



### **All the Best Podcast**

### ***Episode 89. Two Honorary Astros***

#### ***89. Featuring Drayton McLane, Chairman of the McLane Group and former CEO of the Houston Astros Baseball Club***

Sam: Baseball was a favorite pastime of George H.W. Bush, the former president first played baseball at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. He even served as team captain during his senior year. Bush played on the Yale University baseball team from 1946 to 1948, where he wore the number 2. A first baseman, he helped lead the Yale team to two consecutive NCAA Eastern Intercollegiate Division Championships and then on to the first two NCAA College World Series in 1947 and 1948. Both World Series were played in Kalamazoo, Michigan. A few months before Babe Ruth's death, he presented the manuscript copy of his autobiography to then-team representative George Bush at Yale Field before the Yale-Princeton game, which Yale went on to win 14-2. While a member of the United States House of Representatives, Bush played in the annual congressional charity baseball game, recently being inducted into the Hall of Fame. As President, Bush attended 15 major and minor league baseball games. The first was a matchup between the Baltimore Orioles and the Boston Red Sox on April 3rd, 1989. The final game he attended as president was between the Frederick Keys and the Durham Bulls on August 14th, 1992. President Bush never threw out the opening pitch for a World Series game. However, Mrs. Bush threw out the ceremonial first pitch for Game Two of the 1990 World Series between the Cincinnati Reds and the Oakland Athletics in Cincinnati. During their post-presidency, George and Barbara

Bush became diehard Houston Astros fans, attending 30, 40, and sometimes 50 games a year.

This is “All the Best”. The official podcast of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. I'm your host, Sam LeBlond, one of their many grandchildren. Here, we celebrate the legacy of these two incredible Americans through friends, family, and the foundation. This is “All the Best”. On behalf of our family and the George and Barbara Bush Foundation, this is “All the Best”.

Drayton McLean Jr serves as chairman of the McLane Group and is the former CEO of the Houston Astros Baseball Club. A native Texan and the grandson of a successful entrepreneur, Mr. McLane experienced firsthand the hard work and dedication it takes to successfully thrive in industry, working for his father at the family's wholesale grocery business, the McLane company, starting at age nine. Mr. McLane received his Bachelor of Business Administration degree from Baylor University in 1958 and his Master of Business Administration degree from Michigan State University in 1959. Upon the completion of his formal education, Mr. McLane came back to begin working at the family business, loading trucks on the second and third shifts. He worked his way up to become president and CEO of the company in 1964 and held these positions for 30 years. Currently, Mr. McLane is a George and Barbara Bush Foundation trustee and serves on the advisory board of the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. Mr. McLane, welcome to All the Best.

Drayton: Well, thank you, and it's a great title you have there.

Sam: Well, Mr. McLane, it's such an honor to have you on All the Best. It is not every day we are able to speak to a Texas business icon who has impacted their community quite as much as you have. Before we talk about that impact, can you talk about the start of your journey from Cameron, Texas, with your family and Christian upbringing? How did that set the stage for your successful business career?

Drayton: My grandfather started a wholesale grocery company in Cameron, Texas, in 1894, and then in 1921, when my father got out of college, he went to work for his dad. And in 1959, when I got out of college, I went to work for my dad. I saw it all the way through. I worked for my dad in the summertime, and it was hard work, and I said, "I'll never be in this business. I'll do something else." And then I got interested in my father's business, my junior year at Baylor, then so when I finished

at Baylor, I went to Michigan State to get an MBA, and this was in 1958, and not too many people ventured very far away from home to get a degree. And that's why I went to Michigan State, and it had one of the early, really successful MBA programs. It was the number one logistics school in America at the time, and that was kind of the business my father was in, so I went there for two years, and then when I finished in the summer of 1959, I had to ask my dad that I'd like to go to work with him. Both of my parents, both my father and mother, are just outstanding Christians and just outstanding human beings. I had two older sisters and they really brought us up in a very strong, powerful Christian environment. So when I told my dad that I'd like to come to work for him, he had 67 employees at that time, and I'd be the 68th, and I said I'd be his number one assistant. So I asked him what my job would be, and he said my first job would be working on the third shift at night loading trucks. And I said, "Well, dad, I've been to college for six years," and he said, "Well, that doesn't qualify you for anything we do here. You need to learn it from the ground up." So I appealed to my mother, and she said, "Hey, that's between your dad and yourself." But that turned out to be the best thing my dad could teach me. I had the academic knowledge, but I didn't have the experience working with blue-collar people. There were nine on that third shift at night, and I got to know them, and I got to know the whole operation. So that was the best thing my dad could have done for me at that time. It taught me a whole appreciation of how to work with and inspire and really respect all types of people working in the business. So that was my business experience, and that lasted about 18 months of working not only the third shift but the second shift and the first shift in the business before I got to get more responsible positions in the business.

Sam: Well, Mr. McLane, I'm sure you've heard this before, but what would you say to people who claim it isn't smart to go into business with your family?

Drayton: Well, it is a challenge, and a lot of people, particularly employees, think, "Well, he's being treated favorably," but I think when they saw I'd been to college for six years and my dad put me on the third shift at night loading trucks, that I didn't get any favorable position. I found it all the way through, and 27 years I got an opportunity to work with my father and learn from him, and that was a great experience that I cherish today. And I have two sons in their early 40s, and they have been working with me. When both of them went to school, I told both of them, they would have to get the first job out of college on their own, that I wasn't going to help them, and they had to work somewhere for five years. And then if they wanted to come work with us, they had to call me, and both did it that way, one worked for about seven years and the other one for about six years, and they

both work with us today. So family businesses can be challenging but extremely rewarding.

Sam: Mr. McLane, in 1993, you invited your friends and newly retired couple George and Barbara Bush to the Astrodome to watch your team, the Houston Astros, play. I think that started a tradition for them, where they attended 30, 40, even 50 home games a year. Can you talk about what that relationship meant to your team and why were George and Barbara Bush so obsessed with the 'Stros?

Drayton: There are several questions you have there.

Sam: Yes, sir.

Drayton: I had known George Bush when he was the congressman from Houston, and he decided to run for senator. That was back in the late 60s or early 70s, and there weren't many Republicans elected to office in Texas. And I remember he came to Temple, where I lived, and I went to a Republican rally he had when he was running for senator. I bet there weren't 20 people at that rally. There weren't a lot of Republicans in Texas at that time. Later, I knew of him. Got to meet him. His son, George W., I got to know when George W. was a managing partner of the Texas Rangers, and he was a good friend, and he was one of those main persons that encouraged me to buy the Houston Astros, George W. was. He came and visited with us several times in Temple, and I visited with him in Dallas, and he encouraged us to buy. So our family bought the Astros in 1992, but our first full year was 1993, and that was when Barbara and George moved back to Houston. So I had known them briefly, but not extremely well. So when they got to Houston, I gave them a call and asked them if I could come see them, and I told him that we had these diamond-level seats right behind home plate and that we had eight of them and those were their seats. They said that they would be at the Games in April and May and the first part of June. But they said the first part of June, they would go up to Kennebunkport and would be gone and then would not be back until late August. So they certainly came to almost every game during that period of a little over two months before they went to Kennebunkport, and they just were huge Houston Astros fans. And then, when they would come back in late August, they would come to the games in the latter part of August and September. So the public loved the Bushes. People in Texas loved it. They were sitting right on the front row, and this was every game; when they walked in without anybody saying anything, everybody stood and applauded. You know, here was thirty or forty thousand people. And as the Bushes walked in, everybody just stood and

applauded them, and they felt so welcome. They attended the game, and President Bush was a huge student of the game, and Barbara kept score in great detail, and she would ask me from time to time when there was an unusual play and said "How do you score that?" And I wasn't an expert on scoring, so I would have to get one of our official scorers to come down there. Actually, I said with Barbara, "You really worked tenaciously to get it right." She said, "Great. If you do anything in life, you ought to do it right." You remember that from her?

Sam: Oh yeah, I have a lot of unsolicited advice from my grandmother over the years.

Drayton: She said, "If you got to do something, do it right." I asked her several years later, she scored every pitch, every play, I asked her a year later, I said, "Barbara, I'm just curious, what do you do with all those scorecards?" And she said, "You won't tell anybody, will you?" I said, "Oh no." She said, "When I go home, I throw them in the garbage." She said, "The game is over." I said again, "But you worked so hard." She said, "That's how I've lived my life. If I'm involved in something, I want to do it right." And I was so impressed. But she kept score in every game she attended. People loved seeing the Bushes there, and I've had many other people say they weren't particularly a Houston Astros fan, but they would tune in to see the Bushes because they could see them on TV. And so they were an integral part of the Houston Astros, and they truly loved the Astros. I could tell you an interesting story. This wasn't the first year, a couple of years later, the President asked me before they went to Kennebunkport. He said, "I'd like to start a tradition with you and the Astros." I said, "Great, what is that?" And he said, "I'd like for you to select five players and bring them out to my office and we will have lunch out at the office with the players." And so when I would ask several players, they were scared to death. They had never been around a former president. I told them to just trust me. And so we would take five out and the President would have lunch there. He would talk to them, but he would bring out his gun collection, and that broke all of the ice and he would show them the different rifles and pistols that he had been given. I'm sure you've seen many of them that he'd been given all over the world. They were just enamored with that and then just enamored to have lunch with the President. So we did that every year for about 15 years, and the players would start campaigning the first of the season. Can I be one of the guys to go this year? And Barbara would come to most of those that she would sit and talk to them also. Here were just players that were twenty-one or twenty-four years old, had not had a lot of experience like that, and they were just in awe to spend an hour and a

half or two hours with the former President and Barbara. It just showed how close they were to the people and the players loved them.

Sam: Spending time with George and Barbara Bush was a lot of fun, and I know you spent your fair share of time with them over the years, Mr. McLane, including, as you mentioned, a trip to our family home in Kennebunkport. If my grandparents couldn't be sitting behind home plate watching your Astros, I think their second choice would certainly be enjoying the rocky coastline of southern Maine at our place, Walker's Point. For my grandfather, racing across the Atlantic Ocean in his powerboat at breakneck speeds was always so much fun and terrifying at the same time.

Drayton: Did you ride in his boat?

Sam: I did. I did. I think you did, too.

Drayton: Yeah, I did a couple of times. The first time he invited my wife, Elizabeth, and I to go with him, and Barbara said, "Don't do it, you won't enjoy it." So we said, "Oh, we'll do it." So we got on the boat with him. And there were several Secret Service, they were in some chase boats and a couple were on the boat and the head of them came up to us and without cracking a smile. He said, "I just need to say to both of you, if this boat capsized, our mission is to rescue the President, not either one of you. You're on your own."

Sam: Uh oh.

Drayton: And he just went against the waves as he went out over there, and he could be really, really excited. And he'd make that big, sweeping turn, you know, when he would come into the shore there. It was fun. I never could get my wife to go, but I went a couple more times with him, but he made every minute on that boat exciting. He was a brave soul. Didn't bother him at all.

Sam: Yeah, he loved it, and he enjoyed scaring people, too, which I think was a part of what he loved. Mr. McLane, the legacy of George and Barbara Bush is a topic we always like to bring up here on All the Best. When we have a close friend of theirs like yourself, we're even more eager to bring it up. Mr. McLane, when you reflect on their lives and accomplishments, what stands out to you?

Drayton: How humble they were. They were very humble and they didn't pretend to be something they were not. And they were just genuine and they would get to know people personally. I remember they would, between innings they had Secret Service and the Astros had security there. They both would say, "Well, why don't you let a few in, and we'll sign some autographs?" So they would be at the game and they were willing to sign autographs. So they were very genuine, they were very open. They weren't out to just impress highly accomplished people. Everyday kind of people they would invite to come with them to games. We gave them eight seats, so they would bring, a lot of times, friends of theirs. They would bring their cooks sometimes, their housekeepers sometimes, and people would say, "Oh, are those some dignitaries?" And I said, "Oh, you bet, they're close friends of the Bushes," and they would have been a housekeeper or a cook or someone else that worked with them. They genuinely had a cross-section of people, not just highly accomplished people. I enjoyed that. They really got excited about the Houston Astros, and we had some great players during that period of time and they got to know the players and they were so genuine. And then, as you said, every year, Barbara and George would invite my wife, Elizabeth, and I to come up and spend a week with them at Kennebunkport. And that was always interesting. And they were so relaxed there. But they would watch the Houston Astros games at night on their TV at Kennebunkport. And you would think, Boy, here they are. The Yankees and the Mets and the Boston Red Sox are all around there, and they were still interested in the Houston Astros. They were two of the most loyal people. If you are a friend of theirs, they were going to stick with you through thick and thin. They were constantly loyal to people. I remember when the president first moved back that he commented one time to me, he said, "I'm not going to serve on any corporate boards or I'm not going to speak out against any person as President of the United States." He said, "I'll have my personal thoughts, but I'm not going to be a critic of the President of the United States. I know how difficult the job is and how you have to make hard decisions," and I always admired him that he would do that. The other thing he was just a fun-loving person who didn't take himself seriously. He did invite me to come out to his office from time to time and have lunch with him. We would walk in the neighborhood out there by his office and the club that was nearby. He'd say, "Oh, we don't need to get in the car and get a caravan. We'll just walk over there." That was just his informal nature. I think the president had a good day every day. He enjoyed his life. He enjoyed politics. He enjoyed the issues facing America. But he kept his thoughts to himself. He really stayed on top of everything that was happening in the world. And the other interesting thing is coming to the game he would have people, political leaders from all over the world, from Europe, from Australia, he would bring all kinds of

people from all over the world with him to the games. I remember he brought the president-elect the one time. He had us have the public address, introduce her as the president of Latvia. And she stood up and she got a standing ovation and the president leaned over and he said ninety-nine percent of the people don't have any idea where that is.

Sam: That is funny.

Drayton: People from all over the world came as his friends and they came to the games and he wouldn't leave until it was almost over. He stayed to the end.

Sam: They're loyal, they're loyal friends, they're loyal fans, and when you have George and Barbara Bush in your corner, you're in a pretty good spot. I've learned that over my lifetime, and I'm sure you said the same yourself.

Drayton: And they cared about you for who you were.

Sam: Serving others is something that my grandparents mastered over their long lives. If you came in contact with George and Barbara Bush, chances are you're going to catch the bug too, and you're going to be inspired to serve in some way. Mr. McLane, your service to your community, serving on numerous civic and charitable committees and your fervent support of educational institutions like Baylor and Michigan State has set you apart as a top-tier philanthropist. I have to ask what inspired you to give back and why do you continue to be inspired to serve others?

Drayton: I learned a lot from my dad, and my dad said the Good Lord has allowed us to be successful in our business and that we should have very competitive wages and fringe benefits and retirement programs for our employees. But then we should have programs that benefit the community as well as ourselves. So that was why we've given to hospital systems been involved with Baylor Scott & White, which is a big hospital system in Texas and been on their board for many years, and we've given charitable works for Baylor Scott & White in a number of different areas. Baylor University, where I went to school, my sister went to school, our sons went to school, we made that a very charitable contribution and into our faith where members of the Baptist Faith and the First Baptist Church and we tried to give back to our faith and what our faith tries to do in preaching Christ and extending the ministry not only in Texas where we live, but literally all over the world. That was something I learned a great deal from my father and my mother and my wife.



She'd been very, very supportive in the works that we've done in that area. But it was fun to watch the Bushes, and I remember they talked so very, very much about public service. You don't have to be a politician. You can do public service work in other areas. So that has certainly been good. He asked me to be on the Bush School of Public Service at Texas A&M when that was first created, and that was a new venture, and he asked if I would serve on the board and still serve on the board, and that has really been inspiring to see that school develop as one of the top public service schools in America with graduate programs in all areas of public service. When I got inspired, I said, you know, it's really great where you try to get people to work in the federal government and the state government. But I've just seen that city managers in small communities or county managers in small counties many times are not prepared and don't have training. So the Bush School has now got a program training people to be city managers in cities and to be a county manager. So I've seen the Bush School grow just so wide and is now accepted as one of the premier ones in the United States and they just this last year opened an office in Washington, D.C. It has really been met with success because people that are working for the federal government can work full time and go to the Bush School at night and get an advanced degree in public service.

Sam: Yeah. You know, my grandfather really saw the Bush School and the Bush School students as his legacy, his living legacy. And whenever he talked about legacy, we couldn't get anything out of him except for the Bush School. And he really feels that those students who go on to serve their communities and work in the government are really holding a lot of the things that he held so dearly and continuing on his legacy out in the world. So I'm so glad that you're involved with the Bush School and as you said, it's growing.

Drayton: You know one of the things your grandfather really got excited about the Bush School in Texas? There's huge competitiveness between Texas A&M and University of Texas. So he got them to develop a Bush School softball team, the University of Texas, at the school of public service also. And so they would have softball games, and he would go to a bunch of those softball games. He took that as seriously as an Astros game. So he really loved the competitiveness against the Bush school, against the Johnson School of Public Service at Texas University. So he loved the competitiveness between the two universities.

Sam: Yeah, he did. And actually, last night I was at Nationals Park for the congressional baseball game that they do every year between all the congressmen and senators, and he was inducted my grandfather into the Hall of Fame as a

player, so his baseball accolades continue even after his passing three or four years. So it's exciting to see his deep connection with baseball.

Drayton: He was a player for Yale, and even after he went to war and came back from war and he and Barbara were married, he played on the team and she was a scorekeeper he used to say.

Sam: So she started early with that scorekeeping.

Drayton: Yes, she did.

Sam: Well, Mr. McLane, before my last question of the day, I have to say how excited we were to have you as part of the program. I'm thrilled to hear new stories and insights about my grandparents, and today was certainly no exception. My grandfather was always bullish on the future of our country. He once said, "I do not mistrust the future. I do not fear what is ahead, for our problems are large, but our heart is larger." Mr. McLane, do you share in my grandfather's optimism on the future of our democracy and the resilience of the American people?

Drayton: I think in so many areas, the best is yet to come. Look at healthcare today, how it stands. We have a lady in our office whose mother was on dialysis, and she was a perfect match for her mother. So here, about three weeks ago, she gave a kidney to her mother. She only missed five days of work, and her mother was only in the hospital for six days had a transplant and is beautifully successful. But look in all areas of healthcare, how advanced we are today, and people are living better lives and enriched lives. And we look at the rewards of business and the amount of time that we can devote today to our family. People have more time for their families than they've ever had before. And then if you look at all of the technology that we live in, you're a good example in what you're doing right here, is technology how you can communicate. TV used to be one way and a few channels, and now TV is actually interactive. We have all sorts of communication. There are no secrets anywhere in the world. So I think that in every form that you look at, we're learning to deal with social media that's going to change things. And something can happen anywhere in the world, and it's known all over the world instantaneously. You look at all the quality of life we have, the opportunities people have in education today that life is changing and this remote working, I don't think any of us really know where that's going to wind up, that we would have never thought of if it hadn't have been for the COVID issue. We're not sure how it all comes back together again. Why is this changing so rapidly? And the opportunities

are so great for us today that we have to learn to live with this tremendous world, with new opportunities and new ways of doing things. When I grew up, and your grandparents grew up, you went to see grandmothers and grandfathers occasionally. Now you can go on the phone and you can do it on your app and you can do it all day every day. Life is getting better and better, and we're learning to govern this, and I think we're making a better world out of what we have today.

Sam: Mr. McLane, thank you for your time and being on All the Best and thank you for your service and all that you do for your communities and the people that you come in contact with.

Drayton: I see you're having a lot of fun doing this.

Sam: I am having a lot of fun. And if you come to D.C., we'd love to show you the new Bush School because it's beautiful and I think you'd be blown away by all the great work they're doing.

Drayton: That's going to be so good for kids that couldn't quit their job and move to college. They can be in the nation's capital and they can have an impact on the Bush School, and it's such a positive leadership and what the president and Barbara, she had a lot to do with the Bush School, too. I went to many a board meeting and she sat in on the board meetings and she never went to bed at night, not having said what was on her mind.

Sam: That's for sure. Well, Mr. McLane, thank you again for being part of All the Best. It's such a joy to have such a close friend of my grandparents on. Go Baylor!

Drayton: Go Baylor Bears. Thank you, my pleasure.

Sam: I'm Sam LeBlond reminding you to listen, share, and subscribe to All the Best on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and everywhere great podcasts are found. Thank you for joining me as we celebrate "All the Best".