

Where Are They Now?

When our editor, Rob Taylor, expressed interest in republishing *In the Ballpark*, we decided to go back to our interviewees and find out what they are doing today. Of the twenty-one personalities in the book, we were able to reach eighteen. It has now been a decade since we conducted the first interviews; the following is what these baseball people are currently up to and some of their thoughts about how baseball and their professions have changed.

THE STANDS

Jerry Collier

Beer vendor Jerry Collier has left his job in baseball to focus on his career in banking. “For me, the fun was disappearing,” he explains:

On Opening Day 1987, my friend and I each sold forty cases of beer in a single game, which is a record that stands today. In 1993 I was selling twenty-two or twenty-three cases a game, and when I left in 1996, I was averaging seventeen or eighteen cases a game. Now, I think the top guys sell ten or eleven cases a game. All you do is walk around looking for the sale, whereas in the past you would just set the thing down and pour. There are so many places to buy beer around the stadium now that it cut into our market. And it’s not a bad thing, but people are drinking more responsibly at the ballpark. You can still make great money, though, because the price of beer has doubled. If you sell half the product at twice the price you’re going to make the same amount of money but have less fun.

The other two things that caused me to leave—and these are

probably more important in life—is that I had my first child, and I had the chance to take on a significant management job at the bank. When you have a newborn baby and you're in charge of a business with twenty employees, you can't run off at 5:30 to sell beer at the ballpark.

On my last day the other vendors gave me a big send-off at a local pub with a cake and everything. One guy who was a fierce competitor of mine said to someone, "You're going to see a different side of him tonight that you didn't know existed." He knew how much it meant to me. I tried to give a speech, but I couldn't get through it. I had been there a long time, was good at what I did, and I had become part of baseball in Baltimore, so it was hard to walk away. The thing I miss most is the people, my ballpark buddies. But I still see those guys at games, and we'll always be brothers because of what we shared.

Here's a great example of my connection to that job even today. I was on a red-eye to London with my wife for a business trip. We got no sleep on the plane. I've got a business meeting in four hours, and we're waiting at a cab stand when this guy runs over to me. He's got a smile from ear to ear. He hugs me, and he's got his buddy with him, and he starts saying in this thick English accent, "A puddle of mud, a puddle of mud." My wife asks, "Do we know you?" His buddy grabs him, and he says, "You bollocks, it wasn't a puddle of mud, it was a bottle of Bud, a bottle of Bud." Then this guy talks my ear off about going to an Orioles game when I sold him beer. Whatever I did, it must have been important because he remembered it years later. You just don't create those kinds of bonds from a chance meeting in banking.

When the first edition of *In the Ballpark* appeared, several book reviewers commented on Jerry's chapter. He recalls,

I was in Lansing, Michigan, visiting a client. When I left the meeting I picked up my cell phone and saw that my voicemail had twenty-four messages. That's twice as many as I usually got. I thought something had to be wrong. Most of them were from my friends, and the messages were basically identical: "You're a big star! Check out page four of *Sports Illustrated!*" I keep a copy of the *American Way* (American Airlines's in-flight magazine) in my office, and sometimes I tell bankers, here check this out. Here's something you never knew about me.

Vending has absolutely influenced my career at the bank be-

cause to be successful in any kind of people business, you need to know how to treat people the “right” way. That guy from England remembered me because of that. You’ve got to make a living, but you’ve got to do it in a way that puts other people first. When I was selling beer, I never realized that was the gift I had with people, and that’s why I was successful at it.

I don’t think I could ever go back to vending at the level I would want to be at. That’s a young man’s game. But I’m blessed to have done it. Most people will never understand that. To have at a young age the chance to succeed and not just be given an hourly wage or an opportunity because of family connections taught me a lot about life.

I share season tickets now with some friends, and the seats are in the third row right behind the visiting team’s on-deck circle, my old section. It’s cool because I go with my kids, and I high five all the vendors, and they’ll give my wife a hug. During any one game I still have people come down to me and recount a story or just shout out, “Hey, Beer Man!”

Tom Burgoyne

Tom Burgoyne is still the Phillie Phanatic and has traveled much of the world as a Major League Baseball mascot. Drawing on his Phanatic experience, he has coauthored two books with his friend Robert Gordon: *More Than Beards, Bellies and Biceps: The Story of the 1993 Phillies (And the Phillie Phanatic Too)* and *Movin’ On Up: Baseball and Philadelphia: Then, Now, and Always*. “Writing is a whole different experience from performing,” says Tom. “With performing, you suit-up, it’s a physical thing. That comes naturally to me. Writing is harder, but there are times when it does flow. Then you get that same rush. What I like about writing is that you have something tangible at the end of the day.”

Tom has always tried to separate himself from the Phanatic to keep the illusion of the character alive. In conversation he always talks about the Phanatic in the third person. At book signings he lets the audience know that his friend the Phanatic might show up later to say hello to everyone. Whenever he appears on local television as himself, his graphic reads, “Tom Burgoyne: Friend of the Phanatic.”

Tom has also written several children’s books, including *The*

Phillie Phanatic's Happiest Moments, *The Phillie Phanatic's Phantastic Journey*, about the Phanatic's travels around the world, and *The Phillie Phanatic's Moving Day*, dealing with the Phillies leaving Veterans Stadium for Citizens Bank Park. Tom recalls,

Leaving the Vet was very sad for me, both as a fan and as someone who worked there for fifteen years. I had so many fond memories. But I was also excited for the new place. And the new stadium has changed the whole experience of going to a ballgame in Philadelphia. Our crowds are better; they're more rambunctious. We're getting more of the college crowd and young professionals. Now, people spend a lot of money to come to a game, so there's more emphasis on the entertainment dollar and more focus on how to make it a full experience. The stadium has a couple of restaurants, games in the outfield, artwork on the concourse. The Phanatic used to be the whole show as far as the nonbaseball entertainment was concerned. Now, coming to a game is really a full package.

One of the biggest innovations in the Phanatic's routine has been a three-and-a-half-foot fiberglass hot dog launcher, provided by Hatfield Quality Meats to promote their "Phanatic Frank," a hot dog marketed to children. When the Phillies moved into their new ballpark, Tom attached a six-foot hot dog launcher to his ATV that generates about 350 psi of pressure. This allows the Phanatic Frank to reach the upper decks from the middle of the outfield. "At first I thought that was kind of a cheap way to get a laugh, but the fans loved it so much that we just kept up with it. I try to bring it out only once during a home stand so it doesn't lose its appeal completely."

With the Phillies organization, Tom has expanded the Phanatic's community outreach. Together, they started a program called "Be a Phanatic about Reading," which encourages children to read for fifteen minutes every day. In its first year, seventy-three thousand children throughout the Delaware Valley signed up. Tom visits about forty schools a year as part of the program.

Tom is now also married and has three children. When asked about the effect his character has on his children, he said,

I never tried to keep it a secret from my kids. I was up front with

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them from the outset. I told them not to brag about it, that it was just our secret. Now that they're a little older, I'll still throw that line out and they just look at me and say, "Dad, everybody knows. When you drop us off at school in the Phanatic van, I think they understand." They're probably getting to an age now where Dad is a little embarrassing, too.

In 2002 the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum officially welcomed the costume of the Phillie Phanatic into the museum's permanent collection with a dedication ceremony during induction weekend. Tom has joined the Famous Chicken and Youppi of the Montreal Expos as one of only three mascots in the Hall of Fame.

Walter Banks

Walter Banks is still the VIP usher at Turner Field. When the Braves moved from Fulton County Stadium, Walter says, "It was like losing an old friend." Walter was named to the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau Hall of Fame in 2002. He has yet to miss a game since 1965. In a CNN interview Walter was asked how much longer he planned working at the ballpark. "Well, you can never tell," he responded. "As long as you're feeling all right, you enjoy it, why quit something you like? If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Hep Cronin

In 2005 Atlanta Braves scout Hep Cronin was promoted to Midwest regional scouting supervisor. When he was an area scout, Hep covered his multistate territory by car. Now that he is responsible for an entire region and is also a national cross-checker, he travels mainly by air. "It's plane after plane after plane. I think I took eighteen flights in thirteen days in May. In some ways it was a lot easier to drive. I could put more stuff in my car and was prepared for any weather."

Hep is still happy to be working for the Braves, particularly for general manager John Schuerholz, who once was a scout himself and values his employees. Schuerholz sometimes refers to his scouts as "the most important part of the Braves organization."

We asked Hep how scouting had changed since we first met