



**Clint Hurdle: Winning, Losing and Leading | Sept. 11, 2022 | LTIS Episode 12**

TS: Thanks for listening to “The Inside Storey” with me, Tim Storey, the CEO of the National Conference of State Legislatures. On this episode, I get to talk with Clint Hurdle. Clint spent decades in major league baseball as a player and as a manager. He is upfront about both his wins and his losses. At the beginning of his Rookie year with the Kansas City Royals, Sports Illustrated put him on the cover and labeled him baseball’s newest phenom. He went on to play for the Cincinnati Reds, St. Louis Cardinals and the New York Mets yet never quite lived up to the hype of that rookie year despite playing in and losing the World Series. When his playing days were done, he went on to a successful career as a Major League manager taking the Pittsburgh Pirates all the way to the World Series. Yet again, he didn’t win the covenant championship ring. He learned many lessons from his ups and downs in professional baseball and he has become an inspiration to fans across the globe by sharing his personal stories about those days, about overcoming adversity and staying focused on what truly matters in life. We are going to hear some of those lessons today and why they matter for people in work in and around state legislatures.

Clint Hurdle, what a delight. How excited am I to talk to you. I love it when I get a chance to talk to somebody who has built a career in a very different world than the world as we have it. And frankly a world that I don’t think everyone quite understands. The world

of professional sports. The world of professional baseball. You learned a few things about being a manager, about being a person and about taking care of people, relating to people and building teams. And that's what we would like to talk about today. So, hey, thank you. I mean really, really thank you for being with us.

CH: Oh, you are welcome. I've been looking forward to this opportunity ever since I spoke at the Summit at the beginning of August. Hopefully I was able to bring something to the table that they all could relate to because, truthfully, at the end of the day, we both are building, we are building relationships, we are taking care of people and we are trying to head into the future with a vision and a direction that works yeah that works for everybody.

TS: That's awesome and that's what I really want to talk about. Let's just, you know, hear a little bit about your road to now, what brings you to this place. Quick recap. You are one of these rare people who--obviously a gifted athlete--and had the choice of do I go play baseball or do I go play football. Why did you pick baseball over football?

CH: Well, I think there was more just want to in baseball. Football practice, I never had a warm fuzzy for football practice. I loved Friday night, and I loved a lot of other things about football. The community. The camaraderie. I was a quarterback, so I was in charge of delegating and being a go to guy on that side of the ball for 10 other men. But practice was practice. Baseball I never felt like I had to go to practice. It didn't matter if there were coaches there or not. There were so many times my buddies and I would just get together and get out the balls and bats and do our own thing. A lot of our summers were filled with that. Getting on bicycles and driving down to the ballfield and just playing together. So, there was a difference. There are people in Marin Island, Florida, where I grew up near the high school and to this day, they will tell you I was a better football player than I was a baseball player. But baseball made by heart beat. Practice was never too long. Practice was never too hard. It was something that I embraced year-round. So, it wasn't a hard decision.

The more complicated decision for me I graduated from high school was not to turn down the athletic scholarship with Miami for football and baseball. But it was to pass on the opportunity to go to Harvard on an academic scholarship. And the cool thing about Harvard that got my attention I mean like a slap in the face. All the other colleges I went to for football or for baseball told me well if you have trouble in school, we will get you a tutor. We will work things out. We will make it happen, but we got to keep you practicing and we want you ready for games. OK, when I went to Harvard and talked to the people there, the counselor there said look if you have trouble with your schoolwork, you don't go to practice. You don't even have to go to the game. Harvard is an academic institution, and we are focusing on your grades and you getting a degree

and you walking out of here and leaving a mark or creating a mark. That dynamic of OK, if you have trouble with school, we will fix that, and you can play. If you have trouble with school, no, no, you are going to go to more school and you are going to figure out how to do school right. But at the end of the day, it was baseball. It had always been my dream since I was five years old.

TS: Yeah, nobody can argue with that. Thinking about how this. You said something I think that directly applies to people who serve in legislatures. You kind of, I think, implied this notion that the passion for baseball was just natural. You didn't have to trick yourself into going to practice or drag yourself into practice. You just wanted to be there. And I was thinking about you know this legislature world. You know maybe that's telling you something when you're like ah man, I really don't want to go to the capitol next week or maybe even today. You know, maybe that's when you need to rethink like is this the sport I want to be in right now. When you look back at it and you sum it all up, how do you reflect on your time on the field as a player, not as a manager? What was your biggest takeaway? Like what do you reflect on when you think of your playing days?

*(TM): 05:47*

CH: In my playing days, it was a quick shoot to the minor league system. I was drafted in the summer of '75. I played just a little over two years of minor league ball and made my Major League debut at the age of 20. It doesn't happen very often anymore. From that point on, it was hard. It's obviously the highest level. However, things got more complicated along the way for me, I think, personally and professionally. The game had different challenges at that level. There were distractions outside of the game. I always loved coaching and I listened to a lot of people, and I think I tried to make everybody happy along the way, which I can promise you that is probably the quickest way to make a lot of people unhappy.

I switched the position when I got to the big leagues. I had never had a position switch in the minor leagues and a couple of weeks before we were going to break in spring training, we made a trade and the manager said hey can you play first base. When you are a 20-year-old kid, yeah, of course I can. I'd never played first base in my life. That was a challenge. To play at the highest level at a position that you never played at. So, it wasn't linear by any means. There was no linear trajectory. And you know that in life. We learn that in life. We learn in legislatures. You learn that in politics. There are highs, there's lows. How do you find balance? How do you find boundaries? How do you eliminate distractions? Those were all things that I had to figure out along the way to the best of my ability. Some of them, I did well with. Some of them, I didn't do so well with.

And it seemed like in a blink of an eye, that 10-year major-league career was over. From the cover of Sports Illustrated in 1978 to retiring at the age of 30, that's probably not the way a lot of people thought it would go. But by the time I got to be 30, I had spent a lot of time in the big leagues. I was more or less not playing every day. I was part time playing, which still was good. But the last few years I went to spring training, I had to make a team and I did. But it just got to the point that at that particular time in my life that I went it just seemed like a time for a pivot change, something different. And I had learned so many valuable life experiences as well as professional experiences, I thought maybe coaching is something that I could find some purpose in. Maybe my shared experiences could help young men develop because I was a can't miss phenom that did, kind of did. But I played in a World Series. I played on division championships. I've been traded. I've been released. I had experienced you check off a lot of the boxes on things that could happen to you during a career. I've been hurt. Been on the disabled list. Had some crazy cool ups. You know there is nothing better than playing in the World Series and having your mom and dad there and having some friends support you there.

However, that just seemed to have a shelf life for me and rather than continue to chase that dream and knowing I was going to be on the outside looking in, I thought where could I go. What could I do to maybe start learning again. And start at a bottom level and work my way up hopefully. But I never said I wanted to grow up and be a big-league manager. I just wanted to get into coaching to see if I could help young players maybe not have some of the challenges that I did. It took me in a completely different direction. And it took me onto a ride that has lasted over 30 some years. I was probably much better suited to be a coach than a player when all is said and done.

TS: So, this is really fascinating to me that you know the playing experience is you know ups and downs and all of that. And you are like I'd rather be a coach. Did you know you wanted to be a coach while you were playing or was it more like what am I going to do after playing days are over? You know was it just something that burned in you to like you know I want to help other people like what do you think was motivating you to go that direction?

CH: Well, I did not plan on being a coach when I started playing. I think most careers are tied up in themselves so much that they want to play well. And I had aspirations as a lot of kids you know from the time I was six in the backyard playing pickleball to being in the Hall of Fame. And towards the end of my career when I stopped playing every day and became more of a platoon player, I should say a bench player. When I started with the Mets and I spent time with the Cardinals, I basically was a backup catcher or the backup first baseman or the backup third baseman or the backup right fielder or the backup left fielder. Which in today's game is a very valuable position. They call it a super U, a super utility player. Back then you were on the bench and you just backed up a bunch of guys.

We didn't have a little cool term for it. But it was during those times of not playing of actually watching other people play and working in the bullpen, working for pitchers.

The last position I picked up was being a catcher and then learning that part of the game late in my career to develop those relationships to see how the part of pitching played and really dominates most of the game. Then the last couple of years in a bullpen situation where I wasn't warming up pitchers, watching the game from that angle and getting to watch the game from behind the plate, it kind of brought me in this new frontier, new territory and I thought wow maybe not just coaching in the minor leagues, but maybe if an opportunity to manage in the minor leagues, that might be kind of cool. So, it probably developed at the backend of my playing career.

*(TM): 11:12*

TS: So, then you transition to what was your first managing job? Where did you pick that up?

CH: It was kind of funny because I got my first managing job by threatening to continue to play. It was in Port St. Lucie, Florida.

TS: So, you became a manager because they were like we'd rather you stop playing and become a manager. Who was that with?

CH: Actually, it was with the Mets. I was playing in the minor leagues, and I was going to go to spring training for the third year in a row and have to make the club because I did it back-to-back years. I did it with the Mets. I did it with the Cardinals. I was going to go back to the Mets and make the club again. I should say three years in a row, I walked in as an extra guy, a non-roster player and made the Major League club. But it was that winter that one of my superiors ... said hey, have you ever started about managing. And I said you know it's kind of funny you mentioned that because lately I have given it a little thought. And he goes well I'm just here to tell you that I think it's something that you have a chance of being good at. We have a position in our rookie league in Glens Falls, New York and we'd love to have you manage that team. And I said well wow. I'm humbled. That is interesting. I said but you are also opening up a facility in the Florida State like 45 minutes from my house. I lived in Palm City, Florida. I said that place is only 45 minutes away. He goes well you can't manage there. He said you are not ready for that. That is high 8 ball. There are three levels you got to work at to get to that level. I went oh, okay, interesting. Good to know. Ah no thanks on Glen Falls. I'm going to go back, and I'll play. He said so you are really you're going to go just try out again and I go yup, unless that thing in Port St. Lucie opens up, that's the only job that I would retire for. So, I get a call a week later hey are you thinking this through? Are you good? Listen I

can bump you above Glens Falls. I can take you to Lynchburg high A. I go wow or high rookie. Wow, that's nice. Thanks for thinking of me, but did you fill the position in St. Lucie? No, we haven't. Well, that's the one I'm holding out for. No, I'm just going to focus on playing and getting ready for spring training. And then he said some other things that weren't quite as nice to me on the phone. I wait another week and I get another call. And he says hey, are you telling me that if you could manage that St. Lucie club? I said yeah for the last three weeks, almost a month now, that's what I've been telling you I would retire for that opportunity. And he said OK. I'm going to call your bluff. That's your opportunity. We will hire you as the manager there. I said well I don't even have to retire because good players retire. I'm just going to stop playing before people stop calling. So, I took the position. I got the job in the Florida State League by continuing to threaten to play.

TS: So now you are a manager/coach, and you make it all the way to you managed two teams in the World Series in Major League Baseball at the Major League level?

CH: Well, I managed one team in the World Series. I coached a team in the World Series and I played in the World Series. So, I managed with the Mets organization for six years. Two years at A ball, two years at AA and then two years at AAA and then I was fired. And I joined the Rockies organization and spent five years completely different job. I became a hitting coordinator. I would just travel from affiliate to affiliate and work with the hitters and I would stay in contact with hitting coaches. Build the hitting program. Make sure the hitters were aligning. I did that for five years in Colorado as a minor league hitting coordinator. One year I also was the field coordinator where I ran the entire minor league options on field stuff. And then was gifted my first opportunity to be a coach at the Major League level in 1997. I did 11 years of minor league service to get back to the big leagues as a Major League coach. And then I spent five years as a hitting coach before I became a Major League manager with the Rockies in 2002. As you mentioned, I have been to the World Series three times. Once as a player, once as a coach and once as a manager. And that's a very small group of men that have done it that way. But you know what a smaller group is? I finished second all three times.

So, every team I went to, we lost the World Series. That's even a smaller group. But there is after you lose years later because it stinks for a while. But now, I'd look at those relationships that were built. I look at those journeys that were taken. The time was spent. The energy that was involved. You know truthfully you know there was some blood along the way, but there's a lot of sweat and a lot of tears along the way. But to get that opportunity, it is worth it. And more outside of that, it's worth it for so many other people in the organization as well. All the employees. How about the people around the ballpark that are trying to sell things whether it's hotels, restaurants, street vendors. But to see the employees in the organization three different times get on that

ride with us, experience that joy and that special time of playing baseball you know playoff baseball, it's something that I will never forget.

*(TM): 16:26*

- TS: I wonder if there is anything that is sort of an analog for that. You know playing at the highest level or performing at the highest level whether it's you know your first chair at the Boston Symphony or whatever the greatest symphony in the world is. Or you know you are the greatest card player in the World Series of Poker or fishing tournament or whatever it is. I'm trying to think of the analog for people who are you know going to work in state capitals and that kind of thing. Do you ever think about that? Like how do you relate that to people who are doing a wide variety of things including making laws and policies and helping constituents?
- CH: Well, I think it's a great question and basically it goes back to one why are you in it? Are you in it to win the World Series trophy or are you in it to help others become better? To make others' jobs easier? To bring joy in others' lives as well. I was fortunate that I was mentored by some people that you know the best type of leadership is servant leadership and that's what I believe the political landscape is supposed to look like. The legislative landscape is supposed to look like. People in those positions are there to make other people's lives better. Those leadership skills, they play everywhere. There is adversity. There are challenges. There's relationship building. There's learning. There's grit. There's perseverance. And there is joy. And you know the old saying that you are never going to enjoy the view from the mountaintop until you spend some time in the valley. And it was very encouraging and energizing for me to be at that Summit. And there was a bunch of people at that Summit, they were focused on their place. They were focused on their group who they were representing, their constituents. You know their voters. Where they lived. All those things. It was just energizing and of course reaffirming for me to see people politically motivated that were working together that smiled about their job that looked forward to whatever challenges that might be coming because they were going to lock arms and work through them.
- TS: You talked about servant leadership, what does that mean to you? You know we hear that term often. Go kind of a level below and how did you bring that to managing the Rockies and the Pirates in all your different roles?
- CH: Well, I was fortunate that I had some guys that mentored me along those lines. Servant leadership goes back to exactly what I said earlier. It's making somebody else's job easier. I am there to find a way to help put you in the best possible position for you to have success in your position. And the guy that one of the guys that hired me, Keli McGregor, was a mentor of mine. He was the president of the Rockies at the time. He

told me walking in the door that basically your job is to make my job easier. And my job as the president is to make your job easier as the manager. And we can work together along those lines and get everybody working outside themselves for the greater good, we have a chance to do much more good than any one person can on his own. And we can lock arms, decide on a vision, decide on policy, decide on the how to in a room, lock arms and then deploy and go out and actually do it. Be intentional and be committed to the work, you can bring a lot of people with you. You can actually get a ground swell of people to go with you. But we've all worked for people that we may have felt they had another agenda. And you know I used to share with my coaching staff as I was trying to manage coaches don't ever become the "oh no" coach. And they would say well Clint what do you mean by that? I said, well, could you remember a time when you were a player or an athlete when you saw a coach walking in your direction. As soon as you saw them walking in your direction, you dropped your head and said oh no. Here comes Clint. We've all had those people in our lives. What you are looking for creating is an atmosphere and a culture in which I'm walking towards you, Tim, and you go oh gosh I can't wait, I can't wait. Every time Clint shows up, I feel better when he leaves. I mean he has given me something. There's something we have a conversation.

TS: I think what you are implying is that the farther, the odds of success you know increase when you take that approach. I also like this notion that you had with Keli McGregor who was the GM while you were at Colorado right? This whole notion that my success is your success and if we are both kind of thinking like hey, I'll do what I can to make you successful and we do the same, you get everybody on that page. It's the same in legislatures. Let me ask you this. Because legislative leaders and as well as legislative staff, directors, managers, those kinds of folks, you know, there is a lot of turnover. Maybe similarly, because every election brings a new 20, 25% group of people. You also have high turnover with staff. Did you learn over the years any kind of you know what's the magic to getting people to really be their best version of themselves?

*(TM): 21:38*

CH: Oh, I think there comes a time and it's called evaluation of people, evaluation of your personnel. I know one thing for sure that I picked up on earlier, I needed to help them eliminate distractions. Distracted workers don't work clean. They don't work hard. They don't work at being efficient. So, help them eliminate distractions. What's holding them up? Is there fear? Are they caught up in a title? Are they not happy with their financial remuneration. I would try and have some honest conversations about meeting them where they were and saying OK, I can help you here. I can't help you there. Your play is going to escalate your salary. Now based on play, you can get more opportunity, which can get you more dividends which can get you more performance levels and those things can help. However, what can we do to enhance your play? You are not playing

that well right now. What do we need to do to get you to be the best player that you can be. At the end of the day, though, it came back for me still, to build a relationship with a coach or player, and I thought it started with earning their trust. And it was basically three questions I developed back when I was a kid in eighth grade trying to make a basketball team. I'd ask the coach why I wasn't playing more. So already I'm trying to be the eighth-grade coach. I told my dad about it, and he said well, son, it sounds like you are whining to the wrong guy. I'm not your coach. You need to go talk to your coach. So, I went and talked to my coach, and I asked him why wasn't I playing more and he said well the other players are better than you. And I said well OK, I realize here is our disagreement. I said what don't I do well. And he gave me four or five specific things and I went OK. Obviously, he is evaluating my skillset a little differently than mine, but OK. I said, so if I could get better at those, I'll play more. He said absolutely. I said OK. Can I trust you? And he looked at me like well what do you mean. And I go I'm sorry, can I trust you to work with me to develop those skills to earn more playing time. And he looked at me and he says well I've never had that question or presented that from an eighth grader before. And I said well if I want to play more, you are my coach. You are the one with the skills. You are the mentor. Who else is going to teach me. He said no, we can develop a practice schedule where I can meet you on this day, this day for an extra 20 minutes or 30 minutes and we will work on these four areas. I said OK, great. So, I said we are going to earn each other's trust right and he goes yeah. I said OK. The other thing I learned is when you show people you care about them, they will go the extra mile for you.

TS: You're a thoughtful guy, you know, who is really, you know, cares about trying to lift other people up. You know share what you've learned and bring them around, which is why I know about this email thing you do that, I guess, started as a text and you know just sort of the things that you share that you think will lift people up. Why do you do that? Why do you still continue to do that? What makes that important to you?

CH: Well, there's been times in my life and my career that it was very lonely, and I felt isolated. And I wasn't sure who was there for me, and I isolated myself or alienated myself. Somebody always seemed to show up and give me an arm, a lifting. I used to call them arm lifters, hope brokers, encouragers. I'm sure they were there when I wasn't doing well, but I just didn't pay attention to them. So, what I've tried to do over the years is be an encourager. To be somebody that will listen. Sometimes listening is the best tool. I don't have an answer. I don't have a fix. I don't have a solution. I can listen and say, wow, you know, I've felt that way. Here is what worked for me. Here is what didn't work for me.

But it started with a text message. I had 12 people on it. I did it for two months when Keli and I both were with the Rockies. Then I got fired. And it was two months later my

first vacation in 35 years, and I got a call. It was from one of the people on the leadership group and she said hey how are you doing. And I said well I'm doing pretty good. I'm on a family vacation. It's July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend. She goes well I just want to let you know the team is doing great since you got fired and they did. They had a remarkable run. Jim Tracy came in and took over and the team got in the playoffs, but she goes but we are missing something. We are missing you, your leadership, your voice, your love. She goes, we would have these sessions and you would draw up the notes and you would send them to us and at the bottom you would write make a difference today, love Clint. She goes well you are not making a difference anymore and I don't think you love me, and she hung up the phone. And I walked back into the room and my wife goes what happened to you and I go well I just got this very sobering phone call and I shared it with her. And she goes well what are you going to do about it. I said I'm going to take a walk. So, I took a walk around the block, and I said you know what I'm going to start that thing up even though my swipe card doesn't work. Even though there's no job down there. There are people that maybe I can still impact and help along the way. So, the text list was 12 people. It went into the hundreds. I finally got smart enough where I flipped it to email. It has grown and grown and grown. It's 7,000 people strong. There is a daily email of encouragement of leadership and then there is a devotional also that I put out. And from people I read, people I lean into, people I learn from. And you can go to the site at [clinthurdle.com](http://clinthurdle.com) and it's free. It goes out six days a week. And it is just to help. It's just to provide some support and you'd be amazed at how many times Tim I'll get something back and go oh you can't believe how I needed this today. And I just I chuckle because every time I send one, I've already read it and it's already you know it's already squared me up and I thought there may be somebody else out there that it could impact or influence or help. And there's not many days that go by that I don't get a handful of replies just thanking me for making their day better or giving them a different thought or some encouragement or an answer they didn't have. That's why I do it. That's why I'll continue to do it. I learned from reading you know all the different blogs of the readers of the books that I read and the shares that I come up with I continue to learn.

TS: Well, thank you for doing that. I was thinking about the word legacy and how you know when you play sports, you play at the highest level, and you maybe get your name on the trophy or in the record books and your you know your Wikipedia page you know goes through all your titles and all your you know positions you played. But maybe the real legacy is what you just talked about. You know, lifting people up and continuing to do that. That's a pretty impressive legacy and that's going to ripple, you know, from time on. So, that's pretty awesome. Good for you man. I appreciate you doing that, and I'm going to go and sign up. Hey man what a cool pleasure for me. I can't tell you how much I appreciate you giving us your time and sharing some thoughts with our group and coming to our big Summit.

CH: Tim you are welcome. Thanks for the opportunity to share. Much appreciate it.

TS: My guest today was Clint Hurdle, long-time Major League baseball manager who still serves as a coach for the Colorado Rockies. You can sign up for Clint's daily inspirational emails at [clinthurdle.com](http://clinthurdle.com).

*(TM): 28:58*

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