

They say, "You only live once, so you might as well make the best of it." May 7, 2014 was definitely an example of "making the best of it."

I have had an enduring dream of becoming a play-by-play announcer for the Cleveland Indians. On May 7, I was given the opportunity to see the behind-the-scenes life of a professional reporter as a winner of the "Tribe Reporter for a Day" essay contest.

At first I felt a bit uneasy, waiting outside Gate A at Progressive Field, surrounded by dozens of other high school students just like me. All of us were furiously looking through our newly bought OfficeMax legal notepads containing the questions we were hoping to ask Justin Masterson and Scott Atchison. All of us had the look of "I hope I don't blow this" etched across our faces.

Suddenly a representative from the Cleveland Indians gave us entry into the stadium and herded us into some seats. When introductions were made and ground rules set, we were ready. Some were disappointed by the restrictions laid out such as "no asking for autographs." For me, though, the trip was strictly business.

First we met Mr. Joel Hammond, the Communications Coordinator for the Cleveland Indians, who walked us through social media and how it has been essential to the Tribe. He shared personal anecdotes about the dos and don'ts of social media and told a story about how a simple tweet stunted an overzealous fan's attempt to run on the field before it even happened.

We then attended Terry Francona's press conference. We sat in the back row as each reporter filed in and immediately fired off question after question at the Indians' manager. Some of the questions were bold, some soft, some probing, and some sounded as though they belonged on Entertainment Tonight or TMZ. Mr. Francona listened intently to each question, and responded with a calm and collected answer reminding me of Clint Eastwood's performance in "The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly." Tito even threw in a few witty jokes here and there: a side of him that I had never seen before.

Having faced an artillery volley of questions and answers for roughly 10 minutes, Francona said "Is there anything else?" We weren't supposed to say anything at this time, but I had at least a half dozen questions scribbled onto my notepad that I would have loved to ask. I looked around the room at the professional reporters hoping they would keep going, because I loved to hear Francona answer questions. Unfortunately, the reporters had asked everything they wanted to, and so they packed up and left.

But Paul Hoynes, a writer for The Plain Dealer whom I have followed closely for as long as I can remember, stayed behind. He told us about his love of writing from his days as a high school kid and his time as a student at Marquette University. What I found most fascinating, however, were his observations about how the world of sportswriting has changed. "In the old days," as he put it, writers used to go to bed at night feeling good because they had a story nobody else had. Then in the morning they would casually walk downstairs, get a cup of coffee, fetch the paper and read about it, grinning the entire time. Now, the moment a writer gets an inside scoop, he has to publish it one way or another as soon as possible. Otherwise, the reporter runs the risk of another writer or twitter stealing his thunder. Tenacity and speed define the modern reporter.

The final bill on the itinerary arrived: our “press conference” with Justin Masterson and Scott Atchison. I had spent the entire night writing 15 questions I thought would evoke some thoughtful answers and interesting anecdotes. After Justin and Scott got settled, the floor was opened up to us. Questions flew from left and right. I bided my time, looking through the questions I had that were no longer relevant given the direction of the conversation.

Finally, I was called on. One thing I loved about watching the Indians the previous year was that they had an amazing chemistry and seemed to have more fun than any other team. I asked Justin and Scott about what has to be done in order to ensure that high level of chemistry continues when the front office moved lots of players in and out during the off season.

Justin Masterson credited his teammates and manager for their actions in the clubhouse that help create the right atmosphere. He noted that everyone in the clubhouse feels free to be who they are, but when game time rolls around, individuality has to be put in check to ensure that they all focus on their common goal: winning. There is never a moment in the clubhouse when players are trying to prove that they are better than one another. Everyone realizes that they are part of a team, that the team is the priority, and that the team’s success outweighs personal fame. He concluded by saying, “This team, win or loss, is more amazing than any other team.”

Scott Atchison, speaking from personal experience as a new member of the ball club, had a similar answer. Atchison had been on so many different teams throughout his career that, during the press conference, he even lost count. What he was able to recount, however, was that of all the teams he’s played for, “This team has been by far the easiest to walk into the clubhouse and feel like you are a part of the team.” Atchison added that most front offices have to consider personalities to make sure that new players fit in. The Indians, though, have a clubhouse in which just about anyone will feel he belongs.

When the press conference ended, Masterson and Atchison were escorted out and we were told to join up with our families and return to watch the Tribe take on the Minnesota Twins.

While the “Tribe Reporter for a Day” event was the main attraction, the game itself provided its fair share of excitement. A game that went back and forth the entire way, it ultimately came down to the 9th inning. Braving the ever-dropping temperature during the late innings, my father and I were eager to see the Tribe pull the game out. We were determined to make the best of it. Mike Aviles certainly made the best of his final at-bat as he ended the game with an opposite field walk off single, sending the remaining tribe fans into an uproar of approval. By all accounts, it was a great day.