



'Teach me something' was Maddux's opening request in 30-year Hall of Fame journey

*By George Castle, CBM Historian
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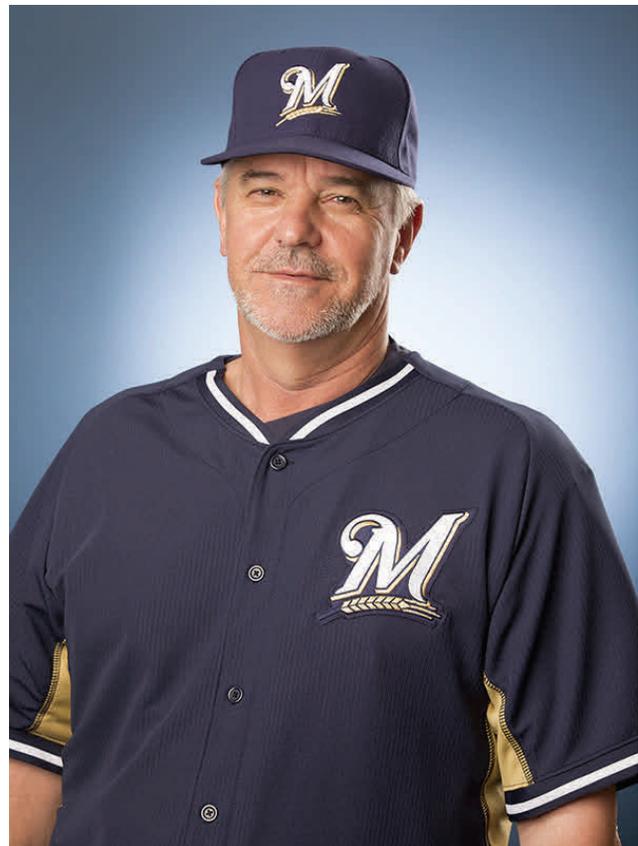
The greatest masters of their craft, people so brainy they're nicknamed "professor," have one thing in common: an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. They're always on duty, soaking up new ideas and concepts.

Such was future Hall of Famer Greg Maddux's stance in the summer of 1984, only weeks removed from graduation at Valley High School in Las Vegas and his senior trip.

Maddux had been transplanted all the way across the country into a "Green Acres" setting in Pikeville, Ky., home of the Cubs' rookie-league team. While the parent club, riding Ryne Sandberg's heroics, was hogging headlines 450 miles to the northwest, out of sight and out of mind of Cubs fans was a kid -- so youthful-looking some mistook him for the batboy -- asking to learn the art of pitching.

"He just flat came up to me and said, 'You need to teach me something,'" said Rick Kranitz, then a rookie pitching coach himself who will watch from afar as Milwaukee Brewers pitching coach as Maddux is inducted into Cooperstown July 27.

"It was my first year as coach, and I was thrown into it," Kranitz said. "For me, I didn't want to tell him the wrong things. I knew he was special. His four-seam fastball was as good as anybody's.



As a rookie coach in 1984, Rick Kranitz was asked by Greg Maddux to teach him about pitching. Photo credit: Scott Paulus/Milwaukee Brewers.

“We put a little changeup grip in his hands. He always had real small hands. He messed with a grip. Same pitch he always threw the rest of his career.”

The Cubs’ No. 2 draft choice in ’84 behind college lefty pitcher Drew Hall, Maddux soaked up Kranitz advice like a sponge. He added so much to his portfolio by listening and watching that he outpitched everyone else in baseball in the 1990s. By the time Maddux retired in 2008, he had won 355 games as the greatest pitcher the Cubs ever developed and let get away. We won’t see the likes of him anytime soon.

His unique talents – a perfect pitching motion and control guided by unparalleled baseball brainpower – is being justly rewarded. Maddux’s entrée to the Hall of Fame is part of a stunning induction class. Also going in are his longtime Braves pitching mate/golf buddy/fellow 300-game-winner Tom Glavine, his Atlanta manager Bobby Cox, Sox icon Frank Thomas, and all-time managers Tony La Russa and Joe Torre. Maddux, Thomas and La Russa give the induction ceremonies perhaps their most robust Chicago flavor of all time.

“Going in with this class, maybe the last two 300-game winners,” said Thomas. “You never know that. With the salaries escalating the way they are, how many pitchers are going to stay around 20 years now to get 300 victories? This could be the last class of 300 pitchers...two 300-game winners and three of the most iconic managers ever. I’m really honored. I feel very fortunate going in with this class.”

Doubts abounded about size

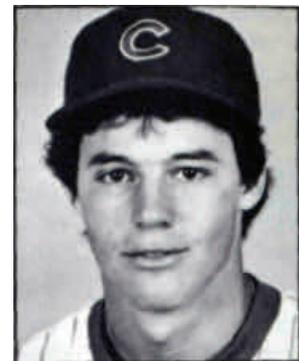
Like the proverbial journey of a 1,000 miles starting with one modest step, Maddux’s three-decade course to Cooperstown began in Pikeville with the counsel of Kranitz and manager Jim Fahey. The teen-age right-hander first had to overcome the image that a pitcher of such modest build could not produce impressive results. Cubs scout Doug Mapson felt he could have topped the entire 1984 draft had he possessed a pitcher’s typical strapping build. Mapson convinced Cubs scouting chief Gordon Goldsberry to invest a high pick in Maddux.

“He kind of struck me, his size was very small,” Kranitz said. “He couldn’t have weighed 150 pounds.”

Then-Cubs GM Dallas Green, a 6-foot-5 ex-pitcher himself, was skeptical.

“I’ve never been a proponent of a small right-handed pitcher,” said Green, just short of his 80th birthday as a senior Phillies advisor. “Gordy convinced me he was above average for 18 years for intellect, knowledge, and command and control of his stuff.”

Even after a year in the majors, Maddux was listed at 6-feet and just 150 pounds in the Cubs’ 1988 media guide. But he packed a lot of athlete and desire into that lean body. Kranitz found out immediately when he helped warm up the pitcher.



A boyish-looking Greg Maddux as a young Cub circa 1987.

“The very first time I stretched him, when I’d take his arms to put behind his back. I could not believe how flexible this guy was,” he said. “I was absolutely amazed what he could do. His range of motion was absolutely phenomenal. He had the ability to throw the baseball the right way. He maximized his potential.”

Maddux’s flexibility and the ability to duplicate his release point and simple delivery was seen as a key to the pitcher avoiding arm and shoulder problems in an era of rampant Tommy John surgery. Answering the bell for a full season from 1988 onward with 33 or more starts each season enabled him to win 355 with just two 20-win campaigns.

“The flexibility kept him away from injury,” Kranitz said. “He had an easiness of delivery. He always released the ball at the same spot so nobody knew what kind of pitch was coming.

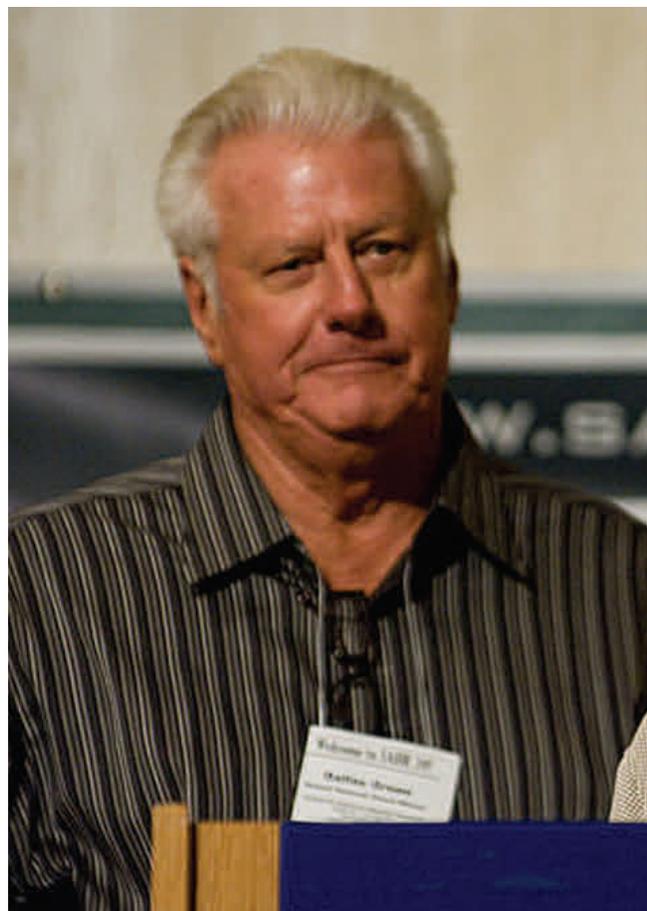
“When guys try to throw harder, they usually open up their front side too soon and the hitter sees the ball. This guy was a master at staying in his delivery all the way through it to the point you didn’t know what was coming out of his hand, because it all looks the same. The fastball looks exactly like the changeup.”

Maddux did not possess what Green called “blower” stuff. But coming into pro ball, his fastball was good enough to build a repertoire of expert location and complementary stuff.

“We didn’t have radar guns,” Kranitz said. “We’d look at the swing, based off what we saw. Very few hitters timed him up, until later in the game when he’d tire. He didn’t have any meat on him.”

Maddux made 12 starts among his 14 appearances for Pikeville. He was 6-2 with a 2.63 ERA. His fine control had yet to be developed with 41 walks in 85 2/3 innings. But he allowed just 63 hits. Maddux threw two shutouts, tying for the Appalachian League lead.

Maddux’s path to Wrigley Field would be quick. He won 27 games at three minor-league levels the next two seasons, earning a promotion to the Cubs when rosters were



Dallas Green was skeptical about Greg Maddux due to his short, slim frame for a pitcher.

expanded in Sept. 1986. Just four months past his 20th birthday, Maddux was the youngest Cub to see action since Rick James in 1967.

Maddux took his lumps in 1987

He was still unpolished by big-league standards. Maddux took his lumps in the big leagues as a full-time Cubs starter in 1987. He was 6-14 with a 5.61 ERA, giving up 181 hits and 74 walks in 155 2/3 innings. He earned two brief demotions to Triple-A in August.

“He wasn’t ready to come in 1987,” Green admitted. “That’s one of reasons I was fired (after the ’87 season).”

But Maddux had learned one thing stone cold by now – how to be a good teammate. He had demonstrated his beyond-the-years fortitude on July 7, 1987 during one of the most tempestuous days in Wrigley Field history.

Padres pitcher Eric Show hit MVP-to-be Andre Dawson in the face in the bottom of the third, touching off a melee. Though bleeding like a stuck pig, the angered Dawson had to be held back by five Cubs as he attempted to get to Show. Ejected, Show eventually would need a police escort to leave the ballpark.

In the top of the fourth, rookie Maddux put his own desire for a victory behind another goal. After striking out Chris Brown and Tim Flannery, he exacted revenge for Dawson by hitting Padres catcher Benito Santiago. Maddux also was tossed with a three-run lead.

Five years later, on Sept. 5, 1992, Maddux again flushed away a potential victory to protect his star hitter – also against the Padres. After Sandberg was low-bridged, Maddux picked his spot to hit catcher Dan Walters with two out in the eighth to put the lead run on base. Without any warning having been issued, Maddux was ejected. Reliever Jeff Robinson came in, and served up an eventual game-winning homer to Jerald Clark, the next hitter. Maddux was charged with the loss, but had long won over the loyalty of his teammates.

“Greg was taught well in the Cubs organization,” Green said. “That’s what Gordy and I believed (protecting hitters). He listened, he learned and did what he had to do as a teammate.”

Maddux quickly recovered from his nightmarish ’87 season. Green wasn’t around to see him win 37 games over the next two seasons. But Maddux wasn’t finished completing his Hall of Fame portfolio. Even in 1991, he said he still had to fine-tune his “stretch mechanics.” By the time he won the first of four straight Cy Young Awards in 1992 as a Cub, he had perfected a back-door fastball that would bore in on left-handed hitters, then dart over the inside corner for a strike. Master batsman Tony Gwynn, who racked up Maddux early in his career, said any sane hitter should dare not swing at that pitch, and instead wait for Maddux to get the next pitch further over the plate.

VALUE OF GREG MADDUX TO THE CHICAGO CUBS

CHICAGO CUB STARTERS 1988 THRU 1992

CRITERIA: GS ≥ 15 IN AT LEAST ONE SEASON (1988 THRU 1992)
STATISTICS WITH CHICAGO ONLY

COMPARISON OF MADDUX TO OTHER CUBS STARTING PITCHERS THE PAST 5 SEASONS (88 THRU 92)

53% MORE STARTS THAN OTHER CUBS STARTER
64% MORE INNINGS PITCHED THAN ANY OTHER CUBS STARTER
63% MORE WINS THAN ANY OTHER CUBS STARTER

<u>GAMES STARTED</u>			<u>INNINGS PITCHED</u>			<u>WINS</u>		
<u>PLAYER</u>	<u>GS</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>PLAYER</u>	<u>IP</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>PLAYER</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>RANK</u>
MADDUX	176	1	MADDUX	1255.1	1	MADDUX	87	1
BIELECKI	92	2	BIELECKI	600.2	2	BIELECKI	41	2
SUTCLIFFE	89	3	SUTCLIFFE	573.0	3	SUTCLIFFE	35	3
BOSKIE	53	4	BOSKIE	318.1	4	MORGAN	16	4
CASTILLO	51	5	CASTILLO	317.0	5	HARKEY	16	4
HARKEY	43	6	HARKEY	265.0	6	CASTILLO	16	4
MORGAN	34	7	SCHIRALDI	245.0	7	BOSKIE	14	7
SCHIRALDI	27	8	MORGAN	240.0	8	SANDERSON	12	8
SANDERSON	23	9	WILSON	237.0	9	SCHIRALDI	12	8
WILSON	23	9	SANDERSON	161.2	10	WILSON	10	10
KILGUS	23	9	KILGUS	145.2	11	KILGUS	6	11

<u>WIN-LOSS PERCENTAGE</u>			<u>EARNED RUN AVERAGE</u>		
<u>PLAYER</u>	<u>WP</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>PLAYER</u>	<u>ERA</u>	<u>RANK</u>
MORGAN	.667	1	MORGAN	2.55	1
MADDUX	.604	2	MADDUX	3.01	2
HARKEY	.593	3	HARKEY	3.12	3
BIELECKI	.569	4	CASTILLO	3.78	4
SANDERSON	.522	5	SUTCLIFFE	3.90	5
SUTCLIFFE	.522	5	BIELECKI	4.05	6
CASTILLO	.471	7	SANDERSON	4.06	7
WILSON	.435	8	SCHIRALDI	4.19	8
SCHIRALDI	.387	9	KILGUS	4.39	9
KILGUS	.375	10	WILSON	4.56	10
BOSKIE	.350	11	BOSKIE	4.69	11

Part of agent Scott Boras' prospectus as he shopped Greg Maddux around as a free agent in 1992. The prospectus is included in the Jerome Holtzman Library at the Chicago Baseball Museum.

Hitting strategies played into his hands

However, that expectation often was not fulfilled with Maddux's master control. Kranitz and Maddux went their separate ways after Pikeville, with the former climbing the ladder in the Cubs' farm system as a pitching coach. Eventually, he joined the Cubs as assistant pitching coach in time to engage in pre-game strategy sessions with manager Jim Riggleman about how to handle Braves ace Maddux.

"Rigs said the best thing we can do with this guy is he'll get strike one, we got to go at him right away," Kranitz recalled of the conference in Turner Field. "We have to start swinging at the first pitch because once he gets ahead of you, he'll start playing with you."

But that was exactly Maddux's point as he psyched out an entire National League of hitters. You start planning against Maddux, trying to hit a specific pitch, he had half the battle won with the hitters trying too hard. He watched all hitters and their nuances like a predatory hawk. Outfielder Doug Glanville couldn't figure out how Maddux always got a quick strike one on him. Then he realized Maddux noticed Glanville's feet weren't completely set in the batter's box as he stepped in. The pitcher got him off-balance with a quick get-me-over fastball to put Glanville in a hole.

Maddux had almost total recall of how he handled hitters in specific situations.

“He asked me one time, what do you remember about a hitter?” Kranitz said. “He said he chose to remember how he got him out with a runner at first and second and two outs in fourth or fifth when he really needed it. When you remember things, especially against certain hitters, you’re going to be quite a pitcher with that kind of ability. He was a master at managing a lineup.”

Maddux’s bungled departure from the Cubs, greased when the Cubs pulled a five-year, \$25 million contract to which he had agreed off the table in the winter of 1991-92, is an issue for another story, for books. Suffice to say, much of him is rooted in the Cubs organization. That’s why he will not have either a Cubs or Braves hat when he is permanently enshrined in Cooperstown. He loved both organizations and fans too much to choose a favorite for his depiction. Just the fact he returned to the Cubs as a free agent in 2004 after his Braves peak seasons, then came back a third time as a front-office aide to GM Jim Hendry in 2009 speaks volumes.

Kranitz, Green and everyone else who worked with Maddux as a Cub feel another burst of pride these days.

“I got nothing but the greatest respect for him and what he accomplished,” said Green. “I’m still very proud to say we gave him the opportunity with the Cubs and professional baseball.”