

My Own Field of Dreams

By Marc Schoenfield, W'68

I was a walk-on baseball pitcher for Penn in my freshman year, and I wound up pitching four years for the Quakers. In high school, I was part of a very good baseball team, where I won 20 games and lost two, pitched four shutouts in a row and was scouted by the then Milwaukee Braves.

At Penn, my record was up and down, but there was a special moment that I now share in an anecdote -- that occurred at the beginning of my senior season. Penn decided to emphasize its baseball program, so they shipped us down to Florida to play some of the universities down there. Boy, could they hit! In the first inning against one of the schools, I faced the first three batters, and they were all on base. Their clean-up hitter came up, and I started him off with a fastball. In retrospect, I guess he didn't think it was that fast! I saw his bat crush the ball, and as I turned to watch it, I muttered "Oh {bleep}!" I swear the ball kept rising even as it left the field. It was the spring of 1968, and I'm still not sure it's come down yet. Any minimum dream that I still had of making it to "The Bigs" died at that moment on that field in Florida.

The only other thing to say is that starting from my high school days, my coaches had encouraged me to "brush back" batters or knock them down if they got too comfortable in the batter's box. I never did that because I was too concerned I'd hit and hurt them. The Florida guy who hit that grand slam off me changed that. When he came up to bat the next time, I went into my windup for the first pitch, and when I got my arms to the top, I took my eyes off the catcher's glove, zeroed in on his left ear and let fly. People ask me, "So you hit him in the head?" "No," I answer. "He ducked and went down." If I'd wanted to hit him in the head, I'd have thrown at his shoulder. Then when he ducked, I'd have hit him in the head!"

I never regretted not making it to the pros. I wasn't good enough. To paraphrase Burt Lancaster as the doctor in the Kevin Costner film "Field of Dreams," "Not making it to the pros wasn't a tragedy. If I hadn't become a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, that would have been the tragedy!"