

Albertus Magnus prof talks baseball and leadership with MLB managers



Contributed photo: Fero's colleague Rebecca Herman interviews Yankees great on his transition to manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers.

By Jim Shelton, Register Staff

POSTED: 03/30/12, 12:00 AM EDT |

Howard Fero is stepping up to the big leagues of leadership.

The Albertus Magnus College associate professor, a lifelong New York Mets fan, firmly believes the ballpark is where you'll find every essential element of leadership on display. There's strategy, persuasion, discipline, analysis and crisis management -- not to mention all those walks out to the pitcher's mound.

What you have to do, Fero says, is keep your eye on the ball. So he did.



Contributed photo: Albertus Magnus College associate professor and Met fan Howard Fero interviewed Washington Nationals manager Davey Johnson, among other pros, for his Lead Me Out to the Ballgame project that studies leadership.

Fero and a colleague from San Diego, Rebecca Herman, spent their spring break prowling around baseball parks with tape recorders and a slew of questions about managers. Fero toured spring training facilities in Florida, and Herman visited teams in Arizona.

"In baseball, leadership is lived on the field," says Fero, director of graduate leadership programs at Albertus. "It's very easy to see good and bad leadership at work. You have a group of guys who have to work together in order to be successful, and it doesn't just happen by accident."

The project is called Lead Me Out to the Ballgame (www.LeadMeOutToTheBallgame.com). Fero and Herman plan to write a book about leadership through baseball, once they've compiled and analyzed their research.

"Players are moved around so frequently in baseball, with constant trading and bringing players up from the minors, that it makes for an interesting dynamic with the manager," says Herman, who teaches leadership and change management at Kaplan University. She's also a San Diego Padres season-ticket holder.

She and Fero have interviewed nine major league managers thus far, including Don Mattingly of the Los Angeles Dodgers, Ned Yost of the Kansas City Royals, Manny Acta of the Cleveland Indians and Joe Maddon of the Tampa Bay Rays.

Of particular interest to Fero was the chance to meet Washington Nationals skipper Davey Johnson, who managed the Mets to a world championship in 1986. "He was great," Fero says. "He's had so much experience. He and guys like Joe Maddon told me stories and shared experiences. As a fan, it was amazing."

Similarly, Herman enjoyed her interview with Mattingly, the former New York Yankee great. "Finding out how he progressed from being the kind of player he was to becoming this manager who really led the Dodgers last year, was very interesting," she explains.

They interviewed players, too -- dozens of them. Everyone from Omar Vizquel (Blue Jays) and Brad Lidge (Nationals) to Joe Mauer (Twins) and B.J. Upton (Rays) answered their questions.

"David Ortiz of the Red Sox was very, very engaging and interesting," Fero says, not wanting to give away what the slugger revealed. "He told me a great story about what it's like to be a superstar player, dealing with a manager."

Here's what Fero will reveal: Players at all levels value direct, honest communication in a leader. The same is true outside the ballpark, he says.

"We need our leaders to be straightforward with their expectations and their vision," he explains.

For that matter, Fero and Herman had to be pretty direct in approaching managers and players about Lead Me Out to the Ballgame. Generally, they had about an hour to talk with players each day in the locker room, before they went out onto the field.

"My first stop was the Houston Astros," says Fero, who also does consulting work as The Leadership Doc. "I was like a fish out of water. I didn't realize I'd just be given a credential and pointed to the locker room. All these players are at their lockers, on their iPhones or talking to friends. I walked around the clubhouse and recorded interviews with nine players that day."

"We quickly learned what not to do," adds Herman. "Don't talk to players if they're eating, and don't talk to them if they're playing cards. You wait and talk to them at their locker."

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