

TEAMMATES 2020

Baseball bond overcomes distance, age difference

Dan Marino & George Altemose have 1000 games & 30+ years of shared diamond experiences

By **GLENN MILLER**

Roy Hobbs Baseball

They're now separated most of the year by more than 1,000 miles.

But perhaps 1,000 games as teammates over more than 3 decades binds George Altemose and Dan Marino in a baseball bond.

That bond and all those games means more to them than the miles that loom between where they reside. *One thousand* miles is nothing compared to *one thousand* baseball games.

Dan Marino, not the former quarterback of the same name, has resided in Fort Myers since 2012. Altemose lives in Setauket, N.Y., on the North Shore of Long Island, a very long way from Southwest Florida.

They connected playing amateur baseball on Long Island in the 1980s.

They connected despite being separated by a generation. Altemose is 75 and Marino is 54. Their shared baseball bond, though, is greater than not only geography but a 21-year age gap.

Wait. ...

Back up ...

One thousand games?

1,000?

Is that possible?

Altemose is a retired electrical engineer and with his analytical ability pointed out that he and Marino have usually played an average of 30 games a year together and over 33 years the number adds up. Some quick grade-school math then puts the number at 993 games. One doesn't need an engineering degree to realize that 993 is darn close to 1,000.

Can it be that many games?

"Probably more than a thousand,"

Altemose said.

Marino, a contractor, now operates Consolidated Builders Group and has a roofing company in the land of the Roy Hobbs World Series. But he's also a baseball man through and through, no matter where he resides or how far



Photo courtesy of Dan Marino
Dan Marino, George Altemose at Doubleday Field in Cooperstown in 2007, with championship trophy.

away he is from his Long Island roots.

When he was contacted in September for this story, Marino was sitting in his 2020 Dodge Ram truck at a Naples job site eating lunch. Marino was more than happy to talk baseball on his lunch break.

He met Altemose in 1987, a third of a century ago a long way north of where he was sitting on a job site on a steamy Florida summer day.

Marino and Altemose built up treasuries of baseball memories.

Altemose recalls a game they played in Cooperstown's Doubleday Field in about 2007. He's not sure of the year but an incident from the game remains a vivid memory. Their team at the time was called the Bay Port Blue Jays.

What stands out about the game in Altemose's memory is a collision between Marino and an opposing base runner with both men knocked unconscious.

Marino was playing third when a runner on second took off for third in a base-stealing attempt. The throw from the catcher tailed into the runner and Marino and the runner banged heads.

As Altemose recalls, Marino was unconscious for about 15-to-20 seconds.

"We didn't know what to do," Altemose said.

At one point, Marino's eyelids started fluttering and then he was able to focus. Altemose said a doctor came out of the stands and said both men likely had concussions.

Altemose pointed out his team had only 9 men for the game. Marino was feeling better and remained in the game, despite suffering for a while from double vision.

Oh, the runner was out at third. Marino somehow held on to the ball.

Somehow, somehow, perhaps befitting a ballplayers who has built businesses in construction and roofing, Marino demonstrated his toughness by more than staying in the game.

Altemose recalls him slamming a line-drive double to the left-center field gap.

Marino is clearly tough and has been his entire adult life, on and off the field. He's been in the construction

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business since he was 18.

Following graduation from high school in 1984, Marino didn't go to college. "I went to work," he said.

No cushy office job for Marino. He learned the construction trade in New York and has transferred his acquired wisdom from the harsh winters of New York to Florida.

Three years after starting in construction, Marino met Altemose and began playing with him. Now, 33 years later they remain teammates. That is plenty of time to know a person.

"He doesn't have enemies," Marino said of Altemose.

He also has extraordinary dedication. "George has missed one game since I've known him," Marino said.

Altemose's job required extensive travel, and Marino said even when George was in Europe he would cut short business trips.

Marino said Altemose would tell colleagues, "I have to be back for a baseball game on Saturday."

Marino started playing Roy Hobbs Baseball in 2012, the year he moved to Fort Myers.

Now, Altemose comes to Florida to play with Marino in the World Series and will be here to play in the 53s in late October.

Over their one-third century as teammates and those roughly 1,000 games, Marino has witnessed Altemose in countless situations. Say each of those roughly 1,000 games went nine innings. That means Marino has been with

Altemose for perhaps 9,000 innings of baseball.

Then there are the road trips. They often made the 300-mile drive from Long Island to Cooperstown to play baseball.

Since Fort Myers' became Marino's home 8 years ago, Altemose comes down in the fall for the Roy Hobbs World Series and they've remained teammates despite the distance.

Marino talked of his utmost respect for Altemose, on and off the field. Altemose is a baseball historian as well as an engineer. He has written a book with a title that reflects his love of the game and history, "Bats, Balls and Bubble Gum Cards."

Marino said Altemose still has baseball cards he acquired when he was 12. Altemose is so committed to baseball history that he has been member of the Society for American Baseball Research since 1979.

That's about the time Altemose started playing adult baseball. Several years later he started playing with a young fellow named Dan Marino. Over the years and decades, he's learned about Marino's dedication.

"He's always there for every practice," Altemose said. "A good teammate."

Marino is about the same age as one of the most famous quarterbacks in recent history. He said at 6-foot-2 and about 215 to 220 pounds he sometimes is asked if he's the ex-quarterback.

"More than a few times," Marino said.

The famous Marino is 59. But the famous Dan Marino never played 33 years with a teammate, with a man named George Altemose.

HARKINS

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developing new pitches," Norment said.

He honed his craft a long time ago. Harkins was around other legends and near legends in addition to Appling. Harkins was selected by the A's on the 13th round of the 1967 draft. Oakland's first pick of the second round that year was a fire-balling lefty from Louisiana named Vida Blue.

Harkins said he and Blue roomed together for a while and he remembers Blue as a shy young man. Harkins was also young. He turned 17 in 1967 when he began his pro career playing for the A's Gulf Coast League team based in Bradenton.

Harkins said he received a bonus of a few thousand dollars for signing. He doesn't recall precisely. But he knows what he did with it. Harkins bought a 1967 GTO convertible for \$3,167.

Like any person of a certain age, Harkins has some regrets. One of his is not reporting to winter ball at the

end of a season. Pitching coach Bill Posedel urged him to participate but the teenage Harkins was homesick.

"I'm a stupid kid," said Harkins, now a retired police officer.

So, instead of reporting to Arizona with other A's prospects he returned home to Massachusetts. But he didn't tell the coaching staff the real reason. He told them he was returning to start college.

"I lied," Harkins admitted.

Would participating in fall ball have propelled Harkins to the big leagues? He doesn't know one way or the other.

But he does know the A's farm system at that time was brimming with talented players who would form the heart of the formidable Oakland teams of the 1970s that won three consecutive World Series.

That includes Reggie Jackson, Blue, Blue Moon Odom, Rollie Fingers, Joe Rudi, Sal Bando and Gene Tenace. But the name of Bill Harkins was not on the fall roster when it could have been.

"My name should have been on it," Harkins said of the winter ball roster. "I'm not saying I would have made it,"

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