



Floyd was good talker as player, so now he gets paid for that skill

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Since baseball is the ultimate unpredictable game, then Cliff Floyd as video pundit falls in line with that tradition.

Floyd, as authentic a Chicago-area guy as they come growing up in south suburban Markham, was friendly enough doing interviews in his entire career that landed him in right field at Wrigley Field during the 2007 playoff season. But the muscular left-handed hitter was never a “moth,” those players attracted to the red lights of the TV cameras.

In baseball, you end up playing positions you could have never projected. That was the case for Floyd on camera, first for Fox Sports Florida doing pre- and post-game Miami Marlins analysis, and more recently for MLB Network’s nightly studio show “MLB Tonight.”

“I didn’t think I was (going to) TV, either,” Floyd said. “Sometimes you just want to see what the other side is like. You don’t want to leave the game and wonder if you want to play one more year. When the opportunity presented itself, it was more, let’s just see if it works. If it works, great. If it was not what you thought it was going to be, then keep it moving.”

Started at Fox Sports Florida in 2012

After playing for the 1997 world champion Marlins and enjoying some prime years afterwards in South Florida, Floyd had a name for himself in the area. Floyd retired and settled in the area. Marlins communications/broadcasting chief P.J. Loyello – who had known Floyd as a top Montreal Expos prospect – suggested he try TV in 2012.



Cliff Floyd got his broadcasting start in 2012 as pre- and post-game analyst on Marlins telecasts. Photo courtesy of MLB Network.

“When I first started, P.J. thought it was a good idea for me to do some pre-game and post-game things for them,” Floyd said. “I thought it was cool. It was local and I’d be home every day.”

“Just being a former player is a definite plus,” said Loyello. “Any viewer would want to get perspective. Cliff being as outgoing and opinionated as he is, he’d be a natural for TV. He knows the ins and outs of the game. You have to be comfortable on camera. You can’t be shy giving his opinion.”

Loyello threw the credit back at Floyd for acing his Fox Sports Florida job.

“He was looking for a little input and advice,” he said. “He did everything, I didn’t do a thing.”

Floyd joined such South Florida staples as Jeff “Mr. Marlin” Conine and Preston Wilson dishing out analysis. He wouldn’t be limited to local broadcasts for long. MLB Network was impressed by Floyd’s easy-going nature and came calling for his services this season.

Being himself on ‘MLB Tonight’

“The show that I really love on the network is ‘MLB Tonight,’” Floyd said. “We get a chance to be ourselves, like locker-room chatter. The other shows – ‘Intentional Talk,’ ‘MLB Now’ – those are more numbers, more serious numbers on what teams and guys are doing. When you get a chance to let your hair down on ‘MLB Tonight,’ you’re giggling. My wife tells me all the time, ‘Are you all working?’

All the wise folks in broadcasting advise on-air performers to be conversational. Floyd agrees fully in such a style.



Cliff Floyd (from left), Matt Yallof and Jose Fernandez in MLB Network’s Studio 42. Photo courtesy of MLB Network.

He is one of a gaggle of former Chicago players on the MLB Network roster of studio analysts. Ex-Cubs lefty relievers Mitch “Wild Thing” Williams and Dan Plesac, a Gary native, are joined by former shortstop Larry Bowa. Former Sox 20-game-winner Jim Kaat and Joey Cora, Ozzie Guillen’s right-hand man on his Sox coaching staff, represent the South Side.

Floyd takes the lead from a well-dressed broadcast pro who is the glue to his panel.

“Greg Amsinger is just awesome,” he said. “He comes to work in a suit. We work (on the air) in suits. We come in wearing street clothes and go to our meetings in street clothes. He comes in in a suit ready to go. You’re going to have a good time when he’s a host.”

If the truth be known, Floyd couldn’t get the competitive fix anywhere else other than playing. At 40, he’s still just three years removed from his final game as a San Diego Padre, rapping up a 17-season, 233-homer career.

Can you always hit a fastball?

“You always have baseball in you,” he said. “You feel you can always play the game. Now, at what level that might be, it’s probably not the level that will get you to the big leagues. But you feel the game is something you can do. You never feel like you can’t hit the fastball. Tony Phillips was telling me, seriously, he feels like he could still play (at 54).”

The end game of his career and beyond was the furthest thing from Floyd’s mind as a three-sport star at Thornwood High School in South Holland at the end of the 1980s.

Son of Cornelius Clifford Floyd, Sr., who worked double shifts at a U.S. Steel plant in Chicago to provide for his family, Floyd used his 6-foot-4, 200-pound-plus frame to push Thornwood into the sectionals in basketball. But the Thunderbirds went much further in baseball with his enormous power.

In the 1991 state Class AA baseball tournament, Floyd went 4-for-4 with an RBI to beat Oak Park in the semi-final game. The next day, 24 hours after Thornwood won the state girls Class AA softball title, Floyd collected a single, double, two RBIs and two intentional walks as Thornwood ended Edwardsville’s state-record 64- game winning streak with a 10-3 victory in the championship contest. Floyd, of course, won the tourney MVP award. He also was named the Chicago Tribune’s high school athlete of the year.

Creighton coach Jim Hendry, who as Cubs general manager 16 years later would acquire Floyd as a free agent, heavily recruited the star along with Arizona State and Stanford. But when the Expos agreed to make Floyd their No. 1 pick in the 1991 draft, he opted for the pros immediately.

Floyd dominated the minor leagues. By 1994 he was the first baseman on an Expos team that sported the majors’ best record when the game’s last, and worst, players strike wiped out the season in August. When play resumed in 1995, Floyd endured the biggest detour of his career. On May 15, playing first base at Shea Stadium, he got the worst of a collision with baserunner Todd Hundley. Floyd’s career hung in the balance due to a severe fracture and dislocation of his left wrist. Fortunately, he came back and played another 13-plus seasons.

Game a 'blessing' after injury

"The one thing I wished is I could have stayed healthy," Floyd said. "That would probably have changed a lot of things numbers-wise. But I got 13 (more years) in. The fact I was able to play after that devastating injury was a blessing for me, so I took every minute."

Although he wasn't the 400-homer producer many projected at his career's start, Floyd racked up 30-homer seasons for both the Marlins and Mets. By the time Hendry signed him in early 2007, he was a platoon-like player. But he was buoyed to join his childhood heroes in Wrigley Field, even in a reduced role and somewhat out of position in right field.



Cliff Floyd as a New York Met, for whom he produced his peak home-run season with 34 in 2005. Photo credit [Tom C.](#)

The timing was good – for family reasons.

"It was definitely a fun year," Floyd said. "When I look back at '07, a lot of things happened. I went to the playoffs. I got a chance to play for Lou (Piniella) in my hometown. My dad got sick and I was able to go see him."

After Cornelius Floyd's death, many Cub players attended his wake on a Saturday morning before racing to Wrigley Field to prepare for a 3 p.m. game.

"I could have been anywhere in '07, but I was able to see my dad, may he rest in peace," Floyd said.

Playing for Piniella, whom Floyd calls "100 percent" his most colorful manager, was a career highlight.

"Lou was great," he said. "If was one thing you're going to get from Lou, it was a good laugh. He was going to keep it loose, keep it entertaining."

Floyd takes the classic view – that talent, not playing conditions and a heavy day schedule in cramped Wrigley Field – is the key to a Cubs revival.

"It's personnel," he said. "Everybody deals with the schedule and you deal with it accordingly. Theo's (Epstein) done a good job trying to rebuild that system. It's going to take reps. You need guys acclimated to the big leagues. Guys not being just a first-half player. Allow the pitching staff to grow."

Even if Epstein builds back the franchise, the Cubs still have to win three postseason rounds to scratch their championship itch. Plus one more victory in a play-in game if they make it as a wild card. It seems that luck would have to be on their side.

Clutch hitting bigger factor than luck in postseason?

“Luck plays a big part, but probably quality stuff from pitchers and execution of hitters with runners in scoring position,” Floyd said. “Catching the baseball, all those things play a huge part. You might not win the first time (in postseason), but the second time you know what you’re dealing with. It takes three quality pitchers at the top. Then it takes guys to step up from a personnel standpoint offensively. You don’t change anything when you get to the playoffs. It’s acting like you’ve been there before.”

You can’t conclude a conversation with the thoughtful Floyd without asking about the performance enhancement drug issue that beset the game throughout his entire career.

“Very touchy situation,” he said. “MLB is doing a great job trying to clean the game up. Hats off to Bud (Selig), hats off to everyone trying to get the game back to normalcy. We giving the game back to the fans who appreciate the guys working their tails off, put themselves in the position to where they don’t have to deal with this crap.

“I think the players are speaking up and putting their foot down and helping the whole system. It’s great. As long as the players are on board along with Bud and MLB, then I think this thing is heading in the right direction.

“I don’t like talking about PED’s. I hate it. I think the big thing here is MLB has done a tremendous job cleaning it up and making sure we don’t *have* to talk about it from a media standpoint.”