

BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

Green is No. 3 behind Epstein, Veeck as the Cubs' all-time baseball executive

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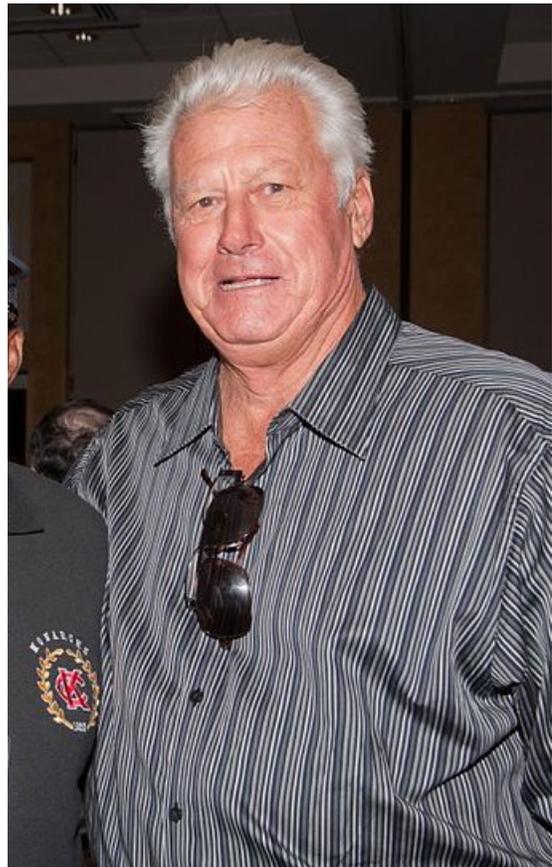
In tributes to former Cubs impresario Dallas Green, who passed away at 82 the other day, a comparison with his successor six times removed have been made – he was “Theo before Theo.”

Not exactly. Theo Epstein sealed the deal, albeit after crashing the talent end of the Cubs and taking their broadcast ratings with them in the process while team ticket prices did not also decline.

Epstein won it all. So he thus ranks as the top executive in Cubs history, ending the 108-year championship drought. William L. Veeck of 1920s and early 1930s vintage ranks second, building up a consistent Cubs contender, making Wrigley Field a regional gate attraction and pioneering blanket radio coverage, Ladies Days and sale of tickets away from the ballpark.

Green is a respectable third in the pantheon, which cannot be confirmed simply by numbers alone. His record included one NL East title and a botched NLCS trip to San Diego in 1984 to go along with five losing seasons, none of them close to .500.

Green’s impact was not in mere won-lost records. He turned around the franchise from the somnolent Wrigley family days, as an inadequate situation by 1970s standards was getting worse as the Eighties dawned. Owner Bill Wrigley was dumping ballast as he was buffeted by a \$40 million estate tax bill. When did you ever see the Cubs needing cash, getting \$400,000 in return in the 1981 Rick Reuschel trade with the Yankees?



Dallas Green was almost larger than life in his long career.

The last of the Wrigleys had stripped down the team so much Green recalled he needed a direct cash subsidy from new Tribune Co. ownership in early 1982 to fund team operations and Wrigley Field maintenance. But once he got the financial situation stabilized, the voluble new Cubs GM fresh from a winning organization in Philadelphia turned around the Cubs' fortunes and how the franchise was perceived.

Amid the continuing cynical, ignorant media stereotypes of goats and curses and lovable losers, there was no turning back in the Cubs' impact and importance. There would be no full return to the bad old days even as Tribune corporate executives cut off the 6-foot-5 Green at the knees, meddled sometimes to disastrous effect in baseball operations and under-spent and were under-staffed for two decades after his forced departure late in 1987.

From top to bottom, the Cubs simply operated closer to present-day standards than the creaky, inbred Wrigleys, who were disgracefully not under any kind of withering pressure from Mike Royko and other local media to modernize or sell out.

Lack of lights, racial enlightenment plague Wrigley era

Two simple facts define the pre-Green Cubs. They refused to install lights without any logical reason or explanation, condemning the franchise to frequent late-season collapses due to likely shift-work disorder suffered by players. And they were racially regressive as the years passed, not selecting a black player No. 1 in the June draft from its first 16 seasons starting in 1965, and offering up a very skimpy Latin American scouting operation.

Green fixed much of what ailed the Cubs even if he did not build a lasting contender.

There was nothing wrong with the Jack Brickhouse-led WGN broadcast crew that had enjoyed below-market rights fees from the Wrigleys. Yet the corporate hiring of Harry Caray kicked interest into a higher gear. Green was no detached executive in Caray's arrival. He and Tribune Broadcasting chief Jim Dowdle counseled Caray to tone it down from his guerilla-theater-of-the-air style on White Sox broadcasts. There would be no reunion with Jimmy Piersall on WGN airwaves. Caray did not miss his personal attacks on players. Just as loud and entertaining as on the South Side, he was far bigger than ever on his powerful broadcast pulpit, serving as a pied piper for satellite-borne Cubs telecasts and Wrigley Field for 16 seasons.

A supplement to Caray's salesmanship was the first active Cubs marketing department. Team promotions and the Cubs Convention began under Green. A publications department startup quickly became profitable. Bob Ibach, Green's first media relations director, recalled how he pitched an idea for a Cubs Hall of Fame to Green on the site of the present-day new team offices on the northwest side of the ballpark. Green liked the historical angle, but left before he could act on it.

He also improved Wrigley Field facilities within the ballpark's limited footprint. Green constructed the first Stadium Club beyond the right-field corner. After two years of operating in the cramped little, high-school-sized clubhouse in the left-field corner, he constructed a new clubhouse facing north-south under the box seats behind the dug-

out. The clubhouse would prove to be too small in a new century. But in 1984 it was a huge improvement, including expanded training facilities.

“I think it made a world of difference,” then-head trainer Tony Garofalo said, after working six seasons in the old clubhouse that had metal stalls instead of lockers. “You can tell the whole attitude changed from in the hole-in-the-wall down the left-field line, to what we thought was the Taj Mahal. Dallas had me look at the Bears facility in Lake Forest and we’ll incorporate ideas into it.

Garofalo confirmed the water table near Lake Michigan had prevented the construction of an even bigger, underground clubhouse such as the one the Cubs now use.

“We had a sunken hot tub,” he said. “The problem were all the controls were underground, and it kept flooding.”

Former Cubs business operations chief Mark McGuire, a front-office contemporary of Green, said in 2001 the water table was an issue in building underground. However, engineers solved the problem 15 years later, permitting the spacious new facility that contributed to the 2016 championship and Kyle Schwarber’s astounding rehab from two serious knee injuries.

Finally, a revved-up farm system

The biggest change Green effected was in scouting and player development.

Trying to re-create the productive Philies farm system with some of the same personnel, Green and top aide Gordon Goldsberry finally got the Cubs development program out of the mud. The farm system would not be as productive again until Epstein. Green and Goldsberry supervised the grooming of Greg Maddux, Rafael Palmeiro, Mark Grace, Jamie Moyer, Shawon Dunston, Joe Girardi and Davey Martinez. Amid swirling office politics, Goldsberry was fired nearly a year after Green. The former boss might have said the courtly, respected Goldsberry’s departure was far worse than his own.

Home-grown players of the time recall Jim Snyder as a tough, but effective director of instruction. Green was not afraid of hiring controversial personalities into this mix. Piersall never was re-united with Caray, but landed a gig as the minor-league roving outfield instructor. The man who said he knew he was crazy because he



Hall of Famer Greg Maddux led the crop of good young players Dallas Green's farm system developed.

had papers to prove so was long lauded for teaching the craft at which he so excelled as a player.

Green's high-decibel style did not win him a lot of friends at first from fans steeped in the more genteel Wrigley family tradition. Rightfully demanding lights be installed for the ballpark from the get-go stiffened local opposition. Residents of gentrifying Wrigleyville were politically active, and rounded up support from their aldermen and state legislators. Once again, the full impact of Green's advocacy was not felt until after he left. Lights were finally installed in 1988.

"I always called him baseball's version of John Wayne," said Ibach, who now runs his own marketing company out of far northwest suburban Huntley. "With that head of white hair, suntanned weathered face and deep booming voice, when Dallas Green walked into a room you knew he was present."

Green opted to establish a work ethic in the front office he felt was lacking under the Wrigleys. He ordered his Pink Poodle lunchroom operator to start serving breakfast to employees working longer, earlier hours under his regime.

Green did not want his winter meetings contingent to go hungry or thirsty, either.

"My job at the winter meetings was to keep food and drinks full 24 hours a day in our suite," Garofalo said. "Dallas said when anything gets low, just order more. He wanted the staff to feel comfortable working there."

Voluble Green had 'soft side'

Said Ibach: "Dallas had a soft side to him that he didn't often share with the general public but with folks who worked for him. His slogan was 'Whatever it takes.' By that, he'd say I don't care if it takes you an hour or 10 hours to get it done. Whatever it takes.

"But behind that work ethic was a guy who made sure he asked about your family, how are you kids doing, how's the wife. . . things like that. He knew when to pat you on the back, or push your backside. He was about getting the job done, but also making sure you took care of your own family. He was a second father to me, and the greatest boss I've had in 45 years of being in the sports industry."

Garofalo can attest to Green's family-oriented side. He should have been walking on eggshells in the spring of 1982. Garofalo was a holdover from the Wrigley years. His wife was close to delivering their youngest son, Greg, during spring training.



Tony Garofalo with his grandchildren. Garofalo found out early that family mattered to Dallas Green.

“I said I had to go home,” Garofalo said. “He said absolutely. Family first.”

If you had good information and the conviction to back it up, you could change Green’s mind. Garofalo dissuaded Green from hiring a longtime Phillies farm system stalwart as his assistant trainer. “I told Dallas he was not certified,” Garofalo said. “That was required after the 1981 strike. He listened to me and finally agreed.

“He was loud, he was boisterous, but he was fair.”

Sharon Panno, now vice president of East Coast Publicity for NBC-Universal, got her first full-time job in baseball under Ibach and Green in late 1982. Outwardly the ultimate macho man, he was not above encouraging a young woman starting out in a confirmed boys club. Panno worked her way up to media relations director in 1991, holding that job until late 2006.



After leaving the Cubs, Dallas Green held a variety of jobs, including Yankees manager.

“He was my first general manager with the Cubs and a wonderful leader and mentor,” she posted on Facebook. “Not many women in the business back in the early 80’s and he gave me every opportunity. He also told me once I shouldn’t ‘burn the candle at both ends.’ My deepest condolences to (wife) Sylvia and his family along with his other ‘family,’ the Philadelphia Phillies. A truly great baseball man.”

In 1985, Garofalo conferred with Green, manager Jim Frey, pitching coach Billy Connors and two team physicians on how to get Rick Sutcliffe up and running again after partially tearing a hamstring. The agreement was 65 pitches, no matter how far along in the game. Garofalo and Connors were to keep count, inform Frey and call Green up in the GM’s box after every half-inning Sutcliffe pitched.

“When we got close to 65, we informed Frey,” Garofalo said. “But he kept Sut in, he threw 85 to 90. So at the next half inning, I called Dallas and told him. I heard him scream. The phone went dead. He had ripped the phone off the wall.”

Despite assurances to the contrary, corporate interference dogged Green from the start. Cubs president Andy McKenna’s inability to reach Tribune Co. boss Stan Cook on a trans-Atlantic flight scotched a winter-meetings trade with the Phillies, embarrassing Green with old boss Paul Owens. Nine years later, Cook would be responsible for botching the Maddux free-agent deal, frittering away a future Hall of Famer firmly loyal up to that point to the organization that had drafted and developed him, first under Green.

For a short while, former Bears GM Jim Finks served as Cubs president, succeeding McKenna, and serving as a smooth buffer between baseball guy Green and the suits in Tribune Tower. But after Finks departed late in 1984, there was no such go-between. Friction began developing as cultures clashed.

Grenesko more concerned with hot dogs than Cubs wins

Ibach related a story of Cubs business chief Don Grenesko's priorities at one Wrigley Field meeting.

"I remember this one meeting where each of the staff directors would come in for a Monday morning meeting to discuss what was happening in their departments," he said. "Well, we were in the middle of a losing streak in mid-1985, the pitching staff had gone down, and we had gone from first place in the NL East to third or fourth.

"So we're in the meeting and it got around to Grenesko, talking about how many things had been sold at the concession stands the last homestand, and how great things were looking. Well, Dallas kicked me under the table and whispered, 'That's it, these guys don't want to win.' It upset him that the focus was on popcorn and hot dogs selling, and not on getting better players for the team."

Injuries to Sutcliffe, Steve Trout, Dennis Eckersley and Scott Sanderson, all signed to lucrative deals, started grating with the corporate crowd looking at money spent on disabled players. Sniping began. After Green fired Frey in June 1986, the "preacher man" manager abruptly re-surfaced as WGN-Radio color analyst late in the same year. Suspicions were rife Frey was a spy for the suits.

Sure enough, after too much corporate interference, this time by former investment banker John Madigan, pushed Green out after the 1987 season, Frey was appointed his successor with no high-level front-office experience. The organization plunged downhill. The eventual appointment of golden-boy Andy MacPhail as Cubs president in 1994, to cut the cord between Tribune Tower and the ballpark, did not prove to be a panacea. MacPhail acted in many ways more conservative financially than the Tribune executives.

[**2013 interview with Dallas Green speaking about his autobiography.**](#)

Green could never get over being low-bridged by the good, gray Madigan.

"The guy at the Tribune was a horse's ass," Green said of Madigan in a 2013 Chicago Sun-Times article. "And I had no business getting fired. Those guys were a year away yet, but we knew where we were and we knew what we had done and we knew the kind of talent we had."

Green said the corporate executives began playing baseball executives, as if they were in a fantasy game. Elevated to Cubs president, Grenesko, not Frey, fired manager Don Zimmer in 1991.

"Once they learn how to talk the lingo, they think they know baseball," Green told the Sun-Times.

Grenesko did not like this writer poking around management decisions, calling me “Inspector Clouseau” one 1989 lunchtime in the pressbox cafeteria. Two decades later, Cook declined an interview request from his Kenilworth, Ill. home to talk about the 1992 Maddux contract botch job. And in 1999, Madigan, by now the top guy at Tribune Co., was caught in a pincer’s movement behind the batting cage between me on the right-field side and then-ESPN 1000 reporter Bruce Levine coming in from third. Madigan declined both interview requests, then hurriedly retreated to the front office, where he complained to MacPhail and GM Ed Lynch that a couple of newshounds were trying to question him.

Despite these Alice In Wonderland scenarios that throttled his best-laid plans, Green always said he enjoyed his time in Wrigley Field. He would not have changed any of it. And the Cubs were better for his presence, even if everyone, including his gray-flanneled bosses, did not know what they were missing until he was gone.