

Marvin's memories: It's no surprise Girardi has come this far, this soon

Chicago native Marvin Freeman was a pitcher for the Atlanta Braves teams that captured the 1991 and 1992 National League pennants. Here the Chicago Baseball Museum board member talks about his relationship with former Cubs catcher Joe Girardi, who guided the New York Yankees to the World Series this season.

By Marvin Freeman

Posted on Monday, October the 26th

I'm not surprised that the New York Yankees are in the World Series with Joe Girardi as their manager. Joe and I competed against one another while he was with the Cubs early in our careers, then we were teammates with the Colorado Rockies for three seasons. It wasn't long before I knew that he would be a manager in the big leagues one day.

Joe was one of the best defensive catchers that I pitched to in my career. He saved me quite a few wild pitches, and that saved me a few runs. Joe was very easy to work with, a real diplomat with the way he handled pitchers. He realized how important it was for the pitcher to be in a positive frame of mind. Joe was a very good communicator and one of the nicest guys that you'd ever want to meet. Everybody on the team seemed to like him.

The pitchers hung out in our corner, where the coach would make sure that we didn't flick too many sunflower seeds at each other. Not Joe, though. He would spend time with the coaches and manager at the end of the bench. He was involved in the game on the field as well as off the field. Plus, Joe was a Northwestern guy. He was pretty smart.

Joe got his start as a manager with the Florida Marlins, and he was selected Manager of the Year in his first season. He had some ups and downs along the way, but he was better for the experience. He learned a lot with a young team.

The Yankees are a much different situation. When you're the manager of a talented, veteran team with a big payroll, the idea is not to wreck a good thing. If you do that, you've got a chance to win a lot of games. It's a lot easier to manage a line-up of All-Stars especially when they do their jobs well. That's probably why Joe is a lot calmer now.

I picked the Yankees to beat the Philadelphia Phillies in the World Series before it started, mostly because they had more talent. But I also know from experience that Joe can get the job done. He's the kind of person that, if he does well, you don't mind at all.

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