



## Vance Law: ‘Winning Ugly’ third baseman, Cubs All-Star now Sox minor-league instructor

*By George Castle, CBM Historian  
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White Sox farmhands will get a decent dose of Chicago baseball history when Vance Law circulates throughout the team’s minor-league system as a roving instructor throughout 2013.

The kids will hear about Law’s role as third baseman on the “Winning Ugly” Sox AL West titlists of 1983, as the franchise marks that storied team’s 30th anniversary. To be sure, some of Law’s experiences as an All-Star on the 1988 Cubs and the following year’s “Boys of Zimmer” NL East championship run also will be related. Law is part of a not-inconsiderable list of players who made an impact playing for both the Sox and Cubs the past 112 years.

But more importantly, some of the best of the late hitting guru Charlie Lau, a mainstay of the 1983 Sox, will be channeled by Law in his return to the Sox organization as special assistant to player development chief Buddy Bell.

“I learned how to hit from one of the best – Charlie,” Law, 56, said from his Utah home. “Charlie really allowed me to understand what to do. You need to understand what it is to make an adjustment. That’s my strength – I’m a good teacher.”

The best of Lau, combined with Law’s relating to young players in a 13-year stint as Brigham Young University’s baseball coach, will serve him well in his new role as a kind of “utility instructor” in the farm system. He can teach hitting, baserunning and infield play. He’ll even fill in running teams when any of the Sox minor-league managers need to take a couple of games off for a graduation or wedding.



**Vance Law as a Cubs third baseman. He made the NL All-Star team in 1988 (Photo courtesy of Vance Law).**

Law's return is another example of the value of making a good impression via hard work and dedication. Those values were instilled in him from his father, former NL Cy Young Award winner Vernon Law. While a Sox under manager Tony La Russa from 1982-84, Law also made a lasting impression on the right guy. When he desired to get back into pro ball in 2012, he was able to call that same person.

### **Relationship with Reinsdorf crucial in return**



**Vance Law as a White Sox. Law was a member of the 1983 "Winning Ugly" team (Photo courtesy of Vance Law).**

“Mr. (Jerry) Reinsdorf’s the first person I called,” Law said. “He’s always been great to me. He’s always said if I’m ever in need of work, be sure to give him a call.”

Law was first put to work in the Arizona Instructional League. Baserunning was supposed to be his emphasis. As he got to know the minor-league staff headed by Bell, Law’s duties were expanded. He’ll draw upon both his college coaching days at BYU, where he was 397-347 with two ties.

“The thing that college taught me is to go back to the basics, fundamentals,” Law said. “I have an understanding of a player’s foundation. Infield play is with the feet (not the hands). College baseball taught me how to communicate to make that person a better player.”

The timing was just right for Law to return to the Sox.

“Always in the back of my mind I wanted to get back into pro baseball after my (five) children for the most part have been raised,” he said. “I could experience their activities through high school. If I was a manager in pro ball while my kids are still in high school, I’m going to miss a lot of their activities. We’ve (along with wife Sharon) always liked Utah, it was a great place to raise children. I don’t know if I’d want to uproot our family to go somewhere. We elected to stick around and try to be a part of their lives.”

One Law son is still playing baseball at BYU – minus his father.

“Had I not gotten let go at BYU (after the 2012 season), I probably would still be there for a few years,” Law said. “Once that took place, I figured wouldn’t mind getting my fingers back into pro baseball.

“I was very, very fortunate. Chicago’s like a second home to me. Both sides of town treated me extremely well. It was just a fabulous experience. The city has passionate

fans, understanding fans, fans who are very knowledgeable about the game. I just feel like Chicago is where I needed to be.”

### **Where are your glasses?**

His first meeting with La Russa was a bit of a puzzlement for the manager after Law was traded to the Sox from the Pirates, his original organization, late in spring training of 1982.

“I played with glasses, but I didn’t wear them off the field,” Law recalled. “I walked in, carrying my bag, past the manager’s office. He looked up and asked, ‘Who are you?’ I told him. He said, ‘I thought you wore glasses.’ He then told me I’d be going to Chicago unless I played my way off the team. That’s comforting and gratifying knowing I’d be in the major leagues.”

Law played all around the infield in ’82, batting .281 with 54 RBIs. He cemented the regular third-base job for the following year, contributing as the Sox made a rout of the AL West late in the season. Then Law had to miss some action with an abdominal strain after the Sox clinched with two weeks to go. Despite his tough exterior, La Russa showed Law he had plenty of heart and sentimentality toward players, remembering his own injury-deferred efforts to stick in the majors.

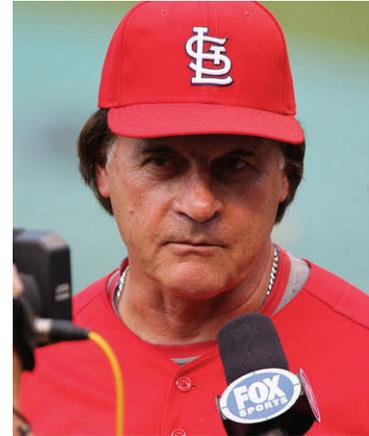
“I needed one more game to get a \$10,000 bonus,” Law said of the final regular-season series in Seattle. “I wasn’t really able to play. Tony asked me if I had any bonuses. He asked if I could play, but I said I didn’t think so. Midway through the game, called on me to pinch-run. One pitch in, he then pinch-ran for me. That little bonus made a difference.”

Law recalled La Russa as a “very good communicator...he let people know where they stood. You knew what your role was, your role was defined.”

### **One of the ‘Boys of Zimmer’**

A half-decade later, after Law signed as a free-agent with the Cubs to replace the traded Keith Moreland at third base, he’d get used to an entirely different personality with alternately lovable/volatile manager Don Zimmer.

“Two things that really stand out,” Law said. “I got off to a rough start in spring training (1988). Zim called me into his office. I never liked being called into the office, usually it’s bad news. I told him I’m trying too hard...He told me just go out and relax and play. You can go 0-for-4, but you’re starting at third base. That vote of confidence was meaningful.”



**As White Sox manager, Tony La Russa helped an injured Vance Law get a \$10,000 bonus at the end of the 1983 season. Photo credit [Keith Allison](#)**

“There was another spring training game. I was facing Mitch Williams, who had a good pickoff move. I got on via a walk with the tying run. (First-base coach) Jose Martinez said don’t get picked off. Well, Mitch picked me off with the first pitch. After the game (third-base coach) Chuck Cottier said Zim wants to see me in his office. Zim has a very stern look, and all the coaches were there. He starts airing me out with language I don’t use. Then I look up, Zim’s got a big ol’ smile on his face. He was busting my chops.”

Zimmer apparently handled Law just right off the bat. In 1988 as the Cubs’ third baseman, he had his greatest big-league season with 78 RBIs, a .293 average and .358 on-base percentage. He made the NL All-Star team.

Law’s output declined in 1989, and he was replaced at third late in the season by new acquisition Luis Salazar. But he still participated in some of Zimmer’s unorthodox moves that played a big factor in the division title.

“He really played hunches,” Law said. “He got to know your abilities, and let you play to your abilities.” Zimmer was unafraid to call for a two-strike squeeze with the bases loaded. Among other directives, Law got a hit-and-run sign from Cottier with the bases loaded.

As a Sox instructor, Law likely won’t get that radical with his young charges. Just good, ol’ fashioned fundamental baseball, passed on by some of the game’s greatest minds through one of its most upstanding citizens.



**Cubs manager Don Zimmer, shown here with future Hall of Famer Andre Dawson in 1989, pulled Vance Law's leg in feigning anger after a baserunning mistake. Photo credit [Boz Bros](#)**