



Green roars in book, but still leaves out some key Cubs angles

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Dallas Green always had a voice so powerful you could hear him before you could see him.

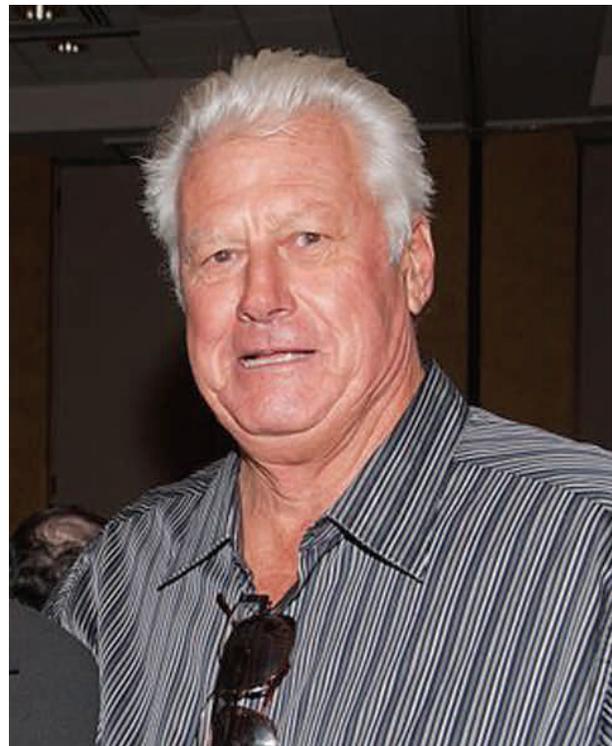
Those vocal cords emoted loud and clear over the long-distance line from his Maryland farm. He hardly needed wires to make the connection. At 79, “Big D” sounds the same as he did in his voluble tenure as the franchise-changing Cubs general manager from 1981 to 1987.

And if you think one year away from being an octogenarian has played tricks with his memory, well, you don’t know the 6-foot-5 Green. Nearly three decades have passed since he shook the Cubs to the foundations, and paid the price for success not imprinted every year with his job. Like the elephant, he has not forgotten the Michigan Avenue suits who ardently wooed him, then pulled the quick hook on him after a little more than half a decade.

“Honestly, the Tribune (Co.) in terms of money and position advancement was very good to me,” Green said.

“Unfortunately, I didn’t get to finish what I started or enjoy the possibility of going to more playoffs and World Series. That has stuck in my craw pretty much.

“It was my first experience with corporate ownership (after working for the Carpenter family-owned Phillies). Corporate-wise, dealing with Tribune Co., some of it was very good. For five years they pretty much listened to what we wanted to do (except for the aborted free-agent signing of Steve Garvey and trade of Bill Buckner to the Phils).



Dallas Green may be all-white-haired on top at 79, but his voice is still heard loud and clear. Photo credit [The SABR Office](#).

“We had carte blanche to build the Cubs into what they were in 1984 and the future. Eventually these (Tribune Co. executives) learned the lingo by going to all these (MLB) meetings. The next thing you know, they’re the baseball experts and we don’t know what we’re talking about.”

More in-depth Cubs remembrances needed

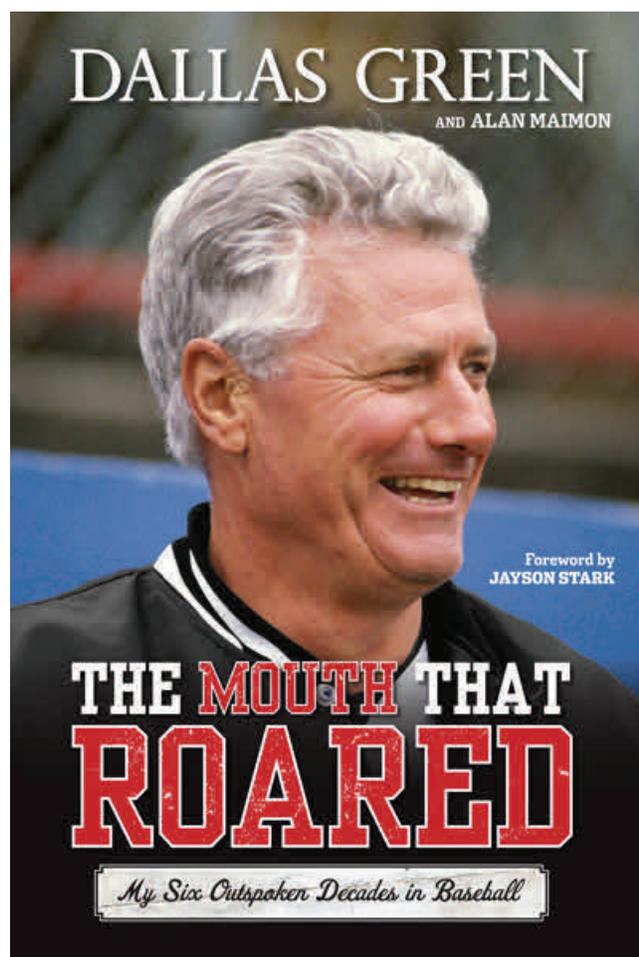
If there’s any disappointment about Green’s book, “The Mouth That Roared: My Six Outspoken Decades in Baseball,” it’s Green did not go into even greater depth about his Cubs experience – the good, the bad, the ugly, the corporate infighting and meddling where newspaper production executives and investment-banker types fancied themselves as experts on talent and contracts.

But that’s understandable, given that of the six decades to which Green refers with the help of author Alan Maimon, more than 50 years were spent working on the East Coast for the Phils, Yankees and Mets. Delaware-born and -raised, Green is still very much oriented to the Phils, his original organization to whom he now works as a senior advisor.

In the book, he recalls how he turned down repeated attempts by Andrew McKenna, Sr., working as Tribune Co.’s agent, to get him to switch to the Cubs in the early fall of 1981. Finally, he was just overwhelmed with the financial deal Tribune Co. presented, and advised by Phils mentor Paul “Pope” Owens to take the money and run. And post-Cubs, he has not really been back to Chicago except as a visiting manager with the Yankees and Mets.

His Cubs time was a comparative fraction of his service. And it’s receding quickly into history. Next year will be the 30th anniversary of the landmark 1984 team that made the Cubs and Wrigleyville fashionable in a way the crosstown, blue-collar-oriented White Sox could never compete.

A good time to have written “The Mouth That Roared” would have been a couple of years after Green left Wrigley Field, when the talent he and deputy Gordie Goldsberry recruited was still firmly in place, and the guilty parties like Tribune Co. honchos John



"The Mouth That Roared" is entertaining, but more Philadelphia-centric in its focus.

Madigan, Stanton Cook and Don Grenesko were making a negative imprint on the Cubs. But Green had a lot of baseball life left, and the meddling Tribune suits might have blackballed him in the intensely political upper reaches of baseball.

The fact Green penned a book as a senior citizen was kind of an upset.

“I hesitated doing it at all,” he said. “Who needs another baseball book? I thought about it. Several people started agitating about writing a book. My wife (Sylvia) got involved. I said, ‘Heck, I’ve done everything there is to do in baseball,’” reciting all the kinds of jobs he had on and off the field.

“The only thing I haven’t done is own a ballclub or be commissioner of baseball, and I don’t want either of those jobs.”

For Phillies fans, “The Mouth That Roared” is an entertaining work about the ultimate old-school, up-through-the-ranks, former broken-down-pitcher who led the Phillies through a lot of verbal histrionics to their long-awaited World Series victory in 1980.

Green is about as traditional a baseball man as they come, remembering late hours and parties with his Phillies colleagues, while enjoying a lasting marriage to a soulmate and career woman with her own mind and guts. While Green loudly prodded an underachieving Phillies team to glory, Sylvia Green continued her career as a school teacher. She had her own mind, and it sounded like she could out-tough her husband when needed.

Sylvia Green got the best of Caray

Like the time a tipsy Harry Caray, in one of his first outings with Green and Co. in Chicago, asked Sylvia Green, “What did *you* ever do?” She gave better than she got. “What the (bleep) did *you* ever do?” Sylvia retorted to Caray. A few days later, Caray saw Sylvia at Wrigley Field, raised her arm and said, “The winner!”

Recalling such people and experience, “The Mouth That Roared” is PG-rated with a touch of “R.” Green does not delve into the “Baseball Babylon” that surely existed throughout his career, including some salacious stories about the 1980s Cubs.

“I told (Maimon), I’m not X-rating anybody,” Greens said. “I don’t kiss and tell. I give you a pretty good rundown on my early career and what I went through as family to get where I got. Along the way, there was some adversity about the Tribune business. I was pretty upset about that.

“The Yankees thing, getting fired wasn’t a big deal, because George (Steinbrenner) fired everybody. The Mets thing, I was disappointed in, I don’t think they respected what we (Green and his coaches) brought to the table. I still didn’t hold back on some things. Obviously, it’s a book about baseball and my life at that time and what my family went through with the game.”



Gordon Goldsberry circa 1950 as a Sox first baseman. Goldsberry became Dallas Green's scouting mastermind, developing the best Cubs period of home-grown talent in history.

Green provides a good outline of his Chicago years. But due to space – about 90 pages of the 342-page work deals with the Cubs -- or perhaps because some details have slipped away over time, he left out some key facts that further explain why his tenure was relatively short.

Given apparent carte blanche to turn over the somnolent Cubs organization left over from the Wrigley family regime, Green was not afraid to cut ties with Chicago legends. He cut off the reported \$25,000 annual team stipend for Ernie “Mr. Cub” Banks for public appearances to which Banks overcommitted himself – a longtime problem for him. Banks would book himself for gigs in several different places at the same time, and show up for only one, if that. Green also fired Billy Williams as hitting coach on the final day of the 1982 season. But both Hall of Famers were soon back in good graces, with Williams returning to the Cubs coaching ranks in 1986 after working in Oakland.

A portent of the future took place during the 1982 winter meetings. Green thought he had made two huge moves – signing Garvey as a free agent and trading Buckner, whom he regarded as a selfish player, to the Phils. However, he had to renege on both transactions because McKenna could not reach Tribune Co. chairman Cook -- traveling back from Europe -- for approval. Cook apologized afterward, saying Green would have complete control. But the corporate meddling would not stay away for long.

Green goes over the moves that built the 1984 team – first the trade with Owens in which he snared Ryne Sandberg, then all the other deals. He describes his hiring, then firing, of buddy Lee Elia and the latter’s “85 percent of the world is working” tirade in 1983. Most of all, Green took pride in print and in the conversation over the uncommonly productive Cubs farm system he and Goldsberry built. After Green was forced out, with Goldsberry following him a year later, the player development momentum withered, and has never totally recovered through Tribune Co. meddling and under-spending by 1994-2006 team president Andy MacPhail.



Dallas Green drafted Shawon Dunston (left) and traded for Ryne Sandberg, then recommended Sandberg's return to manage in the Phillies organization.

The Cubs were really in rough shape in scouting and player development,” Green said of his start in 1981.

Finally a color-blind front office

How rough? The behind-the-scenes subtle racism that existed under 1956-75 GM John Holland, and which did not die out after he stepped down, governed the Cubs’ draft choices. The team did not pick an African-American No. 1 from the time the amateur

draft began in 1965 until 1981, when Joe Carter of Wichita State was the top pick of scouting chief Vedic Himsl in the dying days of the Wrigley family regime. Present-day White Sox announcer Darrin Jackson was the No. 2 pick in '81. The top African-American had been Lee Arthur Smith at No. 2 in 1975. The incomparable Buck O'Neil's recommendations as a loyal Cubs scout under Holland often went unheeded.

The Cubs did not have enough scouts to scour talent in the modern era, and often relied on communal reports of the Major League Scouting Bureau. Green withdrew the team's participation.

"We knew we had to revamp the scouting right away," he said. "Gordie brought our ideas to Chicago. We were able to draft well because at that time we were still drafting high. When you're drafting high numbers, you should still get good players. Look at the 20 to 30 names Gordie had graduating into the major leagues, and you know what kind of job he did.

"Unfortunately, the great players that Gordie signed when we started to struggle (after 1984) really weren't ready for the major leagues: the (Greg) Madduxes, (Rafael) Palmeiros and (Mark) Graces. I ended up on the short end of the stick. Jimmy Frey (as 1989 Cubs GM) benefited greatly from what Gordie and I did."

By the time the Cubs won a surprise 1989 NL East divisional title after Green's departure, six Cubs starters were home-grown under Green/Goldsberry when Maddux pitched. The others were left fielder Dwight Smith, center fielder Jerome Walton, shortstop Shawon Dunston, first baseman Mark Grace and the catching combination of Joe Girardi, Damon Berryhill and Rick Wrona.

Palmeiro had been traded away prior to the '89 season, with Frey explaining 15 years later that he wanted "someone who could hit the (bleep) out of the ball." Forty doubles and a .308 average (but only eight homers) in '88 for Palmeiro were not good enough for the three-run-homer-lusting Frey.

The boosted development wasn't perfect, though. Years later, Goldsberry lamented that he was unable to develop a desired depth of pitching behind Maddux and Jamie Moyer. And while some franchises started to make real inroads in Latin America in the 1980s, the Cubs still lagged behind, not catching up until the turn of the millennium.

Goldsberry's admission, to this writer, is part of a litany of details that Green unfortunately left out of "The Mouth That Roared." He did not mention his relationship with ex-Bears GM Jim Finks, who served a little more than a year as Cubs president above him from late 1983 to the end of 1984. Finks, as comfortable in a boardroom as he was in a draft room, was seen as a necessary buffer between the Tribune suits and ultimate-baseball man Green. He also reached out to the anti-lights activists, even sharing beers with them at a local bar. When Finks left to return to football, Green was promoted to president without the shield who could handle both corporate and jock talk.

'I felt like I was being watched'

All kinds of stories and speculation involving Green's final three years did not get an examination. Green did refer to the arrival of Don Grenesko, a Tribune Co. CPA given

the title of VP of business operations in 1985. “I felt like I was being watched,” he wrote.

An anecdote not included was Green supposedly kicking, in the knowing manner, a colleague under the table in a team meeting where Gnesko prattled on about the Cubs’ bottom line that week. He also did not refer to the fact all five of his rotation starters were on the disabled list at one time in Aug. 1985. The starters’ injury woes effectively wrecked the promising 1985 season, in which the Cubs started out 34-19. When the pitchers did not fully recover health and effectiveness in 1986, the Cubs finished 70-90, resulting in Green firing Frey as manager and Don Zimmer, whom he liked, as third-base coach. The Michigan Avenue crowd no doubt was shocked as the big backward move with a high payroll, and ordered Green to cut spending. It was at this point that the ground under Green started becoming increasingly shaky.

Green wrote of the re-hiring of Frey after 1986 as radio color analyst, as Lou Boudreau was relegated to home games only. The hiring seemed curious so soon after his dismissal. Green wrote, “It seemed harmless enough to let him call the games on WGN-Radio...Only later did I view his hiring in a different light.”

Green left out in the book that perhaps Frey was called upon to spy on the Cubs day by day, and report back to higher-ups gathering evidence on Green. Frey’s one-year stint in the booth interestingly was followed up by his hiring as Cubs GM, without any front-office or scouting experience, a month after Green left. The promotion stunk of a reward for a job-well-done for Frey, exclusively a manager and hitting coach in his post-playing career.

While working radio, Frey observed Lee Arthur Smith in the foulest mood of his career in the locker room during 1987. Correspondingly, Frey rushed Smith out of town, the trade to the Red Sox taking “half an hour,” in Goldsberry’s words, during the ’87 winter meetings. Frey passed up the necessary baseball-wide dickering (the Dodgers, among other teams, were interested) for a good closer like Smith to dump him off for the first names Boston GM Lou Gorman offered – ne’er-do-well pitchers Al Nipper and Calvin Schiraldi.

Tribune Co. plan: Gnesko as GM

Green wrote how, shockingly, Tribune Co. wanted Gnesko, without any baseball operations experience, to move in as GM while Green planned to go back down on the field as manager for 1988 to clean up the mess of a last-place season. A Plan B to hire Phils coach John Vukovich as Cubs manager followed before the steely-gray John Madigan, whose background was investment banking, marched into Green’s office with an ultimatum: resign or be fired. Green fell on his sword and returned to his farm in West Grove, Pa.

With Madigan, Gnesko and Cook taking turns running the Cubs through 1994, Tribune Co. kept tight control on finances and negatively guided player moves with under-qualified, pliant GMs Frey and Larry Himes. Most egregious was Cook’s bungling of Maddux’s long-term contract in the winter of 1991-92, leading to the ace’s departure to the Braves.

Greg was one of the greatest pitchers to ever toe the mound,” Green said. “He was the Cubs. Unfortunately, they didn’t have the foresight to keep him.”

A sample of Madigan’s personality and style came much later, in 1999. This writer and ESPN-1000’s Bruce Levine spotted Madigan, by then Tribune Co. CEO, leaning on the batting cage at Wrigley Field. Approaching Madigan from different directions, like a pincer’s movement, we both had different questions. Madigan politely declined to answer either of our queries, and quickly retreated out of sight into the safety of the team offices. There, he reportedly told MacPhail and GM Ed Lynch that “these guys are trying to interview me!”

The corporate meddling was finally loosened by Tribune Co. overseer Jim Dowdle, who had a broadcast/salesman’s background, in the mid-1990s. In 1999, Dowdle admitted he “cut the cord” of tight control flowing from Tribune Tower to Wrigley Field. Problem is, the benefits of Dowdle’s action was canceled out by the old-fashioned MacPhail’s thrifty spending.

Green proved right on Wrigley lights

More so than shaking up the Cubs on the field, Green’s bluster was most famous by his immediate advocacy for lights at Wrigley Field. His sledgehammer approach immediately angered much of the Wrigleyville neighborhood, prompting anti-night game legislation in effect the rest of his Cubs tenure. But the ensuing decades, beginning with the installation of lights in 1988, have proved Green right. Recognizing the shift-work disorder effects on the roster from day-to-night-and-back-to-day schedules over the six-month season, the Cubs went from 18 to 30 to finally 40 night games with the support of the city.

“I knew in my heart what had to happen if the Cubs ever were going to compete,” Green said, adding he was under pressure from MLB to provide lights for post-season prime-time games. “It took a long time for the fans and for people to realize that. It has come to fruition and I’m proud I was part of it.”

From a distance, Green also is watching owner Tom Ricketts’ continuing effort to begin a \$500 million renovation of Wrigley Field.

“We tried to do as much as we could to make Wrigley more fan-friendly,” he said. “Wrigley Field is a very difficult field to upgrade because it’s so old and there’s very little space involved. I got to give (32-year business-side exec) Mark McGuire credit – he battled for a lot of those changes. They definitely need to freshen up the ballpark the best they can. I keep telling the fans in Wrigleyville they better wake up or they’re going to force the Cubs to move. That would be a terrible thing for Chicago for the businesses and Wrigleyville. They have to meet the Cubs at least halfway to allow this happen.”

Backing Sandberg’s return to Phils

One other personality the Cubs let get away is benefiting from his 35-year relationship with Green. A baseball “godfather” to Sandberg, Green was instrumental in his return to the Phillies, where he has taken over as manager, as predicted.

“(Phils advisor) Pat Gillick and I were shocked...that the Cubs weren’t really going to consider Ryno for the manager’s job,” Green said.

Sandberg dutifully spent four years, from 2007 to 2010, climbing through the Cubs farm system starting in the Class-A Midwest League in his managerial apprenticeship. But after managing at Triple-A Iowa, Sandberg was passed over for the Cubs’ job late in 2010 in favor of Mike Quade, who had a closer relationship with then-GM Jim Hendry. Ricketts refused to intervene on Sandberg’s behalf.

“The dumbest thing I ever heard,” Green said of the Quade hiring. “(Sandberg) paid his dues. Managing in Triple-A is very, very difficult. You got all kinds of players with all kinds of agendas, and you got to try make them into a team. He did that, and I don’t think they appreciated it.”

With Green and Gillick recommending his return to GM Ruben Amaro, Jr., Sandberg was hired as the Phillies’ Triple-A manager at Lehigh Valley for 2011. After two more seasons managing, he was added to the Phils’ staff as third-base coach, and apparent heir to Charlie Manuel, for this season. Sandberg finally got the top job, on an interim basis, in August.

“We’re happy to have him,” Green said. “He’s going to be a very, very good (big-league) manager.”

Sandberg, quiet and almost reticent as a player, suddenly underwent a personality change as a minor-league manager, getting thrown out of games by umpires and adeptly handling interviews. Green said Sandberg had such talents in him all along, and they came to the surface as a necessity as a manager.

“He knows what he has to do,” Green said. “He knows how to motivate people. He doesn’t do it screaming and yelling like ‘The Mouth That Roared.’ He knows the game of baseball and is able to make sure the players understand how he wants the game played. I’m proud of him for that. It’s just fun for me as a baseball guy to watch baseball players grow into being not only being good players, but good men.”

Sandberg has many old-school tendencies of the kind Green likes.

Players preening for ESPN

“The 1980 (World Series) thing was kind of the basis for my thought process on playing the game right, playing the way it should be played in handling game situations,” he said. “Not sit back and wait for three-run home runs. That’s very prevalent today in baseball. Players want to get on ESPN and want to be a big shot. Home runs is the way to do it.

“I want our guys to play the game the right way, and understand you can win – it’s not small-ball, but it’s game-situation baseball. I preach that. I think we’re in a minority anymore in big-league baseball. I still go down fighting, as you probably know.”

Green won’t resist sabermetrics, but does not believe they should predominate in judging talent.

“You still got to find them,” he said. “It’s still up to the scouts. It doesn’t matter how many numbers you throw out there. Two keys to scouting that sabermetrics can’t do anything about is judging head and heart. The other is to be able to predict the future for any young 17- or 18-year-old kid.”

Summing up, Green is sad about the change in the game since he first became a manager and executive.

“The money is the big deal,” he said. “The players don’t play for the love of the game anymore. They play for the money. Some of that is OK. But it’s gotten to the point where clubs got to struggle to survive. I don’t think it’s fair to small-market areas.

“There’s no easy solution to it. Agents are a big change. They’re demanding more and more. The strength of the union has come to the point where the pendulum has swung from management’s side clear over to the players’ side. That’s not totally right, either. (Problems will continue) until they’re able to get that pendulum back in the middle.

“Everything we do to the game, it has survived.”