Southtown-Star, Bill Gleason Sportswriter Award.
- ◆ Dean Anna, Lincoln Way East High School alum and Padres Triple-A infielder, Minor League Player of the Year Award.
- ◆ Jerry Hairston, Sr., former White Sox outfielder, The President's Award, honoring the five big-leaguers over three generations in his family, all of whom played for either the Sox or Cubs.