

The Swinger Series Part 2

Andy Michaels

The Man on the Mound

2008 was a turbulent year for many in America. A hard year to forget – stock market crashing, housing market falling apart, both trades people and Wall Street geeks were out of jobs. The Phillies somehow won the World Series. Hard time for a young man graduating college hoping to leap into a job market flooded with anxious overqualified individuals. Some people found themselves scrambling for opportunity, others put their heads down and worked jobs they loathed all week just to come up penniless on Friday.

Here we begin the story of one Mr. Andy Michaels in Maui, white knuckling around the Pali in the back of Rai Johnson's Miata trying to make it to baseball practice on time. "No Car Andy" as he was dubbed was hitching rides to make it to practice. Long before we got to this fully formed 8 team league it was simply a bunch of guys getting together to practice. Eventually they turned that into two teams playing in a five-game series. Then they played that series again. Slowly but surely spins the wheel of the world- one person told another, many games were played, and we all arrived here today about to head into our 26th playoff run. Andy has been steadfast with the league through its inception, boasting 1064 plate appearances and 910 innings pitched. He has been a constant character on the mound in all 13 years here in the MABL - If you've played the Brewers I'm sure you've faced Andy. A high leg curl leaves him looking like a flamingo in his load. A big step towards home, he throws hard and likes to pepper the corners - I've been brushed back by Andy a time or two myself!



I didn't know Andy in his former years but took his word that he used to be called "Wild Andy" and was notorious for whizzing fastballs past ears and making batters dance in the box. He chuckled when I brought up the umpires in the league to ask him if the league has always rolled with 2 umpires. "Yeah, yeah we have had umpires since the beginning. Wasn't always so smooth with them... me and the guys get along fine now. But it wasn't always that way. We used to be the bad news Brewers – things have certainly calmed down in recent years," he told me with a glint in his eye of seasons past, reflecting memories of barreling down the third base line in a mad race to the finish with that little white ball.

Andy washed up on the shores of Maui on October 20, 2008 and began his professional life slinging shades at the Sunglasses Hut in Whalers Village for 10 bucks an hour with no commission. "I'd sell 5 grand of sunglasses on Christmas Eve and walk away with my 10 bucks an hour... wasn't working for me." While he cleaned up on Christmas Eve something tells me he didn't do too shabby on the other 364 days of the year. Andy is a charmer with the gift of gab – he regaled me with stories of his life as we sat on Ukumehame Beach on what must have been one of the windiest days of the year. Twice during the interview Andy bolted out of his chair to chase down a piece of litter flapping along in the wind. In fact, the only negative thing I heard him say all evening was "who just throws this shit around! There is a garbage can right there!" Andy's hero in this life is his father – a man who worked his tail off to provide for his family, passing along a great work ethic to his son. Andy's father worked in sales and I think some of it rubbed off on young Mr. Michaels as he is a confident, positive and dedicated individual. I imagine many a tourist walked away from Andy's booth back in the day with a snazzy new set of \$300 Maui Jim's feeling on top of the world.



These days Andy finds himself behind the bar at Castaway Café with a view of the ocean while he mixes drinks. "I like it, I can wear shorts and goofy socks to work." The smile he had on his face told me that Andy lives with a sense of fulfillment that eludes millionaires and superstars the world over. He knows just what he needs and has it in his life each day, doesn't mind sharing it with others either. During the pandemic Andy was out snorkeling at Honolua Bay with a friend and joked that he would much rather be wearing his snorkel mask and in the water than a face mask out to protect against Covid. He started to think about a mask design that said just that – "I'd rather be wearing my other mask". He drew up an image with a friend and had 100 masks made to be sold around Maui, quickly realizing that he should be sharing the profit with the community. Andy decided on the Maui Food Bank and dedicated \$1 for every mask sold to be donated to the Maui Food Bank and ordered 500 more. Between his gift of gab and a genuinely cool mask idea he raised over \$700 for the Food Bank. An admirable move much appreciated by this island community. The Maui Food Bank helps deliver food to a large range of people in the county, from families living in remote areas, the homeless and seniors living on a fixed income. The MABL is proud to have such selfless individuals in our ranks that take the time to consider the community. Such acts help define this league as a standout organization and help keep our community healthy.



Q: Alright Andy I'm going to fire off some questions. Just give me your first straight answer. Snorkeling or surfing?

A: Snorkeling, definitely.

Q: Pizza or sandwiches?

A: Pizza

Q: Skydiving or bull riding?

A: Hmm... never done either. Skydiving.

Q: Meditate or heavy metal show?

A: Meditate. Wait. Is AC/DC heavy metal? That is a tough one, I'd love to see them. Ah no, I'm sticking with meditate.

Q: What do you think happens when we die?

A: Hmm. I think... we stop getting to have as much fun. I know I have a blessed life and I love it so much. I'm lucky.

Q: Hot dogs or sausage?

A: Pfft. Sausage!



Q: Thanks for the rapid response on those. Tell me about your favorite baseball player.

A: Don Mattingly. He is managing for the Marlins now; he was the Yankees star in the 80's. My brother and I used to fight all the time and he became a Mets fan, so I became a Yankees fan and I fell in love with the team. Mattingly was the first baseman for the Yankees – he was the leader of the team and a great hitter. He won 9 gold gloves in his career and when they finally made it to the playoffs in '95 he was getting old and had some back issues, it was his

last season playing. He didn't hit too great in the regular season but really broke it open in the playoffs and hit .417.

Q: Tell me about the best day of your life?

A: I don't know, I've had so many! Maybe... if I had to pick a day I would go with the day I moved to Maui. It completely changed my life. It was an unforgettable day, jumping right in the ocean and started a new life far from the rat race in Jersey. And now, my parents are living out here – they came after a few vacations and love it so much. The way my life has changed since I came out here is awesome.

Andy has been involved with baseball since he was a boy playing in a T-ball league. After 13 years playing on Maui I don't see him stopping any time soon, and hope he doesn't for the sake of the league. He has been a manager of the Brewers, part of multiple playoff runs and 2 championship wins. His smile on the field is unmistakable – heavily bearded or not. A standout character in the tale of the MABL. If you get a chance chat him up after a game or go see him at Castaways. Have a drink – Hell, have 10! The world is spinning faster than Andy's inside heater and if you just sit there and watch it go by Larry's going to ring you up.

Thanks Andy, Happy 13th anniversary on Maui!

Chip Swinger



Photos 1, 2 & 5 by Niko Nemoto - you can find more of her work under the "Media" section of the MABL website and on Instagram @mauiinfocollector. Thank you Niko!

Photo 3 by Chip Swinger and photo 4 by Leah Mark Photography