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Don: If you think back to the beginning of your sporting career, when was the first time you picked up a ball?

Joe: I think I was probably four years old. I was at my grandmother's house in South Chicago, Illinois. I went outside back because they just purchased a whiffle bat and whiffle ball and gave it to me. I remember I threw the ball up, swung, and I rocketed the whiffle ball over the garage into the alley next door. I was so excited. I ran into the house. Everybody's like, "What happened?" I was just so excited to tell them what I did. Of course, they thought it was really nice and cute. But for some reason that always stuck vividly in my mind the first time I really knew that I liked it. I had success with it at such a young age.

Don: What drew you to sports?

Joe: The defining moment for me was my father was a steel worker, an iron worker in the steel mills. We didn't have a lot of money. A good friend of his was connected to the Cubs and gave him four tickets to a Cubs game. I was five years old at the time so we went with my sister and my cousin. He was so proud to take his family there, and at five years old. Going to a Cubs game and walking through a special door to Wrigley Field and being provided bats and balls and often kinds of things was an impressionable moment for me. Ironically, my father was a White Sox fan. So he had no idea that at the time, he was turning me into a Cubs fan at five years old.

Don: Growing up, who motivated you?

Joe: I have to really say it was my parents. They supported me, they influenced me. They gave me the platforms I needed to get into athletics to support me through that. They encouraged me quite a bit as a young kid. My father in particular was one of my baseball coaches. He taught me quite a bit about the game, actually. Although I played football and basketball, baseball was my passion and really encouraged me. I had quite a few great coaches along the way. No doubt about it. But when I think about those early years, my parents were really a great encouragement for me to follow my excitement, my passions around athletics.

Don: You grew up in Dyer, IN, why did you choose Indiana State?

Joe: Honestly, my first passion was Notre Dame, but I didn't have the grades. So what I ended up doing was wanting to stay in state and Indiana State had probably one of the best Midwest baseball programs at the time in the in the 80s. I was actually able to get accepted into Indiana State and there I went from Dyer to Terre Haute, Indiana.

Don: Sometimes life will throw you a curveball. Unfortunately, you suffered an injury to your throwing arm that forced you to give up baseball in your last two years at Indiana State. Looking back, what advice would you give to someone going through an unplanned change of direction like that?

Joe: Boy that was a tough time for me because I had aspirations to go to the next level. Obviously every young kid, especially in Division One college baseball, thinks they have a chance to go to the Major Leagues. That was devastating. I quickly realized that wasn't going to happen based on the injury that I suffered in my arm as a pitcher, so I quickly had to pivot. As a young boy, 19, 20 years old, I had to make a really adult decision. The decision I made was that there had to be life after Baseball and I had to make something of myself. I was fortunate to have chosen computer science as my career, or my study, in 1984. I decided to focus on my grades, to get my GPA up, because I was going to need to get a job after college. I got a 4.0 the rest of the way and was able to land a programming job right out of college, but you know what? I would always say in terms of advice, that no matter what your plan is, if the plan doesn't work, there's always another option. There's always another door that can be open, that can be as fulfilling, if not more fulfilling than your original door.

Don: Has an interaction with another athlete or teammate or family member ever influenced your perspective?

Joe: Yes, there's been so many great people I've been fortunate to surround myself around that have shaped me throughout my life, but I'm going to reference my father. I remember very vividly that he taught me how to pitch a baseball. We would go into the backyard and he would be the catcher. Of course, at the time, I had a pretty good arm but he didn't have a catcher's mitt, so I would light up his hand and I remember it would swell up, but he never complained. What was interesting is, he would put up a steel bucket and put a shovel in the bucket, and that would be the batter. That's how I learned how to pitch early on in my life. I lost my father last December, and the consoling part is how I was able to be there at the very end and was able to thank him for all those little things, including teaching me how to pitch, being there for me, inspiring me, and in being a mentor to me all through my life. It was difficult to go through that but I take solace in the fact that I had the opportunity all the way to the end to be with him. To thank him and tell him how much I love him.

Don: I read a magazine piece that shared how you really love college football. What is it that you love about it? Why are you such a fan of the game?

Joe: It started with watching Notre Dame as a kid. All my family was Notre Dame Fans there in Chicago. As I look at college football versus professional football, I think that there's a sense of purity still in college football, even though it's becoming such a large business now. When the players put on their cleats, they don't have contracts. They go out there to play and they play hard. The energy level, the

pageantry, you know, the hype, the Saturday's, the smell of campus when you're there in the fall. All of that combined, it's just an exciting sports venue.

Don: I also read in that same magazine piece that you love the Chicago Bears. We share that in common because I had the honor of living with Walter Payton in the final weeks of his life to write his book. Who was your favorite Bear ever and why?

Joe: It's absolutely Walter Payton. I grew up as a young boy in the 70s watching him. I remember when he came in from Jackson State. It was amazing to watch him because I was there in the city. I watched every game. He had a lot of talent, but he worked really hard to outpace everybody else. I remember watching him work out, running the stairs in the stadium, just constantly working on his string. When you'd see him on Sundays, plowing over people, he would just keep going. When you see that kind of athleticism and the work it took to put in there, it made me a big fan of Walter Payton. But more than that, he was just such a great guy. He's an inspiration to many because he was just an all-around great individual.

Don: The Great Teams I've studied don't just adjust to change, they embrace it. In sports, it could be the week to week change of the opponent. In business, it could mean a personnel change or a merger. I know that Tech Data has grown through acquisition over the years, including the acquisition of DLT Solutions in 2019. Was there a lesson you learned in your sporting career that helped you lead in that transition?

Joe: I had quite a bit of experience with acquisitions and bringing teams, companies, and people together. Every time you do one, you learn more, and you just keep learning. When I look back, there's really one common denominator, and that is culture. Culture is far bigger than the financial aspect or the strategy aspect of pulling teams and companies together.

Don: Your team at Indiana State was led by Coach Bob Warn, a legend in his space, he won over 1,000 games in his 31 seasons at Indiana State and now the field is named after him! The Mountain Valley Conference wrote a wonderful retirement piece on him, talking about his passion and describing his emphasis on academic excellence. Is there a specific moment you can share when you experienced his passion? What about his leadership style has influenced yours within your career?

Joe: He was a mentor to me as I left home and went to University. He took me in. I was really close to him. Two things that stood out about him were passion and discipline. He had a team assembled but they all had different behaviors, characters, egos, and thoughts. He had to figure out how to bring it all together. He did that in a systematic disciplined way. But there was nobody else that I had run into at the time in my life that had more passion.

Don: Now, in business, who coaches you today? Who mentors you?

Joe: I have a bit of an unorthodox approach to that. I am coached by my team, my team coaches me. We adopt servant leadership approach at Tech Data. What that means is, we're here as leaders to serve our people. I always get feedback. I'm constantly getting feedback of how I can improve. What more can I do? Part of doing that to get true, honest feedback from your team, which is probably the best kind of coaching you could possibly get, is creating a system in an environment of trust.

Don: Team building activities are a part of many great sports cultures. How do you create camaraderie on your team?

Joe: I surprise my team. They think we're going to have a full day meeting and, I'll pull at the beginning, an audible. I did this recently. We had such a successful year last year that we were going to go talk about it after the year ended and have a quarterly business review. I pulled the entire team together. I kicked off the meeting talking about the great year that we had. Now it's all about what we are going to do this year and that we're going to use this time to start planning the course and make sure that we're focused on our game. Then I said, "But I'm not going to do that. In fact, what we're going to do today is, we're going to have a little bit of team building and we're going to have a lot of fun, and you guys deserve it." So I've learned over the years, Don, that, It's not just about hitting the numbers. It's about the team, and the team is everything. Putting the best leadership on the field and inspiring them. It's not just about business. It's about us, and each individual, and having fun. I think creating an environment of camaraderie is so important today, more than perhaps it may have been years ago. I really do believe that. Especially with all the things going on in the world. We work super hard, they work hard, and being able to just say, "Stop, let's celebrate each other."

Don: I know you do not only lead in business, you also lead in the community. You are a National Trustee for the Boys and Girls Club of America. What lessons from your sporting experience have you applied to this leadership role?

Joe: I got to a point where I felt like it was important for me to give back and there was only one philanthropic organization I was really passionate about and that's the Boys and Girls Club. The Boys and Girls Clubs serve over 4 million kids and it's only a fraction of the need. There are over 1000 clubs in the US. Being a national trustee, I now get to be a role model at a level that provides influence for a greater good and a real impact to children, who we help every day become responsible citizens of the future. It's just been extremely fulfilling. There's a lot of work to be done and we're only scratching the surface, with a lot more to come. Thanks for asking. I really do appreciate that experience and the opportunity out there.