

BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

Kids were a Sox, Cubs clubhouse staple for decades

*By George Castle, CBM Historian
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Don't know what all the fuss on kids in clubhouses is about.

I started covering Major League Baseball in 1980, and I've always seen players, managers and front-office types' kids both in the locker room and working out in batting practice.

Perhaps Adam LaRoche stretched the custom a few degrees by having son Drake in uniform for every game. But he was a designated exception. No other players demanded their kids get similar privileges.

So it's blown up into an international cause célèbre. Not once as I write this have I heard concurrent accounts of baseball kids cavorting around the field, or even being used as props in post-game press conferences. Once again, the media feeding frenzy focuses in on the hot development of the moment with little or no historical perspective. And past is always prologue in baseball.

Are our memories so short we forget the famed Darren Baker, almost run over near home plate in the 2002 World Series, then sitting with dad Dusty to conveniently deflect the toughest of questions after games a few years later at Wrigley Field?



Darren Baker (left) sported all the uniforms of the teams his father, Dusty Baker (right), managed. The younger Baker sometimes sat on his father's lap during post-game Cubs press conferences. Darren Baker photo credit [Jimcchou](#).

I don't understand why White Sox media isn't recalling Adam Dunn's sons, including kindergarten-aged Brady, who frequently cavorted about the clubhouse during the slugger's four seasons on the South Side. None made an issue about Brady Dunn's presence.

Not only was Brady, 5, much younger and in less of a workout condition than Drake LaRoche, but he also was afflicted with epilepsy. Wouldn't that be a more questionable clubhouse presence than the younger LaRoche's? Brady Dunn loved his clubhouse time, sometimes experiencing wardrobe malfunctions. You know his mental outlook was better hanging with his Texas-sized Dad, going back in the training room and doing hot-tub time. Outside the locker-room entrance, Rachel Dunn brought a golden-doodle dog, Astro, to greet Brady after games. Dogs and their human brethren afflicted with epilepsy have proven to be a vital match. The dogs sometimes sense a seizure coming on.

Just before and briefly intertwining with the Dunn era was the posse of Ozzie Guillen's kids. They were constants. Two were given team employment, including Ozzie, Jr. working the broadcast booth. Ozzie, Jr. was an alternate quotes source and sometime-translator for Latin players. Eventually, Oney Guillen bit the hand that fed his family with poorly-thought-out tweets about Sox management. But other than the 140-character outbursts, no one made an issue of the Guillen family posse spreading out in all directions.

Hobnob with any big-leaguer whose father also made the majors, and you'll hear plenty of clubhouse tales from personal experience. Ken Griffey, Jr. and Brian McRae were two such storytellers. While Ruben Amaro, Jr. was Phillies general manager, he fondly recalled hanging with other Cubs figures' sons when father Ruben, Sr. was a Cubs coach circa 1984. I recall Jon Riggelman, then-Cubs manager Jim Riggelman's only child, taking infield grounders in the late 1990s at Wrigley Field.

The kiddie club extended to media. In the 1990s and early 2000s, writers' and broadcasters' children were allowed at specific, limited times in the pressboxes and on the field in media-accessible areas. I will testify that Laura Castle has posed with freshly-inducted Hall of Famer Billy Williams in the dugout at 3½, and sat on Harry Caray's lap in the WGN broadcast booth at 12. As a college-age spectator, she attended Baker's pre-game talk in the old cubbyhole interview room. Laura's met dozens of players. The expectation was the kid would be well-behaved. They all were. Knowing they were in a big-league atmosphere thanks to their dad, they rose to the occasion.

The crux of kids in the clubhouse, including Drake La Roche, is the enforced separation due to the game's brutal travel. Scores of big leaguers have told me over the decades they burn out on travel before age and injuries sap them of their enthusiasm. Whenever they could bring their kids into their workplace, they'd make the right arrangements.

The only thing worse for family ties than the one- or two-week-long road trips are military deployments. Lee Arthur Smith once told me he delayed fatherhood until later in his career to avoid moving the kids around from one home and school to another in the course of a season.

Again, even the media were affected. I know one Chicago writer who, much to the consternation of some of his kids' more inflexible teachers, took them out of school to spend at least half the six weeks he was stationed with the Cubs in spring training.

Players also devolve in age with their sons around. While writing game stories a decade ago, the look on Kerry Wood's face as he threw the ball back and forth with son Justin on the field at Wrigley Field was priceless.

Ryan Dempster? That was different as he brought his retriever out to shortstop post-game. Nature called, No. 2. Maybe a left-handed commentary on the Cubs fortunes at the time?

Eventually the Cubs brass banned dogs. Kyle Farnsworth brought a 100-pound beast onto the field. Yeah, there was a bit of a liability problem.

But kids? Their ballpark experiences have traditionally brought smiles and good memories. That Laura-Caray photo traveled with me in my computer bag for years.

Some basic perspective was needed after the biggest baseball sideshow so far for the 2016 season.