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Ballplayer's stellar seasons
fueled his witness in Japan

By David Smith

Baptist Press
12/19/94

TUSCON, Ariz. (BP)--The Major League strike, which canceled the playoffs and World Series for the first time in history this year, hasn't had much of an impact on one of baseball's best-fielding third basemen.

Jack Howell, who had the best fielding percentage of any third baseman in the majors with California in 1989, has played in the Tokyo League the last three years.

And the Southern Baptist layman has had an impact on that country's rabid sports fans. In his first season in 1992, he was named Most Valuable Player after leading the league in home runs and batting average with the Yakult Swallows.

He had no idea how enamored the Japanese had become with his baseball skills, however, until a sports writer asked him about his success in his second season.

Halfway through 1993, Howell already had broken the Tokyo League's season record with five game-winning home runs -- "Sayonara" home runs as they are called. In an interview, an English-speaking Tokyo sports reporter told Howell the Japanese people looked up to him as a Buddha.

When Howell said he didn't understand why, he was told it is the Japanese tradition to consider someone a Buddha who has done something incredible, totally out of the ordinary.

"It's like a sign to them, that this guy has something different," said Howell, a 33-year-old Tucson, Ariz., native. "I don't know if they consider it a power or what. It really opened my eyes.

"Thankfully, God gave me a quick mind. I told him that I appreciated the fans getting a kick out of that feat.

"But I told him, 'My faith is in Jesus Christ and my power and strength come from him. He's the one I give the glory to, the one I look up to, the one I thank. He's the one I give credit to for hitting those Sayonara home runs.'"

By the end of the 1993 season, Howell had led Yakult to Japan's World Series championship.

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Howell, who played for the California Angels from 1985-1991 and for San Diego for one month in 1991, launched a unique Christian outreach not long after his interview with the Tokyo sports writer. In his first season, Howell had tried to find a way to relate his Christian faith to the Japanese people. The Japanese naturally enjoy giving, he said, especially to the baseball players. Howell had noticed it is customary for many Japanese baseball fans to wait outside the clubhouse after games and give gifts to the players.

So Howell decided to print a pamphlet designed like a large baseball card. It was designed by the Yakult Swallows' chapel leader, a Tokyo pastor who is also fluent in English.

To the fans' shock, Howell began to give them the pamphlets as gifts halfway through the 1993 season.

Based on his MVP season in 1992, he called the pamphlet, "My MVP." The Tokyo pastor realized from experience that a direct tract telling the Japanese not to believe in Buddha, but in Jesus, would not work. So Howell's pamphlet has information on his baseball statistics, where he has played and his family, including pictures. It begins discussing his MVP year and then leads into Howell's faith and belief in Christ.

"As I start to get into my testimony," Howell said, "I tell them that the most important thing to me is not that I was voted Most Valuable Player, but my faith in a God I believe in who is my Most Valuable Person.

"Then at the end, it says that my wish would be that the Japanese people would come to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. It talks a little bit about eternal life. I just tried to get them interested in it."

The response went well, Howell said.

"I would come out of the clubhouse and just start winging them out to them, handing them out."

Howell's venture in Japan began after he became a free agent after his 1991 season. His statistics had been down his last two years, so the offer the Padres made him wasn't as good as he would have liked. Scouts with the Yakult team were looking for a power-hitting third baseman and Howell fit perfectly. The Japanese team made an offer almost double his 1991 salary with the Angels and Padres.

After his first MVP year in Japan, several U.S. teams showed interest in Howell again. But his contract allowed Yakult the option to pick him up the second year, and the Japanese team exercised the option.

After leading Yakult to the World Series championship and winning a second batting title in 1992, Howell received more offers from American teams.

"But it just worked out better to stay there and sign another two-year deal, a year and an option year," Howell said.

After a down year this season, Howell said Yakult will not pick up his option for 1995, but the Tokyo Giants have signed him for the upcoming season.

While in Tokyo, Howell, his wife, Kelly, and their four children have attended Tokyo Baptist Church where most of the congregation speaks English.

Members of the church and many visitors come from all over the world, including Indonesia, other Oriental countries, Australia and the United States.

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Smith is a free-lance writer in Little Rock, Ark. A copy of Howell's tract to be available from Baptist Press' central office in Nashville.

Baseball opens doors
to share gospel in China

By Clay Renick

Baptist Press
12/19/94

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--The chances to witness seemed natural for Johnny Flint. He was in China as a baseball coach.

"We prayed for the Lord to open up chances to share," said Flint, from Oxford, Miss. "And the opportunities came with normal conversation."

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"Tell me about your family," a cab driver said. "I've got two kids," Flint replied. "I've been married 24 years. My mother died when she was 58 of cancer. She's with Jesus."

The driver didn't understand that, so Flint got to explain the gospel.

"Never did I realize (that) the death of my mother would allow me to share with a Chinese cab driver," he said later.

Flint, a faculty member at the University of Mississippi, went to China with Frank Drinkard, minister of recreation at Germantown Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn. Drinkard also serves as coordinator of SportsNET, a sports evangelism ministry of the Brotherhood Commission and Foreign Mission Board.

The two were guests at a teacher's college in Tianjin, a city of 9 million near Beijing.

Flint formerly coached baseball at Ole Miss for 12 years. He spent only five days with the Chinese team.

"Opportunities to play the game in China (are) limited," said Drinkard.

"There's not the same type of infrastructure there as here."

Players at the college were 17 to 19 years old. Each of the players were studying to be physical education teachers. Flint and Drinkard worked on fundamentals: how to run, bat and catch. Flint also took detailed notes as they practiced and wrote an overview of the group.

"I would like for you to tell me some things about my players," the Chinese coach said at the end of the week. Flint gave him the written report.

"This is a very good plan," the coach responded.

A translator explained each comment. They were at a banquet.

"Let me tell you about a better plan," said Flint. "The plan for salvation."

He outlined the gospel for that man also. As the trip ended, 10 people had become Christians.

"The greatest hindrance we had on our trip was sheer time," said Drinkard.

"People were excited that Christians were coming to help."

Flint has since received several letters from players in China. The college president also wrote to invite the Ole Miss Rebels baseball team for a tournament.

Flint and Drinkard also gathered donations for equipment. That amounted to new gloves and shoes for each member of the team in Tianjin.

"I was aware there were sports evangelism opportunities available through the National Fellowship of Baptist Men," Drinkard noted. "We can't ignore the opportunity God has given us."

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Renick is a free-lance writer in Martinez, Ga. More information about sports evangelism opportunities available through SportsNET may be obtained by calling 1-800-766-7948 at the Brotherhood Commission or 1-800-866-FMB1 at the Foreign Mission Board.

Generators sent to Haiti;
food distribution continues

By Tim Yarbrough

Baptist Press
12/19/94

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Despite no electricity and transportation problems, Southern Baptist volunteers are continuing food relief efforts in Haiti.

"We feel good about what we've done, but it will just take time to get the new equipment into the country," said Mickey Caison of the Brotherhood Commission. Caison is serving as manager for the Haiti relief project.

Two new generators were shipped to Haiti the week of Dec. 19, but it could be days before the equipment clears Haitian customs, Caison said. Electricity in Port-au-Prince, Haiti's largest city, has been spotty since a fire swept through a major power plant Nov. 29.

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Water and electricity will continue to be limited until the new generators arrive, Caison said. But volunteers are exhibiting the true meaning of Christmas as they work under difficult circumstances.

"I encourage all Southern Baptists to pray for the volunteers and the ongoing effort in Haiti," Caison said.

Harry Campbell of Killeen, Texas, is serving as on-site coordinator in Haiti. His wife, Nancy, also is serving as a volunteer there. Campbell reported the contents of family food packets -- rice, flour, beans and oil -- continue to be available, but the price of food is fluctuating.

"(Southern Baptist missionary) Mark Rutledge is working hard to find the best price. Prices in most cases will not be quoted until the food is in the warehouse," Caison said.

He added transportation problems continue because of the damage done by Tropical Storm Gordon. Damage to already pothole-filled Haitian roads outside Port-au-Prince has made transporting the family packs to the churches difficult.

Caison said the two pickup trucks flown to Haiti by the Brotherhood Commission have been licensed, but trucks owned by the Foreign Mission Board still need repairs. Campbell is assigning volunteers with the appropriate skills to help repair the trucks.

Volunteers still are needed for teams set to go to Haiti in January, Caison said. The Dec. 16 team was staffed with only two of the 10 volunteers needed.

Plans continue for the construction team that will leave Jan. 6, with block layers and carpenters still needed. Also needed is a mechanic who can work on the well-drilling trucks to be used.

Caison said there will be no volunteer team in Haiti during the week of Dec. 24-30. However, Harry and Nancy Campbell will remain in Haiti over the holidays.

Information about the Haiti relief effort may be obtained by calling the Brotherhood Commission at 1-800-280-1891 or (901) 272-2461. Financial contributions for the Haiti project may be sent to the Brotherhood Commission, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38104, or to the Foreign Mission Board, Box 6767, Richmond, VA 23230-0767.

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MSC volunteers
reach 2,000

Baptist Press
12/19/94

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's Mission Service Corps department surpassed in December the 2,000-volunteer mark for long-term missions workers.

"People are still volunteering in record numbers," said Bob Mills, Mission Service Corps director. In 1994, the board assigned 487 new volunteers to MSC posts, he said, a 17 percent increase compared to the 337 assigned in 1993.

Of the almost 5,000 home missionaries assigned by the Home Mission Board, almost 1,100 currently are MSC volunteers who have committed to serve at least two years, Mills said.

Started in 1977, Missions Service Corps enlists Southern Baptists willing to volunteer at least four months in missions work. The work ranges from evangelism and church starting projects to administrative and support help for missionaries, state conventions or SBC agencies.

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Leavell says life is short,
'better do it now' for Jesus

By Debbie Moore

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"After 20 years of two graduations a year, and having presented the charge at all but two or three of the 40, what can I say?" said New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary President Landrum P. Leavell II in presiding over his last December commencement exercises there.

Leavell announced his retirement Dec. 13, effective Dec. 31. He will stay as an interim president until a new president is selected.

Even though Leavell completed his own graduate work at New Orleans 40 years ago, "It seems as though it were yesterday," he said.

He received his master of divinity degree in 1951 and his doctor of theology degree in 1954, both from the hand of his uncle, Roland Q. Leavell, the seminary's fifth president (1946-58). The seminary's chapel, where commencement services are held, is named in honor of his uncle.

Describing life as a journey that is a short ride, "Whatever we intend to do for Jesus, we'd better do it now," Leavell told the 134 December graduates.

He warned graduates to be careful because the journey "is what you make it. ... You'll find what you're looking for," he said.

"If you're looking for a fight, there are myriads of people out there who will fight with you."

Leavell also warned graduates mean-spirited and bitter people are everywhere and "if you are disposed to being little, mean-spirited and bitter, you'll gravitate to them. They'll come up to you with little pious voices and whisper in your ear. ... They'll join you in criticism."

However, "If you want to leave a positive impact where you are, begin now to change your attitude. ... Plan to make yours a happy, productive journey."

While it is a short ride, it is also a rough and rocky ride, Leavell said. "Some folks seem to have it easy all the time, but they don't. An old pop tune in my era reminded us, 'You always hurt the one you love, the one you shouldn't hurt at all.' Those who hurt you the most will be the ones closest to you, your best friends and associates. If you are a pastor, it will probably be a staff member or a church member you have trusted. ... But that's just part of it; that's life.

"But wherever you go, go with the attitude that this is where God wants me for the rest of my life. I think it's horrendous to go somewhere with the attitude, 'Oh, I'll be here four or five years then move on.'

"(If) you wait on God to move you, you'll be in the right place," he said, no matter how rough and rocky it seems to be.

The journey also is complicated by change. "If you are the dinosaur type, you are going to become extinct!" he said.

"Some folks refuse to change and some churches will die in their obstinacy. They won't face reality."

Christianity is a counterculture, he said, "and if we don't have the courage to go against the crowd, if we're not different from the world, the question is, have we been changed?"

Describing the Christian life as a changed life, he said Christians are to change the world with love, not might. "It's slow," he said, "but it's the surest way."

The journey is often lonely, Leavell said, not just for foreign missionaries but for everyone. A personal support system is mandatory because it "will sustain us when the deacons are punitive, the WMU is hostile, the offerings are pitiful and the pulpit committees all stop before they get to you.

"You are not alone. Even Gideon had a handful left, but they were enough to get the job done. You'll have enough to do God's will."

Leavell encouraged the graduates to "be someone else's friend. Reach out to someone else who is lonely. Don't wait for someone to reach out to you."

The journey can also be joyous, he said, noting, "It was intended to be a joyous journey.

"It's amazing when you have your eyes fixed on Jesus, you won't even see most of the stuff going on around you."

Leavell told graduates that if they will keep their eyes fixed on Jesus, "Every day you can hear trumpets in the morning and every hour you can sing the songs of Zion and hear the voice of God saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it!'"

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Golden Gate commencement:
multi-media focus on grads

Baptist Press
12/19/94

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary shed some of the "pomp and circumstance" typical of commencement ceremonies to focus more on its graduates.

Instead of a commencement speaker Dec. 16, Golden Gate featured a multi-media presentation highlighting the graduates during their seminary studies and in their ministry settings.

Fifty-four students representing 13 states and four countries received degrees from the Southern Baptist Convention's only seminary in the West during ceremonies on the seminary's Mill Valley, Calif., campus.

"Shaping Christian leaders for the churches of tomorrow is the heart of our mission," said William O. Crews, Golden Gate's president since 1986. "It is fitting we use today's technology to showcase some of those leaders in action."

In his charge to the graduates, Crews said not to neglect ministry beyond the church walls: "There is a world out there that needs not only to be reached, but touched by the church. Move beyond the walls of the church building out into the community where people are."

Crews pointed to the ministry of Jesus as a model for meeting contemporary needs.

"The best stuff Jesus did was outside the walls of the establishment, touching people others wouldn't touch," he said. "There is a ministry out there that won't be done if you stay huddled up in the confines of the church walls."

The former pastor offered four suggestions for ministry:

-- Look outside. "See who's there."

-- Live among them. "The people you will encounter need to be touched by those who've been touched by the hand of God. You don't have to be like them, but you have to live among them."

-- Lead the world. "The world needs to be led right. Be a leader among the community where you find your church."

-- Love the people of the world. "God loves them and wants them to be something no one else will tell them about. You may be the only one to touch them with the life God has in mind."

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Southern grads told
to spread 'divine moments'

Baptist Press
12/19/94

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Asbury College President David Gyertson challenged December graduates at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to be "purveyors and conveyors of divine moments."

"Daily you are going to intersect with the lives of people," said Gyertson, who addressed 144 graduates at the Louisville, Ky., school's 174th commencement Dec. 16. "Daily you are going to have the opportunity to live the witness of the gospel before them."

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Gyertson, an ordained elder with the Free Methodist Church, told graduates people will be looking to see "whether or not what you profess, you really possess."

A native of Canada, Gyertson assumed the presidency of Asbury, an evangelical college in Wilmore, Ky., in 1993. During his address, Gyertson shared the story of going to live with a Methodist minister and his wife when he was 13. Gyertson's father, an alcoholic, had abandoned the family when Gyertson was 10, and Gyertson's mother, suffering from emotional problems, forced her son to leave home three years later.

The pastoral couple steered him through severe moments of crisis and modeled God's love to him, Gyertson said. He reminded the graduates they must be "the incarnate Christ in a world that still longs to come to Bethlehem and see this one who was born king of the Jews."

People "still long to hear the (gospel) story in simple but real terms," Gyertson said.

In a separate ceremony the same day, Boyce Bible School, a division of Southern Seminary that provides ministerial training for persons without college degrees, awarded nine associate of arts degrees and 52 diplomas and certificates.

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Counselors follow call
to minister in New Mexico

By John Loudat

Baptist Press
12/19/94

FARMINGTON, N.M. (BP)--Bill and Linda Eubanks know what it is like to leave everything to follow Christ. That is exactly what they did when they moved from Houston to Farmington, N.M., in mid-1994 to open the "Biblical Counseling Center."

Admitting he is not the kind of person who ordinarily puts much stock in dreams, Eubanks told of a dream he had in early May in which he thought he heard the words "Melissa Key." Deeply intrigued by the words, neither he nor anyone in his family knew anyone by that name.

Not long after, however, Eubanks came in contact with Melvin "Mel" Petersen, pastor of First Indian Baptist Church in faraway Farmington, N.M. Eubanks came to understand that he had misunderstood the dream. Instead, he was being told "Mel is a key" -- which is precisely what the couple found Mel Petersen to be.

Petersen set up a meeting for Eubanks with First Baptist pastor Eddie Tubbs and San Juan Baptist Association director of missions Wes McAfee. Out of the meeting emerged an old radio station building they would be able to use for the new counseling center.

Members of First Baptist assisted with money and manpower for remodeling the building, and before too long the Eubankses were in business.

The two see themselves as "missionaries in the mission field" and feel a definite calling to provide low-cost counseling for those who need but cannot afford it.

They also had a strong sense God wanted them to have a ministry with the Indians in New Mexico's Four-Corners area.

Already the ministry is well established in the community, with 20-25 counseling sessions each week. Eubanks also has taught marriage enrichment courses at First Baptist, where he and his wife became members.

Eubanks said the new ministry is definitely "nonprofit;" they don't expect counseling fees to pay all the expenses. "We have no choice but to trust God to provide," he said.

Prior to moving to Farmington, the Eubankses were members of Second Baptist Church in Houston, where they helped start a lay counseling ministry a few years ago, giving up the landscaping business Eubanks had been in for 10 years. One year earlier they had taken a spiritual gifts inventory, revealing they had gifts of encouragement and evangelism which they were not using.

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The couple enrolled at Liberty University, Lynchburg, Va., and both earned masters degrees in counseling three years later. Second Baptist in Houston then employed Eubanks as a counselor for the next two years, until the couple left to follow the Lord's call to New Mexico.

Eubanks said they cannot help people using only secular counseling techniques. God's Word is what brings conviction to people's hearts. Eubanks said their goal is to help those with whom they are working to understand their need of a personal relationship with Christ, and the importance of growing in that relationship.

The Eubankses also plan to establish a prayer network in the Farmington area, an area with large populations of Mormons, New Agers and Indians. "Breaking down the darkness starts with prayer," he said.

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Cronkite to explore
'Christianity Reborn'

Baptist Press
12/19/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--Veteran newscaster Walter Cronkite's quarterly report on The Discovery Channel will examine "Christianity Reborn: Prayer and Politics."

The Dec. 21 program will be aired at 10 p.m. Eastern and Pacific times and subsequently at 1 a.m.

A news release about the program states, "The re-emerging focus on the role of religion in politics and the rapid rise to prominence of the Evangelical movement are changing the traditional place of religion in our lives."

Interview segments will include Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition founded by Pat Robertson, an influential religious right organization in the November elections, and Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, and several others at the suburban Chicago mega-church.

Also interviewed by Cronkite, former CBS news anchor, on the program are Martin Marty, University of Chicago theologian; Joan Brown Campbell, general secretary of the National Council of Churches; and Joanna Moseley Adams of Atlanta's Trinity Presbyterian Church, the largest Presbyterian church in the country headed by a woman.

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