



Bernie Williams: Remembering the 2001 World Series (4/4/19)

00:00:23 Mike Greenberg: How did that, the rest of that season, then, become different from any other time that you spent in a half a century in baseball?

Joe Torre: Well, it affects your life. We were going to go down to Ground Zero. And then we went to the armory. You know, this is where the families were waiting to get results of DNA to find out about their loved ones. And we sort of walked around the perimeter, and then one family called us over. And we walked that way. And I remember Bernie Williams went up to this one woman and said, "I don't know what to say, but you look like you need a hug." And he hugged her.

00:01:07 And then all of a sudden, people start coming over. And at this point, you're getting a sense that... Okay, you know, They legitimately want us to be there. And then all of a sudden, pictures, photos of their loved ones in, like, a Yankee jacket or a Yankee hat.

00:01:27 And it, and it... It was powerful, it was powerful. And you realize at this point in time that it was starting to develop that baseball was... was here to distract. You know, that was our role at this point in time.

00:01:56 Eva Usadi: Good evening. I'm Eva Usadi, and I was the woman that Joe Torre was talking about in the video.

So, on September 12, 2001, along with hundreds of other medical professionals and mental health professionals in the city, I joined the Red

Cross, and I joined the Red Cross Disaster Mental Health Team. My first assignment was at the armory at 26th Street, and then I was at Ground Zero for multiple shifts for about three months.

00:02:32

And one day at the armory, I was trying to clear what looked like a bottleneck. There were a lot of people, and they were kind of blocking the way to get to the lower level. And I turned around to sort of say, you know, "Everybody needs to move," and I bumped smack into Scott Brosius.

(laughter)

00:02:52

Literally, boom. And he could see that I recognized him immediately and so he laughed and I laughed. And then I said, "Oh, oh, I'm so sorry. Did you lose someone?" And he said, "No, no, no. We're just here to lend support." So I didn't really know what that meant. I thought he and his family. And we chatted for a while, and we talked about that they were not playing for a couple of weeks, and what a, you know, sacrifice that was, and what a wonderful thing it was that major league sports did. And we kept talking.

00:03:26

And then I noticed he was looking toward his right, so I looked to my left, and there was the entire lineup of the New York Yankees. And being a fan, I did my best not to pass out.

(laughter)

And then I saw Bernie Williams, and he came up to me and said, "I don't know what to say, but can I give you a hug?" And I said, "Yes."

(laughter)

00:03:56 And it was a hug. It was a real hug. I felt it in my heart. I felt his warmth and his compassion, and that he saw something in me that I didn't even know that I needed. And that is a moment that I will never forget, and I've spoken of it often to friends and family. So after all the work that I did at Ground Zero, I started a nonprofit. And we're based in New York City. It's called Trauma and Resiliency Resources. And we do work primarily with military veterans who are struggling with the challenges of service.

00:04:37 And we have a... Initially, it was just an online resource to help New York City's first responders connect with good trauma therapists. That's what I do. And then it developed into something else. I was working with a lot of fire and police, and some of my guys and women were deploying in 2004. And we realized we needed to do something more than just be an online resource. So we went operational with a weeklong program that is designed to prevent suicide. That is our mission, to end military suicides.

00:05:11 And since we started this program in 2013, we've lost no one. So our next plan is that we'll be moving out and working with first responders and family members. So in 2012, as we were developing the program, and we were ready to run our first one, one day, I did a social media blast, and I tried to find every well-known person from major league sports to celebrities, just anybody who might be willing to lend us some support.

00:05:42 And I must have sent out hundreds of Facebook messages, and LinkedIn, and all of that. And I sent one to Bernie Williams. And I... because I had a contact, I, you know, reminded him that we had met once. And I think that it's because of that that his manager found me a few months ago and asked me to come and do this presentation. I think that's very much why I'm here.

00:06:12 So it is with affection, and it is a great honor for me to introduce tonight's speaker, Bernie Williams.

(applause)

00:06:48

Bernie Williams: I told her I was the one who needed a hug now.

(laughter)

Clifford Chanin: Well, that's hard to follow.

(laughter)

Um... There's a lot to talk about. And you had a wonderful career, but after 16 years in the big leagues, you were asked a number of times to think back about some of the most important moments to you. And this includes four world championships and a batting crown, and All-Star appearances, and so on and so forth. And you mentioned 9/11, and the first games after 9/11, as those peak moments for you. Why? Why...

00:07:27

Bernie Williams: I still say that, yeah. I still say that, because... I felt that at that moment, I thought of baseball as being paid insanes amount of money to play a game, you know? It was... How fortunate I am that I can, you know, throw this ball and hit it and run the bases. And... And it was just this, you know, this great thing.

00:07:56

But once 9/11 happened, to me, the game transcended sports. It was just, we're playing for something much bigger than us. And as an individual, you play for the Yankees, and, you know, tradition, you know, 100 years of baseball, and all this excellence and World Series. But that was... that didn't mean anything at that point. And just thinking about it now just brings me so many memories.

00:08:24

But every time I get asked that question, I said, you know, out of all the seasons and of all the years and all the accolades and all that stuff that happened in my career, I still mention 9/11 as one of the most important

moments in my career, because we were playing, trying to... Like Joe was saying, we were trying to distract people from, you know, the horrible thing that happened. And we had so many people pulling for us that year, it was just insane. And want fact that we came up short, you know, two outs...

(laughter)

00:08:57 Bernie Williams: Mariano on the mound, winning by one run. Sometimes, depending on how I feel, I call 2001, you know, my fifth World Series.

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: Not a lot of times, but...

(laughter)

00:09:11 Clifford Chanin: You know, I wanted to go back to that moment that Eva described, because it would seem to me that you were brought down as a team. You are the New York Yankees. You are the, the... The source of great encouragement and strength for people. But take me back to arriving there. It's the family center, so there are all of these people in these first moments of shock and grief. And what did you think you were there for? And what happened to change what you thought this was as it was happening?

00:09:48 Bernie Williams: Well, before the armory, I remember going to the Javits Center, and to one of the local hospitals. And then we had an opportunity to see all the people that were flown in from other states that were there, sort of camping in this big, you know, convention center, just kind of taking shifts in, you know, the cleaning and the rescue process. And... You know, they were happy to see us, and we were happy to see them.

- 00:10:17 But it never really... I mean, even going to the hospital, we saw a couple of people injured and in hospital beds. And I was still, you know, going to many places to, you know, visit sick people and people that are injured. But nothing hit me more than going to the armory, because we were talking about, you know... If I can be graphic, you know, they were just bringing remains of, you know, of people that were living. And just, they were encouraging people to bring, you know, personal artifacts, like brushes, you know, whatever, to see if they can match. To me, it just, it was just mind-boggling to me to think that we were in a situation like that.
- 00:10:58 So going in, I, you know, figure, you know, stay quiet. Don't say a word. Don't even smile. Just, you know, be there, you know, for support. And I really didn't know what to expect. And we really saw the change in people's attitudes for ten minutes, you know? You know, the ten minutes that we were there--I don't know, time just flew. But the amount of time that we were there, we saw people's faces just change dramatically. Like, they were just living this nightmare, and all of a sudden, this commercial, you know, happened. And they're, like, "Oh, okay."
- 00:11:39 And so people's attitudes changed and they're smiling. They were taking pictures. You know, they were trying to get me to sign stuff, and... And, you know, it brings me to, to that situation in which I really didn't know what to say. I mean, I'm no psychologist, I am not a doctor, I... But I saw her look, and I've seen that look many times. And I was, like, I don't really know what to do. But I... "Can I give you a hug?" Because that's the only thing that I could say. And to me, that's one of the things that I look back in my career... And I wasn't even playing the game. I wasn't even throwing... I wasn't even doing anything.
- 00:12:23 But it was the fact that we were the team that we were. We were going into the midst of this crazy thing that was happening. And we were there, and people really cared about the fact that we were there, and we genuinely cared for the people that we were there, you know, to support,

and... To me, that's one of the moments in my career that I will never forget for as long as I live.

00:12:46 Clifford Chanin: What was the dialogue within the team like? How did the impact of this event and the Yankees, as the focal point of people's attention and as the possibility of some relief, how was that understood by the players? How did you talk about it amongst yourselves?

00:13:03 Bernie Williams: We were about to... I mean, in my mind, we were just going to cancel the whole season. I just didn't see, in my mind, any reason whatsoever why I would be out there playing a game and having fun while the country is going through this. That was my, my initial mindset. I said, "Dude, what are you thinking about, man? This is... this is... This is just incredible. Why, why are you thinking about playing baseball right now? I mean, this is just insane." And I think that was kind of, like, most of the collective mindset that the team had.

00:13:41 I mean, this is... I mean, "We're not going to play. We're just going to see." I mean, and at the time, also, because of the severity of the attacks, you know, there was this sort of... kind of, like, thing going, like, you know, "Are we going to get more of these things going?" You know, "Is this going to be an army coming in? Are we going to have, like, fighting street on street?" I mean, "What is this?" I mean, there was this collective sort of mindset of... Everybody was on edge.

00:14:07 And I felt, well, I mean, "Where's my family?" I mean, talking to my people. I couldn't even talk to my families for, like, you know, days. Because all, like, you know, connections were, you know, busy. So baseball was the last thing on my mind.

00:14:22 Just, I guess that was my long way of saying it. Baseball was the last thing on my mind. And then when we started playing, going into that process, it changed. It was, like, to me, we are playing for something bigger than us. We are playing for something bigger than baseball. And we have the responsibility to do whatever we can to play our part, to assist in the

healing of this nation. And if we are here to be a distraction, that's what we're going to be. And it just happened that we were just playing in the World Series, and we were playing in, you know, those games, and I... They were saying, you know, the whole country being behind the Yankees. I think we were the most hated team in...

(laughter)

00:15:15 Bernie Williams: But at that particular point... I mean, even the people from the Diamondbacks. I remember Bret Boone saying, "We're American, too, you know!" You know, "You don't have to make us the villain here." But, yeah, I mean, I think both teams, you know, everybody that was involved in that particular, you know, scenario was playing the game and giving it all, because we felt like we, we were important in that process. And I was very proud to be part of it.

00:15:43 Clifford Chanin: Where were you when you learned about 9/11 itself? How did, how did you come to know what was going on here?

Bernie Williams: I was in Armonk, New York, at 8:30, having half a bagel.

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: And I'm watching TV. I usually put, you know, the TV on SportsCenter, and you see the highlights, see who's doing what. And, you know, I tend to flip the channels, you know, like everybody does. And all of a sudden, every channel that I turned, it was that. And I thought it was, like, some sort of documentary or something like that. But then I was, like, "No, this is happening right now." And I started getting... You know, getting a little agitated. And I started calling everybody in the family. It was, like, "Come here, see this."

00:16:24 And I remember... Tino Martinez lived about 20 blocks away, and his window actually looked at the Twin Towers. And he was sleeping, and his wife called him from Florida, and said, "Dude, do you know what's happening?" And he's, like, "No, what's up?" "Turn the TV on!" And then he turned the TV on, and he was there. And then he looked outside his window, and was, like, "Yeah, it is, it is, it is happening."

00:16:49 So I go in... You know, the first tower, you know, collapses. I go in and start, you know, calling everybody that I know and trying to figure out what's going on. And then I thought it was a replay, you know, they were kind of putting it back. But it was not. It was the second tower collapsing. And at that point I was, like, "We're under attack, and what's going to happen here?" So it was a moment of... I mean, I didn't know what to say or what to do. And just gathered my family and, you know, just hoped for the best.

00:17:17 Clifford Chanin: Obviously, going to play baseball was not the immediate priority. But what was the team doing to reach out to the players to communicate about what would happen next?

Bernie Williams: Well, I stayed in touch with Joe Torre, our manager at the time, and he was in the same boat. He was, like, you know, "We do not know what we're going to do. What are we going to do? But at some point, it will be clear, you know, our role "and I'm going to talk to the commissioner of baseball, and we'll keep you posted."

00:17:47 And I was... I don't know, it was like... I mean, I'm sorry about my notion of time, but it could have been, like, maybe two weeks or so, around that, when we started. But before that, I know that the Mets were at Shea Stadium playing their first game. And I think Mike Piazza hit a home run, and... I think all the teams had this, you know, sort of responsibility, I think, to go out and reach out to as many people as they could and try to lend support-- I know the Mets did that. And all the professional sports teams in New York did that. So we were part of that sort of the, you know, community, you know, reaching out and then seeing what we can do to help.

00:18:32 Clifford Chanin: We were downstairs before the program in the sports exhibition, "Comeback Season," and, you know, that moment of the Piazza home run is, of course, featured in the exhibition. But it's interesting—before the home run is this moment at Shea Stadium where the Mets and the Braves sort of break ranks and embrace and shake hands. And that was a very bitter rivalry, like the Yankees and the Red Sox...

Bernie Williams: Of course.

00:18:55 Clifford Chanin: In the National League. And I'm wondering what the back and forth was with the other teams, because, you know, you are the local team, but this is an attack on America, so all the players are wondering. But how does the competition change? And how do you connect with the other teams and other players, many of whom you know, of course, over the years?

00:19:16 Bernie Williams: Well, I think playing the game was probably the easiest part. Because playing the game was our distraction, as well. We didn't have to think about anything that was happening outside. Just play the game the way you knew how to play it, and the opposition knew that they were playing us. I don't know what their mindset was, but I'm pretty sure they wanted to beat us, too.

(laughter)

00:19:38 Bernie Williams: So we were... You know, we had this mission, I guess, you know, for lack of a better expression, to go out there and do it for New York, do it for the city. And do it for the country, I guess. So that was our mindset. And I don't... I don't remember ever preparing as hard and playing as hard as I, as I did those, those days. I mean, it may not show up in the numbers, but...

(laughter)

00:20:07 Bernie Williams: But I... I was... I mean... I was really, really focusing on doing... on having a good performance, you know, like... Did everything that I could in my power to make sure that I was at the best of my abilities in that game. And like I said before, playing the game was the easy part, because those three-and-a-half, four hours that we spent there playing the game, it was a huge distraction for after the game, you know, what was happening out there and the other stuff that was happening.

00:20:38 Clifford Chanin: I wanted to just take a moment, because, you know, we saw the Piazza home run downstairs. You know, the Jeter home run in the World Series-- and we'll get to the World Series-- and this book that goes back a couple of years, "Rhythms of the Game: The Link Between Musical and Athletic Performance" that you wrote with some musical colleagues.

But you talk about sort of being in the zone and the clutch moment. And I... you know, this was something that you accomplished on the ballfield a number of times. Then in those moments with the Piazza home run, the Jeter home run, talk to us about what it takes to rise to the occasion that way. Do you believe that some players have more of whatever that is in their game? Or is it random?

00:21:18 Bernie Williams: I really don't know how to answer that question. I think good luck happens when preparation meets opportunity, right? So if you're... if you're put in a position and you have an opportunity to do a great thing, you cannot go out there unprepared. So being prepared and meeting that opportunity would allow you to do the best that you can to make sure that the outcome that you're looking for is the one that happens.

00:21:49 But baseball is a crazy game. It is crazy! I mean, you can be, you know, feeling great, have my mind great, I have no pains, no aching injuries... I

mean, no nagging injuries, you know. I feel awesome. And I'll go 0-for-four with three strikeouts, okay?

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: And I was, like, "What happened? I thought I was... I was feeling great." And then I would go in, you know, with, like, a 102 fever and feeling, like, really, really not good, and not really feeling... you know. And then I'd go four-for-four with, like, a double and the game-winning catch, or something like that.

00:22:20

So I learned a long time ago that the only thing that you can control is your approach. Not the result, but your approach. And I found a lot of pride in saying, I mean, even if it didn't happen for me, I did everything that I could to make that happen. That where... that's where luck comes into play. Because some of these guys do have a flair for the dramatic, and to, you know, be able to perform in those type of circumstances, you know, like Derek Jeter and Hideki Matsui, you know, in 2009, and on and on and on. Those guys have this ability to block everything out and just focus on the task at hand. And they're able just to put themselves in a position where they could be successful, and then let the chips fall where they may.

00:23:13

Clifford Chanin: Is that recognized, that quality recognized, by other players, that there are some among you who somehow are able to have more focus or just deliver more of these kinds of outcomes?

Bernie Williams: Yeah, yeah. I think there's, you know, some talks about, you know, people here and there in different situations, but I think the beauty of baseball is the fact that with our lineup, anybody can do it in any situation. And you should expect, as a player, to be the person that is put in that situation, like, you want to have that. If you don't want it, then it will come to you. And then you'll be horrible at it. You know, you have to be the person in, like, every...

00:23:57

Especially in those years, our team had a group of players that they wanted to be... I mean, they knew how to lean on each other, but they also, at the same time, wanted to be that person to be thrown in that, you know, situation where the game is on the line and you've got to get the base hit, you know, to win the game, or you've got to get the strikeout to win the game, or you've got to get the winning, you know, catch on the field or make a spectacular catch. You know, you put yourself in that situation, more times than not, you're going to be successful.

00:24:28

I mean, obviously, God-given talent and your ability to play the game, the work that you put in, the opportunity comes... (snaps fingers): It's there-- you grab it, and you do everything you can to make it happen. If it doesn't happen, then you can't be mad. You can't be mad. You know, you can't say, "Why not me?" You say, then, "I'll get them next time."

Clifford Chanin: So you go back to work, if you will, September 18, in Chicago, and you beat the White Sox. And I'm not sure you were with the team at that point.

Bernie Williams: No, I was, I was injured.

00:24:58

Clifford Chanin: You were injured then. But, you know, you were around the team before this all happened. I mean, what was the mood? What is the buildup to going back to the games?

Bernie Williams: We're still hesitant. We're still kind of questioning why, you know? What is our role in this whole thing? I know I was, for a fact. You know, especially being hurt and not being able to play sort of added a little bit of fuel to the fire. But I think that we, we had a collective mentality that, you know, we are professionals, we are getting paid to do this, this is our job. And I think most of the people sort of approached it that way-- you know, "This is our job, we're..." You know, "We're baseball

players, "professional baseball players. We're going to go out there and do our job."

00:25:46

And... I think, you know, once in a while, we would get a comment, you know, you know, talking about the reality of the situation and, "How's your family doing?" You know, "Is there anything that we can do as a team?" But for the most part, it was, like, you know, this is our responsibility now. And, you know, and then, after the first game, was, like, "Well, we're going to do this for New York." "This is, you know, this is our moment to show the city how much we appreciate their support, so we're going... We're going to try to play our best for the city, try to get this thing done."

00:26:20

Clifford Chanin: Did you feel a difference in the mood in the locker room when you went back to baseball?

Bernie Williams: Yeah, yeah. It was a lot... a lot somber, a lot, you know, more pensive. We were focusing more on the things that... There was still joking around and things, you know, things of that nature. But they had this sort of backdrop of, "We got a job to do, guys. We cannot let this thing happen without us being, you know, an important part of this process. So we've got to get there and try to get it happen. Make it happen."

00:26:54

Clifford Chanin: And then you come back to Yankee Stadium for the first game back after 9/11, and you're playing the Tampa Bay Rays. You wind up losing that game. But what did that feel like to be back and to have your fans fill the stadium? What was the atmosphere as you remember it?

00:27:10

Bernie Williams: Oh, wow, it was just insane. It was incredible, it was incredible. I remember having lines and lines of police officers and... You know, firefighters, and, you know, medical, you know, nurses... And emergency rescue people lined up. And I was... You know, there is a line

from my, from the locker room all the way to the batting cage, which is in the next corner.

00:27:45 And there's this line of people. And I shook everybody's hand. And I don't know, I mean, there might be some footage of that. But I remember looking at everybody in the eyes and asking them, you know, "Are you okay? How are you doing?" And, you know, that energy sort of passed on to me. It was like this... like this kinetic energy that you couldn't really explain, but you felt it, you know? And I knew that they would probably, would give anything to be able to go out there and play the game themselves. But they said, "We got our hopes on you guys that you're going to do this for us." And I felt it, I really, really felt it.

00:28:26 Clifford Chanin: Incredible. And then, you know, one of the things we saw in so many sports arenas around the country as people came back, that, of course, you have all of this sadness and grief inside, but it needs to express itself in many ways. And so that release of being in the ballpark-- we saw that with the Piazza home run, in particular, but later, in the World Series-- that, that need to just get something out, and even if in that moment, it's a happy expression, I think it goes so back to the depth of the emotion that people were feeling at that time.

00:29:00 I mean, and you guys are in the spotlight here, and you are surrounded by all these expectations and all of this emotion. You know, you say it gave you a purpose. But I'm sure there were also moments where you realized how much was at stake.

Bernie Williams: Oh, yeah, yeah. We did, we did. We realized how much was at stake. We, you know, going into the season, we had the biggest expectations of all to go out there and go out there and try to win the World Series. And that was before any of this happened. That was kind of like the mandate from Mr. Steinbrenner every year.

(laughter)

00:29:44 Bernie Williams: You know? If you don't... I mean, it's not even finishing first in the regular season. It's not even going to the playoffs and kind of have a good... no. It's actually going to the World Series and winning it.

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: That's a, that's a good year-- that is a good year for us. So that was the mandate. So we had that thing in our, in our minds from day one. So I think it just sort of cemented our seal with an additional, you know, reason even more important than the one we had before.

00:30:12 Clifford Chanin: Yeah. So you finished the season with 95 wins. You beat the As in the A.L.D.S., three to two. You beat the Seattle team in the A.L.C.S., four to one. So now you're at the World Series against the Arizona Diamondbacks. You're in Arizona to start, but, you know, you are on the verge of this moment, and it is a national moment now. Everybody is watching the World Series-- in particular, I guess you're feeling, because one of the teams is from New York.

00:30:45 Bernie Williams: Oh, yeah, yeah, we felt it. We felt the pressure-- I felt it. But it was good. It was good pressure. It was... It was one thing to think that, you know, we want to win, but when you have, like, the majority of the country kind of rooting for us to win, it's even more pressure, because, I mean, you really have to do it for them.

00:31:13 So we really felt the pressure coming into the games and knowing that we had that task at hand. I mean, I don't know how we... how we actually did it, you know, to tell you the truth. But we sort of went back to basics, you know, said, "The game is played this way. We're going to go back and do our research and kind of, like, businesslike, develop a plan of action, doing a lot of research on their pitchers, you know, how are we going to play?" So we got into, like, the schematics of the game itself.

- 00:31:50 And that process sort of started distracting us from everything else that was happening. We knew in the back of our heads what and who were we playing for, but we still needed to go through the process of actually preparing ourselves to play these games. And that's what we tried to do, to the best of our ability.
- 00:32:08 Clifford Chanin: I'm curious how Joe Torre, the manager, spoke to you about that mix of concerns, whether the pressure of all these expectations, or, "You guys know how to do this. You're professional baseball players. You've earned this spot in the World Series." How did he manage that aspect with you?
- 00:32:25 Bernie Williams: I think it was a mix, because... To me, I think Joe was probably the best person to have in that situation. Even when we were playing before, he really knew how to get the best of every player that he managed. And there is a balance. You know, you need to have a balance. You need to know who to be on to try to get him to perform, and you need to know, who do you leave alone, and, "Just do your thing, I got you."
- 00:32:55 So I think he was really good at knowing that. And then when he made collective meetings and he spoke to the players, he was just basically being encouraging, saying, you know, "We got to this point." Like you said, "We got to this point, we earned it," and... Not let ourselves to be too engulfed into the situation, because you want to be under control. You want to be able to have a focused mind playing the game. So make sure that we stayed focused on what we needed to do. We had to prepare ourselves to the best of our ability, and... and play the games. And that's basically what he said. And, you know, that's all he needed to say.
- 00:33:37 Clifford Chanin: What did you need from him? How did he handle you?
- Bernie Williams: He left me alone.

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: He said, "Yeah, this is Bernie being Bernie, so I'll just leave him to do his thing." And I loved it, I loved it, I... I loved him as a manager, and still a really, really good friend of mine. But he was one of those guys, he said that I had, I had... Let me see, there was, like, one story. I had to have a root canal at some point, and I was in...

00:34:05

Clifford Chanin: A root canal?

Bernie Williams: A root canal. In spring training, I am just with this pain in my... you know, one side of my face. I am laying in his office, have this little office thing. Little sofa there. And then Joe goes into saying, "You know what? You know, I'm going to have to close the door, because if they see you here, they're going to think that you're my favorite."

(laughter)

00:34:36

Bernie Williams: And I told him, "They already know."

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: "You know, they know." But he was great, he was awesome.

Clifford Chanin: So the World Series starts, and I don't... I don't want to live too much of this moment for you, but you lose the first two games in Arizona. So you're down two games to none, and you come back to New York, and... That is the moment of the return. And the team is now playing in front of its fans and of these people with so much expectation.

And on top of which, the president of the United States is going to throw out the first pitch. So take us back to that. And I don't know how you interacted with the president, if you did, but what was that like? And how has that happened?

00:35:21

Bernie Williams: I kind of did. You know, obviously, you know, he had a million security service people around him, and... He was, you know, saying hi. Because we'd met several other times. I think, you know, we went to the White House one time when he was the president. One of the World Series celebrations. And I remember being on edge. There was this weird reason. I don't know, I don't understand why, but I was on edge because the president was there. And I don't know how safe we were.

(laughter)

00:35:56

Bernie Williams: So, in fact, I mean, I was completely ignorant, you know, of the situation. But they had snipers and all kinds of security... It was probably the safest place in the world at that point. And I remember him. He was, you know, he was a former team owner. He owned the Rangers for a long time. And so he knew, he knew baseball. So he was walking into the... into the batting cages, and he's, you know, practicing his first pitch, you know?

00:36:24

He's doing this, you know, making sure that he kind of, you know, gets it all in one... You know, one time, and doesn't bounce it. So... (laughs) I remember... he's ready, I said... He's saying, "I'm ready." Derek comes in, and they say hi, and he says... No, they kind of... He leaves and Derek says, "Hey, you know, don't bounce it, because they'll boo you."

(laughter)

00:36:49

Bernie Williams: To the president of the United States! I was, like, "Dude, you're crazy!" So, yeah, so... Yeah, I saw some of the footage there at the exhibition. And he goes and does this, you know, his thumbs-up. He stays there for, I don't know, I think it was, like, half a minute or something like that.

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: And I'm in right field saying, "Throw the damn ball! Throw the ball!"

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: "Go, go!" And then he just calmly... (makes whooshing sound): Strike. And the crowd erupts, and it was just a great beginning to that, to that game. I was, like, "This is just, you can't make this up. (laughs): "You can't write about this. This is just insane."

00:37:31

Clifford Chanin: Incredible. And, of course, you win the three games in New York, with two of them in extra innings, and very, very close. Again, that clinch, that clutch moment. And the interaction with the crowd. I've watched a lot of video of those games. And it struck me with the Piazza game at Shea, also. But there's something about the interaction with the crowd, the New York team with the New York fans at that moment, that seemed very, very different to me.

00:38:02

Bernie Williams: It was special. And I'm one to not interact with the crowd. My mantra was, like, "Shut up and play." You know, that was what I did. But at that moment, I didn't see the crowd as my... You know, as a distraction. I saw them as, you know, they were... They were just pushing me out to do the best that I could do. You know, they were rooting for me. And I remember making a lot more eye contact with the fans at that time, looking people in the eye, saying... (speaking softly) And yeah, I mean, I never do that. Never do that.

00:38:39

You know, as a matter of fact I try to block everything out. That's the only way that I know how to play and stay focused. But I allowed myself to, to interact with the crowd more because I knew that, you know, I... You know, I knew for a fact, you know, internally, that I was playing for them. I wasn't playing for the team, I wasn't playing for a win. I wasn't, you know, I wasn't distracted by anything else, but, but just do the things that I needed to do for them, for the fans. A really special moment in my career, because I don't think, I mean, anything like that happened before or after that. So to me, it was really special.

00:39:18

Clifford Chanin: I guess that's why you remember it as fondly as you do, if "fondly" is the right word, even though we know, seven games, but it didn't turn the Yankees' way.

(Williams sighs, laughter)

Clifford Chanin: I'm not saying this because I'm a Met fan and trying to rub it in.

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: Oh, my God.

Clifford Chanin: But let me say that again.

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: It's all right, nobody's perfect.

(laughter)

00:39:40 Clifford Chanin: No, but I'm sure it... And I speak to people who remember that so well, and they really... They don't focus on the outcome of the series. They really focus on the bond and the things they got from watching the team play, and play as well and hard as it did.

00:39:57 Bernie Williams: I totally agree with that. And I... I've talked to people after... You know, years after, and... One thing that I said was, "2001, man, you guys didn't win, but thank you, because those games lifted us all up." It was so important, and... You know, they... It's more of an, you know, appreciation that I hear, as far as that series is concerned.

00:40:31 The other ones, you know, 2003, maybe not. But 2001, and most of the people that I talk to about it, you know, "You guys didn't win, but you, you did your best, man. I really, we really appreciate what you did for the city." And I feel really proud. You know, even though we didn't win the series, I was, like, "Wow, man, I was part of that craziness that was happening." And it was really special, really special to me.

00:40:58 Clifford Chanin: I mean, of course, you're a Yankee legend, so people are going to come up to you.

Bernie Williams: Oh, not like that, I mean...

Clifford Chanin: People are going to come up to you anyway. But even now, years later, does it still come up in terms of 2001 and 9/11, and all of what that meant to people?

Bernie Williams: It does come up, especially when they try to ask me, you know, about my highlights and, you know, my career, what are the highlights? And I always mention, you know, that... You know, those

moments. It is a long career, I think. You know, I should probably measure it in dog years, I think.

(laughter)

00:41:34 But, I mean, you get... To me, all of the experiences kind of sum in one full year. It is just so fast. And it goes, comes, 22, and, like, "Oh, man, I'm invincible. I'm going to play for the next 100 years," you know. And then at 37, I'm, like, "Oh, man. "Everything hurts! This is just insane, I got to go!" But between those years, there's all this stuff that happened that was really, really special. And out of those moments, I always remember 9/11 and the role that we had in that, in that... in that process.

00:42:15 Clifford Chanin: You know, we'll take a couple of questions in a minute, but I've got to talk a little about the music, because you're going to give us a treat at the end. But did you start the guitar or did you start baseball first?

Bernie Williams: I started both at the same time. I was eight years old. My mom was an educator in the public education system in Puerto Rico, where I grew up. So I'm eight years old. My brother's seven. And she tells my dad, "These kids are watching way too much television."

(laughter)

00:42:44 Bernie Williams: "They got to go out there and do exercises and, you know, start playing music." And my dad said, "Well, maybe they're too young." And she said, "No, they're not too young. They're just going to do it." So I started playing baseball and guitar because my mom wanted us to be well-rounded, as part of her vision of a well-rounded education for us. We were in a prep school. Even though we weren't rich, we went to prep school. The nuns were on me for about eight years, you know, trying to get me to write cursive, and I don't even use it anymore!

(laughter)

00:43:17 Bernie Williams: But it was... I mean, it was a great, great time. And I am so appreciative of what they did. So they started us on baseball and music. When I was in ninth grade, I had this great opportunity to go to this performing arts high school in Puerto Rico called la Escuela Libre de Música, the Free School of Music. And it was actually a public school, spent four years there. But on the side, I was playing Little League. So I was playing in this youth league. Actually, Mickey Mantle was the last league that I played at 16, before I signed to play with the Yankees.

00:43:52 But through all that time, my guitar was always with me. I always kept it, even in my first years in the minor leagues, because I couldn't go out to bars and drink and doing anything. I mean, I was, like, what, 18? Right after my... Yeah, right after my senior year in high school. Shipped me out to Sarasota and I started playing in the minor leagues there. So I've always kept my guitar with me, all through my minor leagues, all through the Major Leagues. I actually had a guitar in my locker room.

00:44:20 And Paul O'Neill-- I think it was Paul O'Neill-- he brought Bruce Springsteen into the clubhouse, right? And I was, like, "I'm not going to make him sign a ball," you know. So I had my guitar. It was, like, a black Telecaster. The one that he uses. And I was, like, "Mr. Springsteen, would you please sign this for me?" So check this out. He writes, "To Bernie, if you ever get tired of baseball..." Dot, dot, dot, "Bruce Springsteen."

(laughter)

00:44:49 Bernie Williams: So I was, like, "Oh, man, this is so great. Thank you so much." Fast-forward, 20 years later. I am playing at Joe Torre's Safe at Home Foundation dinner, and he is the guest performer, and he brings me up, and we're playing "Glory Days" on acoustic guitar. I was, like...

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: It was just awesome!

(applause)

00:45:15 Clifford Chanin: How did your musical tastes change over the course of the years? You write that, you know, you, you had come from a home where your parents played a lot of music. And so it was in the air for you. But, you know, you focused on more Latin or Puerto Rican music, local music, and then your tastes began to expand as you came up here. So how did, how did you develop as a musician all at the same time as you're developing as a baseball player?

00:45:40 Bernie Williams: Wow, that's a really interesting question. I never really thought too much about it. But what I can say is this. Like, I started making connections with life as a young kid, not necessarily... Well, a lot through sports, but mostly through music. You know, I started making this connection of, if I work hard at something and I get it done, it feels great. It's better to play one good note at the right time-- that timing thing-- as opposed to playing 1,000 notes, you know, rambling around.

00:46:12 So timing is really important in life. The discipline, the commitment, like putting my work in, and whatever I get out of it is because I earned it, you know. Nobody's given it to me. So, so, hard work. Oh, wow, so that's part of life, too.

So I started making all these connections through learning music, and, obviously, you know, the whole socializing thing, with sports and things like that. But I started growing up, you know, really, really making these life connections through my, my instrument. And then when I started listening, really listening, to music, it was the traditional music of Puerto Rico, the boleros, in Christmastime, the aguinaldos, you know, the parrandas and all that stuff, it's, like, really, really festive music.

00:47:01

My parents, when they were, like, you know, feeling romantic, you know, they would put, like, a little station that would, used to play instrumental music, and have these, you know, Trio Los Panchos, and all these, like, really old, like, trio music with guitars. So I started listening to that.

When I went to the performing arts high school, then it was all classical, because they thought that classical was... That was it, you know? That was the basis of everything. So I started listening to Beethoven, Mozart, Tchaikovsky, and taking harmony classes, and really understanding the structure of music, and why is it that something sounds better than others? And why is it that maybe I don't like something? You know, why is it that... What's doing in my brain, in my mind, that's I just, like, "Oh, no"? Or what is it that, "Oh, man, I want to listen to that again and again and again"?

00:47:53

So you start developing this sort of ear for music. And my thing was, I didn't want it to, like, kind of say, "I like this type of music." My thing was, like, "If it's well made, I'll listen to it." So you started listening... I started listening to jazz and rock and salsa and merengue, and music, you know, from all over the world. And I started developing my ear for music that was just well made. If it was well produced and it had a message, it had a voice, it was original, and there was, like, this, you know, sort of great facility with the musicians, I was into it. So that sort of became my sort of way of listening to music.

00:48:42

It wasn't until I went to the Manhattan School of Music about seven years after I retired from baseball that I actually really understood why... Why. And, why do I want to do this? You know, why do I, why do I want to be a musician? So going into Manhattan School of Music, I had to write every week about something. You know, I had these writing classes, these humanities, that would take us to modernity and the Beats, and... You know, Thoreau and all the poetry and all this, like, things that were new to me, but they were art, not necessarily music-music, but they were art that sort of was into music, into writing, literature. And I was, like, "Oh, okay, now I understand."

00:49:27 So... It was an interesting process and still ongoing, because there's so much music out there that, you know, you would be... You would be doing a disservice to yourself, you know, to not be able to keep your ears open to listen to all the wonderful music that is out there. So I'm still a work in progress. And hopefully I will be until the day I leave this Earth. So, yeah, music is just... just amazing.

00:49:54 Clifford Chanin: How did your team... And what was it like in the clubhouse to be... I mean, I'm not sure how many players were talking about Thoreau in the clubhouse, but, you know...

Bernie Williams: I didn't, either.

(laughter)

Clifford Chanin: But I think you know what I'm getting at.

Bernie Williams: Yeah, yeah, I know. They... I mean, everybody likes... I don't know if... I have not met somebody that doesn't like music yet in my life. So music is really important for everybody. The level in which they understand music is different for everybody, right?

00:50:23 So you like different... You like different music for different reasons. You like music in general, you know, to whatever, for whatever it is that you need it for. So I used to go with my guitar to the lounge, and Derek had this MTV Hits... I don't know if any of you remember that channel. So there were all the hits, all the videos of all the hits, and I would sit with my guitar, and play my acoustic guitar through all the songs. And I would, like, find the chords and find the key, and I would, like, solo, and, you know, start playing... playing new parts in the songs. Like, "I never heard this song like that. How are you playing this stuff?" So they would try to pick my guitar from me and start playing, and they just...

(laughter)

00:51:01 Bernie Williams: It was, like... "Uh, wow, this is a lot harder than I thought." So they started developing an appreciation for me doing something that they had no chance of doing. So they left me alone, you know.

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: They left me alone for the most part, you know, until it was, like, maybe 15, 20 minutes before the game started. It was, like, "Bernie, all right, time to go. Let's go." (laughter)

00:51:23 "Leave that guitar and then start getting ready for the game." But yeah, but my teammates... And, also, there were a couple of teammates that had some musical knowledge. I mean, they had... Paul O'Neill was a good drummer. So when he was traded in '93, he... He used to go to this, we called it the paint room, where there was all this leftover paint, you know? You can imagine the fumes there. And he was... he was playing this drum set that Ron Guidry had left, yeah.

00:51:58 So, the only person that was playing that drum set before him was... Was it Cunningham? Bobby Cunningham, the... The grounds crew guy. And he would, like, put headphones in, and he would play through the radio, you know. And then Paul started playing, and there was one day that I'm walking from the locker room to the batting cages, you know, to get my swing, and I hear... (imitates drums) And I look, and I open the door, and it's, like, Paul doing this. You know, it was, like...

(laughter)

00:52:28 Bernie Williams: "Dude, what are you doing?" It was, like, "Oh, I play a little bit." So it's, like, "Oh, would you mind if I bring my guitar?" So from that moment on, I brought my guitar, and then we were jamming after batting practice, rain delays. We would, like, bring people... We would bring people over, you know. I think it was, like... Who was that guy, Jack Scarangella? It was, like, old session musicians in New York. We were having these jam sessions in the paint room in Yankee Stadium. Nobody ever knew about them. But that was, that was really cool, though.

00:52:58 Clifford Chanin: That sounds great. Let's take, we have a question or two from the group. Just raise your hand, but wait for our microphone. We're going to go right here, if you would. Just hang on a sec.

Audience Member: Hi.

Bernie Williams: Hello.

Audience Member: Born and raised a Yankees fan. I grew up watching the Yankees through the '90s. I watched you, Jeter, of course, the core four, early 2000s, and now. I'd like to hear your opinion on the current roster...

(laughter)

00:53:37 Audience Member: And if you had to pick one player that you, you deem as your favorite and you see a longevity with the Yankees franchise for them.

Bernie Williams: Oh, wow.

(laughter)

- 00:53:51 That is such a hard question to answer. For many reasons. As you know, the game has changed so much. It's not the same as we played, you know, when Joe was there. We had a lot more small ball. We had a lot more bunting and moving runners over, concentrating on defense, really taking a lot of pride on not striking out as much, taking, you know, working the counts and things like that. That's not really happening as much right now, which, I think, it's, it's not good, because the game, it's, you know... There are so many aspects of the game that are part of the game that should be a part of the game, and I think we're letting a lot of these numbers sort of take over.
- 00:54:42 Who is my favorite player right now and the one that has the possibility to remain with the team the most? I think, for me, it's Judge. If he stays, if he stays healthy, he has the allure, he has the body type. You know, he's a slugger. He carries himself with a lot of class and dignity. He's always, you know, deferring to his teammates when something is happening, when he does well. And he, yeah, he's a good, really good player. Good outfielder for his body, has a great arm.
- 00:55:14 It's just a matter of him staying healthy. If he stays healthy, I think he's going to have a great, great career. May have an opportunity to be one of the best players that ever played the game, because he just has that, that body type, you know? Kind of, like, I don't know, comparing him to Strawberry or Cecil Fielder. He's even a better athlete I think, you know, mobility and all of that. I think he was, like, used to be a football player or something. I think-- yeah. So, yeah, I think he has probably the possibility of, of remaining with the team for the longest.
- 00:55:47 But the game has changed. It's, it's different now. I think the way that our lineup is designed, we need a couple of more table setters-- you know, guys like Gardner, and somebody that can just get on base so these guys can drive them in. But, you know, nevertheless, I think we have a really, really good team that can give anybody in the league-- you know, the Astros, the Red Sox, the Cleveland Indians-- a run for their money. We have the best bullpen in the league. You know, now that Betances is kind

of sidelined a little bit, but when all these people come back, and it's good that it's happening right now, four, five games into the season.

00:56:24

I mean, I would say, if it's, like, in August or September, that would be a different story. But now they still have an opportunity to, you know, put it behind them and win some games.

Clifford Chanin: In fact, did you have any interest in doing media or baseball, or...?

Bernie Williams: Absolutely not, no!

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: No! Not at all!

Clifford Chanin: You sound very convincing when you do it.

Bernie Williams: I know, but music has me.

00:56:46

Clifford Chanin: Gentleman back there. Hang on one second.

Audience Member: Thank you so much. My name is Mike Kenny, and I spent several months at Ground Zero. I just want to tell you a little story about... During October, when you guys were in the Super Bowl... In the World Series. >>

Bernie Williams: World Series, yeah.

00:57:03

Audience Member: I'm nervous. We have bosses, we all answer to our bosses. But we had radios that were monitored by O.E.M., and citywide, and we used to have the Y-D coordinates. And we were keeping score, and we were broadcasting it over the radio every time the Ys were up—it was 3-2, we were happy. So, thanks so much. I'm a Bronx boy, I grew up right up the hill from Yankee Stadium, Sacred Heart, and lifetime fan, thank you so much.

Bernie Williams: Oh, man.

Clifford Chanin: That's lovely.

Bernie Williams: Thank you, thank you so much.

(applause)

00:57:41

Clifford Chanin: One more, right here. You're wearing a Yankees sweater, so you get... hang on one second. Hang on one second.

Audience Member: So, a lifelong family feud. I was at your last game as a Yankee where you were guest managing.

Bernie Williams: Oh, yeah.

Audience Member: Our father forced us to leave the game before you got that last at-bat. We were exiting the stadium as you got that hit. And we, now every time we're at a game and he wants to leave, we just say, "Bernie," and we stay, but...

(laughter)

00:58:11

Audience Member You say that you don't interact with them, you tried not to interact with the fans. But, I mean, if you guys are behind and people are starting to sneak their way out, like, how does that affect you during the game?

Bernie Williams: It doesn't, really. I mean, for me, I'm just so focused on what I need to do on the field that I rarely pay attention to what's happening out there, except for, you know, if there's a fight or something like that in the stands.

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: It was, like, oh. Well, actually, there's...(laughs)

Clifford Chanin: Go ahead, say it, say it, say it.

00:58:44

Bernie Williams: We were playing... I think we were playing the Red Sox at one point, one of those years. And it was, like, a night... It was a night game in the old stadium. And the bleachers in the old stadium, like, the third tier, it's like, like this. It's, like, really, you know... so there was this fight. I'm in center field and watching this. And then all of a sudden, you see all kinds of security people going in single line... (imitates) Going into, going into the stairs. And I see this person going... (imitates thudding)

(laughter)

00:59:13

Bernie Williams: I was just, like, "Oh, my God! Look at..." It was just insane.

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: So, yeah, I mean, I get an opportunity to see some of the things that are happening in the stands. But the worst thing that you can have is to be looking in the stands at some point and hear... (imitating bat hitting ball) And it's, like...

(laughter)

Bernie Williams: So you did not... You don't want that to happen. So I try to stay my... keep my eyes on the game.

00:59:37

Clifford Chanin: Pay attention at home, kids. So now we come to the high point of the evening, and we're just going to break up this stage set a little bit, because Bernie has very, very generously consented to serenade us all to close the program. So give us a minute.

Bernie Williams: Thank you, thank you.

(applause)

Bernie Williams: All right. Oh, wow.

(laughter)

01:00:17

Bernie Williams: All right, so this is one tune, this is one song. And if you recognize it-- I'll play it twice. If you recognize it, feel free to sing it.

(picks at guitar)

(playing gentle tune)

(continues playing)

01:00:48 (starts playing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game")

(continues playing song)

01:02:49 (resumes song from beginning)

(continues playing song)

01:04:21 (plays final chord)

(cheers and applause)

Bernie Williams: Thank you.

(cheers and applause)

Bernie Williams: Thank you, thank you. Thank you so much.

Clifford Chanin: That was just wonderful.

Bernie Williams: Thank you so much!