



Bo's post-baseball work helps garner Beacon Award

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Bo knows...education.

The subject of schooling as a priority over baseball dominated talk in and around the annual Civil Rights Game at U.S. Cellular Field Aug. 24. So it made perfect sense that Bo Jackson, honored at the pre-game luncheon with the Major League Baseball Beacon Award, would talk about education's relationship to sports.

That's been the focus of his Bo Jackson Give Me a Chance Foundation headquartered in the Chicago southwest suburb of Bolingbrook. Jackson is his own best publicist.

"My goal in my foundation is to get the young black athlete back into baseball through academics," he said. "I don't want the public to think I'm just trying to go out and teach young black kids the game of baseball. I want them to get their education to where baseball can be a simpler task.

"This is 5 1/2 years (the foundation has existed) and tapped into the school systems to where all the kids we've sponsored to go to my sports complex to be tutored and mentored by ex- minor league and major-league baseball players. In order for them to be a part of the program, they've got to make the grades."

Many of the programs are held at the Bo Jackson Elite Sports Complex, an 88,000-square-foot facility in nearby Lockport. Jackson partnered with former Sox outfielder



Bo Jackson's latest honor was the MLB Beacon Award, presented just before the Civil Rights Game at U.S. Cellular Field.

John Cangelosi – now running Cangelosi Baseball training facility -- to build up the complex.

Give Me a Chance’s own web site describes its mission:

“Our camps are professionally developed to give kids an opportunity to not only learn important athletic skills, but, just as important, personal values, such as self esteem, sportsmanship, cooperation, responsibility and unity through sports and personal counseling. The foundation uses a fair, subjective process based on financial need, family situation and current academics achieved to select those truly in need. These highly successful camps allow our kids to be involved in a summer sports, educational and social program that occupies them in a healthy, productive and memorable way.”

The foundation can be reached at www.contact@givemeachancefoundation.org. or at 630/759-0518.

Chicago-area resident for 22 years

Jackson may be most renowned as the greatest multi-sports athlete of the 20th Century when he starred for the Royals and Raiders simultaneously. But he always had another, less publicized side that only has come out in the two decades since he retired to southwest suburban Burr Ridge.

“I have always learned,” he said, “and I learned this from my mother who had a high-school education is you can’t be successful on the playing field unless you’re successful in the classroom. That was the only way I got to play sports.

“I wasn’t the sharpest knife in the drawer. But I brought those D’s and F’s up to B’s and C’s in order to play organized sports. I’m just using that same method my mother used on me on the kids I’m supporting right now through my foundation. One-hundred percent of our proceeds (after foundation operating expenses) we made goes to the kids.”



Bo certainly knows the gridiron, so a Jackson autograph on a football is still prized.

Jackson is particularly helpful in the Chicago area. Burr Ridge and the Windy City have become his adopted home base after he signed with the White Sox in 1991. His second-to-last big-league season in 1993 was memorable: Jackson's 16 homers and 45 RBIs as exclusively a designated hitter helped the White Sox win the American League Central.

"After I left Kansas City and moved here, my oldest (child) was getting ready to start school," Jackson said. "We got our kid in school here, and take up roots here. We're tired of moving around and doing the pinball machine thing. The youngest (child) is a senior in college. We've been here for about 22 years and everything's been great."

Beacon Award a career highlight

A highlight of his time in Chicago has been the Beacon Award.

"This honor ranks up in the top two, three from the standpoint my peers recognized my work off the playing field," Jackson said. "To recognize that is very important to me. Not only do I do it from the heart, but I do it because I hope the public will look at me as a role model. I try to do what I can to give back.



Bo Jackson (left), who won the 1985 Heisman Trophy at Auburn, and Gen. Ann E Dunwoody (right), accept awards from the NCAA in San Antonio. Photo credit [U.S. Army Materiel Command](#).

"I say that from the standpoint because the country supported me in what I was doing 20, 25 years ago. It's only right to give back in some capacity."

Jackson was a top honoree at the luncheon. But he knew his place in the pecking order in a ballroom also hosting Hall of Famers Hank Aaron, Frank Robinson and Billy Williams, among others.

"To have all of those guys in that room at the same time, that's a gold mine of athletic history," Jackson said. "To be a part of it, to be in that room with all that knowledge and experience, it's wonderful.

"Wow, it's like someone telling you to dive in that pool of liquid gold. And you come out gold-plated. To be in that room with all that experience, you can't do but come out smarter than when you came in as far as baseball knowledge is concerned."

The Cooperstown enshrines also advanced Auburn product Jackson's continuing education on civil rights.

"There were no classes about civil rights (when he attended school). "I try to absorb as much as I can. They always say, 'You can forgive, but you don't forget.' It's a good thing

we can sit down and educate the younger generation to let them understand so they will know the meaning of civil rights.”

Bo also knows...what if?

Whenever Jackson holds court, the question inevitably comes up about what might have been. While Jackson was honored for playing the two top sports at the highest level at the same time, a concurrent theme was how much better Jackson could have been had he concentrated on either baseball or football. And second-guessing the course of his career was how he might have avoided his career-shortening hip injury if he passed up football, by far the more physically stressful of the two sports.

Jackson amassed four straight seasons of 22 or more homers for the Royals. During his one 100-RBI season in 1989, he was the most valuable player in the All-Star Game. That same year was his peak with the Raiders – 950 yards rushing with a 5.5 yards-per-carry average. Jackson finished with 141 homers and 2,782 yards (5.4 average).

The second-guessing is left for others. Jackson won't participate.

“No,” he said. “If I had to pick one sport, I would have been doing what the public wanted me to do or someone else wanted me to do. You know they say -- you have one life to live, live it to the fullest. That's what I did.

“Do I have regrets about doing both sports? No. If I had to do it all over again, I would do it the exact same way. I wouldn't change a thing. Even with the injuries. I look at life. I am a realist. God put speed bumps in everybody's road of life. My hip injury was nothing more than a speed bump.

“I slowed down, got over that speed bump, and went on down the road. And now it put me in the position...where back then, I was someone else's employee. I'm people's employer now and I like that side of the business better.

“As far as saying, oh, I wish he didn't get hurt, I don't buy that. Things happen for a reason. I think I'm a better, stronger man for it.”