



Garofalo campaigns for trainers' recognition from Cubs

*By George Castle, CBM Historian
Posted Thursday, May 12, 2016*

The baseball trainer is the guy you see but don't hear from – the silence now legislated via HIPPA health privacy laws and baseball dictum.

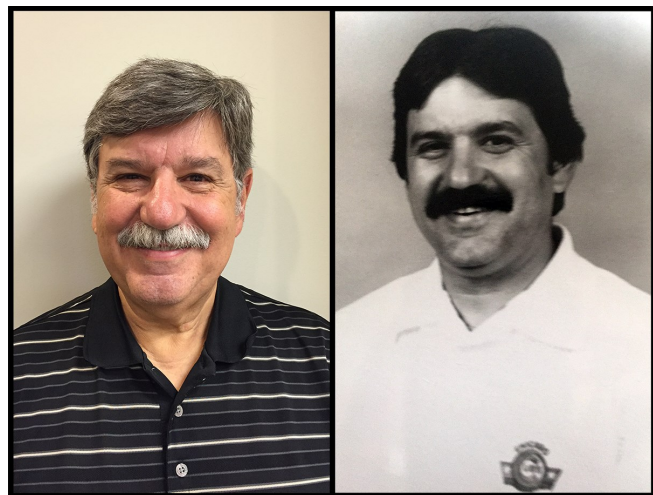
A player is hit in the head with a pitch or collides with another fielder. Armed with towels and scissors typically protruding from his back pocket, the trainer shoots out there in seconds for potential emergency M*A*S*H* work and follow-up clubhouse care for the wounded gladiator.

Along with the clubhouse attendants, head trainers and their assistants work far longer hours than players, managers and front-office types, for less money. Even more importantly, for far less acclaim.

That's why Tony Garofalo is spreading the word to get the pioneering members of the Professional Baseball Athletic Trainers Society honored by the teams for which they once worked.

Some teams remembered not only their star players, but behind-the-scene supporting cast like trainers. Others need a nudge. West Dundee, Ill. resident Garofalo, the Cubs' trainer from 1977 to 1986, is trying to do just that with his old team in his spare time as a trainer consultant with Athletico.

P.J. Mainville certainly honors his predecessors. He operates a Taj Mahal of a training room that includes a pilates area in the Cubs' spacious new subterranean clubhouse. Garofalo was wowed by Mainville's workplace, having had to work in little better than a closet in the old left-field corner clubhouse when he began in 1977. Head trainer Mainville plans to list all the 10-year head trainers in his luxurious quarters. That's in keeping with a mini-museum of historical displays in the long corridors leading to the dugout and the old clubhouse-turned-batting cage.



Tony Garofalo today (left) and as Cubs trainer in the early 1980s.

Problem is, the stunning collection of photos is out of sight of the general public. Not that Garofalo stays up at night worrying about personal credit. But characters like Andy Lotshaw and Al “Doc” Scheuneman more than doubled Garofalo’s own service at Wrigley Field. They were as much a part of team history as anyone else in their longevity and loyalty.

In a letter to Cubs chairman Tom Ricketts, business president Crane Kenney and corporate spokesman Julian Green, Garofalo gave a timeline primer, logical reasoning and precedent elsewhere in baseball for public remembrance of team trainers.

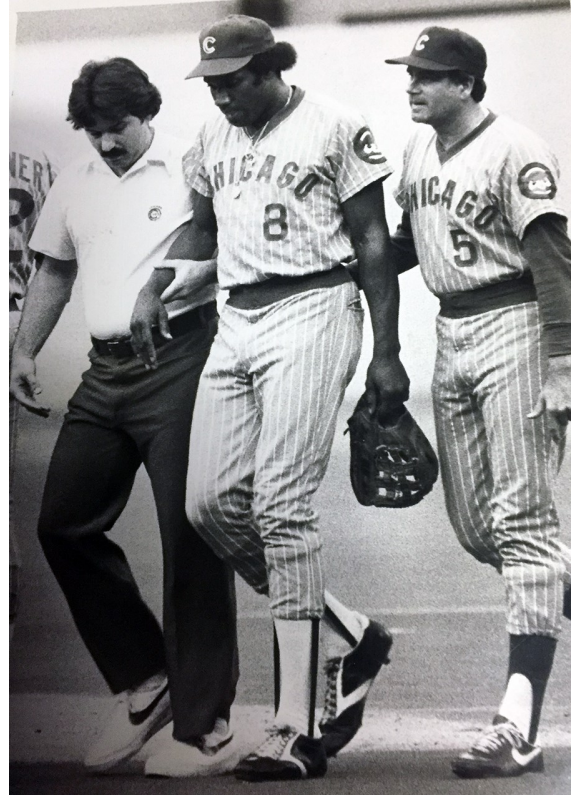
“In the 101-year history of Wrigley Field, 17 men have helped to keep hundreds of players healthy and ready to compete on a daily basis each Championship season,” Garofalo wrote. ‘Four of these individuals have accounted for 70 of those 101 years at Wrigley Field. The hard work and dedication of all of these men has gone unnoticed by the fans, but the athletes that they have worked with on a daily basis, know the important part they play in the day-to-day grind of a MLB season and the importance that they provide to their individual careers.

“A few organizations, such as the Yankees, Cardinals, Braves, and Orioles, have included their Athletic Trainers into their respective Halls of Fame. Hopefully, in the future, this will be the norm rather than the exception.”

Trainers may have to wait in line

In the Cubs’ case, however, the trainers will have to get in line behind the players, managers and front-office types. Ricketts has been busy rebuilding Wrigley Field and surroundings, and acquiring rooftop clubs to maximize every dollar out of the property they already control or covet. The ruling family is emphasizing the here and now. Unlike many of the teams to which Garofalo referred, and other small-market clubs not mentioned, the Cubs do not have a Hall of Fame, team museum, formal alumni association or speakers bureau.

Thus someone who drew a Cubs paycheck for a decade needs to bring the history angle to the brass’ attention. The Chicago National League Ballclub may not have any championships since 1908, but it still has as riveting a history as any other team.



Tony Garofalo (left) and Cubs manager Joey Amalfitano escort an injured Bobby Bonds, father of Barry, off the field in a 1981 game.

In his letter, Garofalo traced the 1983 founding of the trainers' society under somewhat harrowing circumstances. The Lords of the Game feared the trainers desired to form a union and, fearing for their jobs, had to meet secretly. Not until Bud Selig's commissionerhip did PBATS gain the full acceptance and cooperation of MLB.



Tony Garofalo welcomes predecessor-once-removed Al "Doc" Scheuneman to his Wrigley Field training room.

Garofalo wrote: "The Professional Baseball Athletic Trainers Society, which I am a founding member, has done an outstanding job recognizing the efforts of all MLB Athletic Trainers and those who helped to start their organization. When we started PBATS, we put our jobs on the line because we believed in our profession and wanted the respect that was deserved as being part of Major League Baseball.

"The evolution of PBATS has gone from getting a letter from the League President stating that we would be fired if we continued to pursue the organization to having Commissioner Selig consult with the PBATS Board prior to testifying before Congress. Even those of us who are retired PBATS members, still continue to help spread the word about safety and injury concerns that plague young baseball players around the country by speaking to coaches, parents and athletes.

"I understand that the players are the ones with name recognition, which is rightly deserved, but if you ask any current or former player about their Athletic Trainer, I am sure that they will speak very highly of them and the important part that they have played in their careers."

Garofalo cited two top achievers in Cubs annals as remembering their trainers at key moments. He started with the Cubs' clinching of the NL East at old Three Rivers Stadium in Pittsburgh in 1984.

Cey, Sutter give credit to trainers

"Ron Cey was waiting for me to enter the clubhouse and proceeded to pour a bottle of champagne over my head and saying 'this is for all your time and effort that you did this past season to help make us champions.' I still have and treasure that empty bottle.

"The other instance was when Bruce Sutter was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. During his acceptance speech, he thanked his athletic trainers by saying, "People will never realize how important you were and what you have done for my career." Many other athletes have done the same to their athletic trainers as well. Ryne Sandberg and Cal Ripken are two names that come to mind."

Garofalo listed all the trainers in Cubs history. The colorful Lotshaw, who also served the Bears, worked from 1922 to 1952. Scheuneman, frequently seen on Arne Harris' dugout TV shots in 1969, took over and worked until 1972. Gary Nicholson preceded Garofalo for a four-year run in which he assembled data showing the all-daytime home schedule hurt the Cubs. But Nicholson and all other team employees realized nothing would change under the Wrigley family ownership.

Garofalo was succeeded in 1987 by John Fierro. Northwest Indiana native Dave Tumbas got to come home for seven seasons starting in 1997. Dave Groeschner lasted just one season in 2004 because he was not licensed as a trainer in Illinois. Mark O'Neal, still working for the Cubs, had to deal with almost daily questions over Kerry Wood's and Mark Prior's ailments from the moment he began in 2005. O'Neal was shifted upstairs when Mainville took over in 2013.

Assistant trainers were Nicholson in 1972, Dave Cilladi (1986-92), Brett Fischer (1993-94), Brian McCann (1995-97), Steve Melendez (1998-2000), Sandy Krum (2001-04), Ed Halbur (2004-present) and Matt Johnson (2012-present).

The whole craft has certainly come a long way from Garofalo's first season with the Cubs. Then-farm director C.V. Davis, an import from the White Sox, once threatened to fire Class-A trainer Mike Palmer for daring to compare notes with Garofalo, in a far-less organizationally coordinated era. Garofalo went to then-GM Bob Kennedy to head off the firing.

Kennedy also raised Garofalo's first-year trainer's salary \$5,000, from \$12,000, when Garofalo protested he could not live on that pittance as a family man in Chicago. Amazingly, Kennedy also allowed Garofalo to take over a coaches' dressing room to expand his training area in the old left-field corner clubhouse. The coaches then had to dress with the players.

Dallas Green finally built a bigger clubhouse in 1984 that was just replaced by the huge underground quarters. He gave Garofalo the privilege of designing the then-new trainer's room. Garofalo made the most with still-limited space. He said the '84-vintage clubhouse was still smaller than almost all road locker rooms the Cubs visited.

Wedged in with just two tables and no desk or spreading their wings, trainers are baseball's unsung heroes.

"Players come and go but one consistent thing each year is the athletic training staff," Garofalo concluded in his letter. "Many of the original PBATS members are no longer in the game, but if you ask each one of them, I'm sure that each of them will still consider themselves as part of the organization that they served."



Tony Garofalo serves as a walking advertisement for third baseman Steve Ontiveros' deal with Hairline Creations.