

Joe Magadan lost a sports career to injury, but helped relatives reach the majors

By Andrew Meacham, Times Staff Writer
August 8, 2010

TAMPA — Everything in [Joe Magadan](#)'s life might have been different, if not for the injury.

Until that devastating collision in practice, Mr. Magadan showed every sign of being able to fulfill his dream of a career in football.

Instead, the former **Jesuit High School** standout worked as a business manager and poured the rest of his energies into his family and coaching little league baseball.

Two relatives he coached, son [Dave Magadan](#) and nephew [Lou Piniella](#), went on to successful baseball careers.

Mr. Magadan didn't mind talking about the injury, and with little prompting would show the scar where doctors removed one of his kidneys. While the life he gained was not the one he planned, he relished it to the end, doting on his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Around Christmas 2009, Mr. Magadan surprised his family with an announcement. He thought he would die this year. He was about to turn 92, and Sept. 2 was nine-two. He would not survive past then, he said.

At the time, Mr. Magadan was healthy and jogging regularly. Family members set his comments aside, like a tabled motion.

They called him the "child whisperer." Whenever a baby cried, their parents just plopped the child into his arms. He sang to them in Spanish, obscure folk songs his parents had taught him.

"You wouldn't want to hear him sing in church, but it was soothing to the kid," said his son, [Joe Magadan](#).

Mr. Magadan was born in Tampa and spent part of his childhood in Spain. After Jesuit, he went to Loyola University in New Orleans on a football scholarship. In practice, a defensive player's knee broke his rib, which punctured his kidney. A priest gave him last rites in a New Orleans hospital.

Down one kidney, his weight dropped from 230 pounds to 145. He later got a baseball tryout with the New York Yankees but was not the same player.

"One of the big frustrations of his life was that the injury prevented what could have been," said Magadan, 52.

He played semiprofessional baseball in Tampa while working for Corral Wodiska cigars. The family moved to Venezuela, then back to Tampa. Mr. Magadan made sure his shift at a produce plant ended by early afternoon, so he could coach his sons, Joe and Dave.

He taught his players that being a winner and a being a low-key nice guy were not mutually exclusive. "He never got uptight if you struck out," his son said. "It was more of a learning process."

He also devoted coaching time to his sister's son, Jesuit star Lou Piniella.

"From the time Lou was able to get out and play, my dad and his dad took him out to play," Magadan said. "Our summer vacations were in Selma, Newport News, New York. We saw him everywhere."

Mr. Magadan took pleasure in guiding his nephew and sons. It felt like the universe was righting a wrong.

Piniella played for the Yankees and managed the Rays. He is now manager of the Chicago Cubs and one of baseball's most visible personalities.

Mr. Magadan's other son, Dave, played for 15 years in the majors, starting with the New York Mets. He is now a hitting instructor for the Boston Red Sox.

Mr. Magadan died July 29, after an aneurism burst. He was 92. His matter-of-fact prediction that he would not live past Sept. 2 had come true. That led his family to another thought.

A couple of months ago, the jerseys for granddaughter Taryn Magadan's Brandon-area soccer team came out, with randomly assigned numbers. Most of the numbers were below 20.

Taryn's blue shirt, straight from the factory, bore the number 92. As with Mr. Magadan's prediction about his longevity, no one reflected on the jersey number until later.

"It was like, wow," Magadan said.