

[00:00:00] **Music:** Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

[00:00:01] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

[00:00:14] **Music:** “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

[00:00:23] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. The playoffs just started in baseball. As I'm recording this, eight teams are vying for the World Series title. By the time you hear it, probably be down to six or maybe even four. And this year has been a weird season for Joe Maddon.

Joe Maddon has worked in baseball his entire life, first as a ball player—a pro, though not an especially good one. And then, starting in his early 20s, he worked in pretty much every other baseball job you can have—starting with Junior Scout and ending with Major League Manager. He has three Manager of the Year awards, two with the Tampa Bay Rays and one with the Chicago Cubs. He led the Cubs to their first World Series title in more than 100 years. He's a distinctive sort of manager. He usually wears a pullover hoodie in the dugout, and that and his thick-rimmed glasses and his low baseball cap make him look less like a baseball manager and more like I guess maybe a surf dad?

Maddon was famous for being a very distinct hybrid of old school and forward thinking. On the one hand, he is the absolute epitome of a baseball lifer. On the other, his propensity for the unusual is legendary. He introduced themed costume days to his team's schedules, like multiple themed costume days. And once, when he was managing the Chicago Cubs, he set up a visit from some actual live bear cubs—like real cubs—to, I guess, inspire everyone? Joe Maddon started his pro career with the Angels, and he worked for that team for 35 years. As a player, a coach, a scout—basically every job. He was even interim manager of the team on two different occasions. But to become a real, full time, permanent manager, he had to leave home and head to Florida and the Tampa Bay Rays. In 2020, with those three Manager of the Year awards in hand, He came back to Anaheim. The prodigal son. But it didn't go how anyone hoped. Only two and a half seasons in, he was fired. And that's how, at age 68, he ended up unemployed for pretty much the first time in his baseball life.

So, I think it's fair to say that it's been a weird time for Broad Street Joe. What did he do? Well, he played some golf, and he put out a book. *The book of Joe: Trying Not to Suck at Baseball and Life*, was written by Maddon and Tom Verducci. It is part memoir, part inspirational text, part practical guide on how to build better baseball teams. I was grateful to get to talk to Maddon from his home in Pennsylvania. So, let's get into it. My conversation with legendary baseball manager, Joe Maddon.

[00:03:34] **Transition:** Bouncy synth.

[00:03:42] **Jesse Thorn:** Joe Maddon, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you on the show.

[00:03:45] **Joe Maddon:** Thanks—really, thank you for asking. I'm talking to you from Sugarloaf, Pennsylvania and back here playing a lot of golf, enjoying my summer.

[00:03:54] **Jesse Thorn:** I have to tell you; your Zoom background is one of the most idyllic of anyone that we've ever with. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:04:03] **Joe Maddon:** Well, you're looking at the Cunningham Valley over my shoulder. It's really beautiful. I'm right on the—I'm in the middle of a golf course. I'm actually—that is the eighth green, the ninth tee box, the first fairway, third fairway, and number two green. So, I'm literally in the middle of a golf course.

[00:04:21] **Jesse Thorn:** Okay, so if you literally live on a golf course, how come you're not just retired-retired? What—? (*Chuckles.*)

[00:04:28] **Joe Maddon:** Yeah, I don't I don't know. I want to just say semi, because there's still a possibility. If somebody were to approach me and I felt really aligned to them philosophically or the group, I definitely would listen. There's no question. I need it this year. Like, right now, it's about a year that I'm officially off—about a year since the time I was let go by the Angels. And one of my agents had told me, “You got to wait at least a year to determine exactly what you want to do next.” So, it's a year. And you know, I'm getting a little itchy. I'm not real scratchy, but I'm a little itchy. And again, if the right opportunity came around with the right group of people, I definitely would entertain it.

[00:05:08] **Jesse Thorn:** When was the last time you spent this long not traveling constantly for work?

[00:05:16] **Joe Maddon:** 19... I would say 1979, 1980. 1980—in that that window, I had been let go as a player out of the Cal League, came back here. I was working in a home for juvenile delinquents in West Hazleton. So, I stayed there. Then, eventually I drove out to Boulder, Colorado, where I got signed up again to go back to the Angels, but it goes back to '79/'80, where I actually had nothing to do, enjoyed a summer, had a beer at night not worried about what's gonna happen the next day. Honestly, it's been kind of fun.

[00:05:50] **Jesse Thorn:** I imagine that for a while not working is like, you know, a quiet period of the off season stretched out, you know? Like, for a while, being in your house is the same as being in your house during the offseason of a regular year only, you know, you have a little less homework to do. At this point, you're getting to the point where I wonder if your body is just like wondering why it's not doing that thing that it did for 40 years.

[00:06:21] **Joe Maddon:** That's very astute, actually, and you're right. So, my body is wondering that. However, I am active, man. I mean, I'm not doing all of that. I'm not planning on plotting on a daily basis, but literally playing golf almost every day. I have a once-a-week podcast. I'm on MLB network now once a week. We're still promoting *The Book of Joe*. The podcast is *The Book of Joe* and me and Tom Verducci. That kind of keeps my mind active. I'm watching games again at night. So, I'm wanting to see who's playing and what the game looks like right now and where it's going. And in the event that I do get reconnected somehow, I want to be able to hit the ground running.

So, yeah, I'm not, I'm not nearly—like, when you're a major league manager where you're involved with the ball club on a nightly basis, daily basis, that's a whole different world. You get caught in that hamster wheel, man. And it starts in February, and it spits you out, you know, October, November. So, it's not quite like that, but I feel connected. I feel like I'm staying in touch. I feel like I have an idea of what I'd want to do given an opportunity again. And so, those are the kind of things that are important to me. Just, again, kind of keeping that wheel rolling or turning in the event that I got to go full speed. But you're right, you—for right now, this is a different version of a season, and I don't mind it. I don't mind the being able to wake up in the morning and just read my newspaper, drink my Bulletproof coffee, and then plan the day and kind of take a little bit more slowly.

[00:07:57] **Jesse Thorn:** You were a professional baseball player for four years.

(Joe confirms.)

And the highest level in which you played was single A, which is the lower part of the minor leagues. Did you have a point where you knew that you weren't going to be a major league player?

[00:08:12] **Joe Maddon:** Oh, yeah. You know, it was actually 24/25. There was a scout—actually, you guys are from San Francisco area. Loyd Christopher is a very famous scout from that area. Loyd played for the San Francisco Seals and was good friends with DiMaggio and that group. He was one of the—he was my mentor as a scout, one of my mentors. And even when I was playing in the minor leagues with the Salinas Angels and playing in Visalia, I hit a home run the night before, doing actually pretty well. Loyd walks up to me the next day during batting practice and asks me, “When are you going to stop playing and start coaching?” And I think I was 23 years of age at that point.

So, even he—a lot of guys saw that component within me that of course I'm not going to see. I want to be a major league baseball player. But even when Loyd said that to me for the very first time, it absolutely got my mind. Well, you know, these guys are pretty smart. What are they thinking? What are they seeing? So, I was kind of like preparing in the back of my mind for the eventuality that I would become a coach and manager and hopefully one day a major league manager. But it did start on a field during batting practice in Visalia, California. I think it was 1977 or '78 that Loyd came up to me. So, it was there, and I was never—I was disappointed I didn't become a player, but I wasn't crushed. Because as a player, I was considered old at 26. As a manager/coach, I was really like almost a bonus baby at 27.

[00:09:35] **Jesse Thorn:** I have to say like I've never been as good at anything as a single A baseball player is at playing baseball. Like, to be a professional athlete in any capacity takes just extraordinary gifts and extraordinary skills and commitment. And the thing that, as a guy who's not good at that kind of thing, that blows my mind about that career is the idea of being that good at it, being 23 or 24 or 25 and having to give it up.

[00:10:16] **Joe Maddon:** Part of it is your body makes you. *(Chuckles.)* You know, you hurt your arm a couple of times, you pull a couple of hamstrings. And even at that age, the body doesn't recover really well. It's difficult, and you know, you're watching the other guys play the game. You're watching guys that when they see their pitch, it doesn't get fouled off.

It goes in fair territory, gets hit hard and it becomes something good. One of the things that people don't realize when it comes to baseball in general, everyday baseball players are unique. To be able to play that game, even in a minor league level—say 136 games a year, 140, or in a major league level 140 plus up to 162—and be good at it every day, not easy. Very difficult even beyond the physical component of repeating your physical skills, the mental skills involved in dealing with that much failure is incredible, to be able to stink one day or stink two days or stink three days and be able to throw it aside and come out and get on like maybe a week or two week or ten-day run and be very good at the game again.

These are the kind of things that don't get evaluated or talked about enough, and that—I've always told my players I respect the everyday baseball players so much, because I as a minor league baseball player was—I was good two or three days a week. I was never good seven days a week or six days a week, and I respect that guy that is. So, all of those things became apparent to me as a young player. And then, as I became a young coach and a manager, I was very understanding of the guy that can do it every day and what it meant to rest this guy, really pay attention to him as well as the guy that couldn't do it every day, understand his skill set and try to pick the right spots for him to participate. That all became obvious to me in my early failures as a minor league baseball player.

[00:11:58] **Jesse Thorn:** We've got to go for a quick break. When we return, even more with baseball manager Joe Maddon. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.

[00:12:08] **Transition:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

[00:12:12] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Joe Maddon. Joe was a manager in major league baseball for 19 seasons. He helmed the Tampa Bay Rays. He brought the Cubs their first World Series championship in over a century. He also wrote a book that came out last year. It's called *The Book of Joe: Trying Not to Suck at Baseball and Life*. Let's get back into our conversation.

How did you handle the realization that, you know, your lifelong dream of becoming a major league baseball player was just not going to happen?

[00:12:47] **Joe Maddon:** Ah, it was kind of easy, man. I said—when I know something is over or I'm done with something, I really am able to move on pretty quickly. I knew my body was not going to hold up. I knew it. I mean, I hurt my shoulder a couple times. I had really—I had torn hamstrings a couple times. This goes back to—you know, I played football when I was 10. I was a quarterback when I was 10. You're playing midget football. You're hitting since the time you're 10. And you're playing little league baseball or junior little league since you're 6 or 7. And you're playing almost every day during the summer. I played all the sports. So, at some point, you know, your body—even at a younger age, my body was not able to sustain or maintain all of that beating up.

And so, I knew that. I knew that, so it became relatively easy for me to know that I really can't do this anymore physically. But I did know that I could do the other thing for a long, long time, which would be coach and manage and scout, which I did. So, I started taking care of myself body-wise so I can throw. I threw batting practice almost every day for X number of years, hit fungoes. And then, I did all the grunt work. I used to catch pitchers during spring

training for the Major League Club in the '80s, whether it was Tommy John, Geoff Zahn, all these dudes that hung out, Bruce Kison, Kenny Forsch. I would be the dude that would catch all these guys, throw the BP, wrap up the cords, bring out the pitching machines, help with the tarp if it was raining. Those are the kind of things I knew I had to do in order to eventually arrive at the point where I become a big-league coach.

[00:14:18] **Jesse Thorn:** You started as a scout, as you alluded to. Scouting, you have a community of peers, you know. There's other guys sitting in the scout section or whatever—or equivalent. You have colleagues who you see at various times during the year. It also seems like a really lonely job.

[00:14:42] **Joe Maddon:** It should be. I mean, if you do it right, there's a loneliness about it. There's no question. I mean, the best scouts I've ever met are kind of—they were kind of lone wolves. And I already talked to you about Loyd Christopher. Gene Thompson was another one, Geno. He was an older gentleman, played for the Cubs back in the '30s and the '40s. Geno taught me a ton. Bob Fontaine Sr.—you know, this whole group of men. There was a couple—there would be a gaggle that they had to sit together in order to scout, because they didn't really know what they were doing. But the guys that were lone wolves—even Ray Boone, Aaron Boone's grandpop, I knew Ray. Ray would sit over here behind the dugout on the first base side, and I talked to Mr. Boone. And you know, he said, “You know why I sit here? I sit here because this is where I see the game best from. This is where I learned to see the game from, right here.” And that made such an impression on me. If you'd ever saw me manage, I always stood at the farthest point, closest to home plate—either on the third or first base side—and I would stand there, because that's where my eyes saw the game best from.

[00:15:45] **Jesse Thorn:** What's something you would have recognized in a player as a 29-year-old who'd been a scout for a little bit that you would not have recognized as a 23-year-old who was catching an A ball?

[00:15:56] **Joe Maddon:** Yeah, just purely tools. I mean, tools in general. I mean, when you're 23/22, you're just locked into yourself, man. You don't even know. You don't really know what you do well; you don't know what you do poorly, because you think you do everything well. So, when it came down to arm strength, watching a ball carry, watch rotation on a ball as an example. Watching an infielder with his feet and how his feet worked and the fact that he stepped in front with his right foot as opposed to stepping behind when he went to throw the ball and what that did to his shoulders, as an example. From a hitter's perspective, you know, the way the bat head came through the zone more with a popping of the bat with your hands as opposed to something long and slow with your arms. I could never recognize that as a player, because I didn't know, because I was just so focused on me pitching. And then eventually, I believe I can see things that a lot of guys don't see from the side. And a lot of it's based on the training that I had from 1981 through 1993/'94.

[00:16:56] **Jesse Thorn:** Was your goal to become a major league manager?

[00:16:59] **Joe Maddon:** Yep. It was, but I also knew I had to become a major league coach first. I was always wondering how many years as a major league coach equals one at bat as a player in the major leagues. Because at that time—it's not that way now, but back in the day, if you did not play in the big leagues, it was very difficult to get a job as a major league coach

and then a manager. A few examples, I mean, Buck did it eventually. Showalter. He started in the early '90s. Jimmy Leyland, one of my favorites. I love Jimmy Leyland, by the way. Love Jimmy. Jimmy's the best. But for the most part back then, if you did not play in the big leagues, you're not going to get a chance to coach and manage in the big leagues. And I knew that.

So, I figured—this was my thought. I thought maybe if I got ten years in as a coach, that might equal one at bat in the big leagues to somebody. And that that would open their eyes and permit me the opportunity to become a major league manager. Which, when I got with the Rays, I had interviewed several times. I came close with the Red Sox, close with the Diamondbacks, and even with the Mariners. But I eventually got it with the Rays, or the Devil Rays—Andrew Friedman. And Andrew had a very short resume also, getting to that particular point. I had my ten years in as a coach. But that was the perfect storm for me, meeting up with Andrew and Matt Silverman in a hotel or whatever in Houston. That was perfect for me, and everything that I'd done before that resonated with them. And that's why I got my opportunity.

[00:18:29] **Jesse Thorn:** Before that, you were a company man. One of the things about working in minor league player development is that it is—or in scouting, often—is that you can get to a place where is a career and you may even be able to expect to have the same job next year that you had last year. Which is, you know, relatively uncommon in pro sports, you know what I mean? (*Chuckling.*)

(*Joe agrees.*)

But often, you know, the area scout for Houston still has that job when a new general manager gets hired. Did you see yourself as an Angels guy when you were working with the Angels?

[00:19:15] **Joe Maddon:** Oh yeah. I thought I was going to be there forever. I was there for 30. And then left for the Rays, the Cubs, and then came back to the Angels, which I thought I would still be there. Me talking to you right now is totally unexpected. I thought that I would still be managing that team. At least, my goal is to manage as long as Mick Jagger was singing. So, that was my original concept. And what is he 78 right now? Something like that. So, I really thought I'd have another nine or ten years left in me. Maybe I do. I don't know. But the fact that I'm sitting here really shocked me, you know, last year when it occurred. Because I am an Angel. That's what—I grew up as an Angel. I was a California Angel, which I still wish they would have changed the name back to it still.

So, yeah, I was an Angel. That's exactly who I am, who I was. And I really anticipated concluding there several years from now. It didn't work out that way.

[00:20:05] **Jesse Thorn:** What did that mean to you in 1986 or whatever?

[00:20:09] **Joe Maddon:** Yeah, it meant everything. It was an identity. Listen, there was—I think people, groups, players, coaches, especially coaches and managers, minor league, we really identified with the organization. We were very proud and we—like you just alluded to earlier, we stayed with that same group for a long, long time. We weren't moving around. I

mean, I never even considered moving, even though we were getting paid nothing and our raises were minimal, if anything. We never really said, “Well, I’m going to go talk to the Giants or the Dodgers,” whomever. I hated the Dodgers! I wanted to beat them in instructional league. I used to get my guys together before instructional league games, and I would bemoan the fact and criticize the Dodger for having the whitest uniforms I’ve ever seen in my life. And we got to beat these guys up because they think they’re better than everybody else. That was my spiel on the grass at Gene Autry Park to my guys in instructional league in 1982/3/4/5/6/7, as I was in charge of that particular group.

[00:21:08] **Jesse Thorn:** Did the kind of (*pronouncing carefully*) systemization—is the word I’m trying to say (*chuckles*)—that is required to do something like run the mechanics of the minor league system of a major league baseball team, or eventually be the guy running a major league baseball team—did that come naturally to you? Or was it something that you had to build the capacity to do?

[00:21:38] **Joe Maddon:** Weirdly, it was natural. I mean, even as a kid, I was like the captain of all my teams as a quarterback. I eventually became a catcher at Lafayette, but I did play quarterback through one year in college. It was always in charge of the group I was with. I was always the captain of the team kind of a thing. And when you’re played in that era, you were permitted to do a lot of this stuff on your own. You were empowered to do things. I called my own plays, like in football. There wasn’t like a guard coming in or out. We didn’t have a headset in there. You’re calling your own plays based on everything you discussed during the week with the head coach and the offensive guys and etc..

So, you’re always thinking, always plotting, always looking, always seeing, anticipating all the stuff you did. And so, when you get to the point where eventually I became a scout, minor league coach, manager, coordinator. You put—it all comes to bear. It all comes to the forefront. It’s the Malcolm Gladwell think, man. It’s about blink. It’s about intuitive thinking. It’s about the moment and all the years of experience. All the different things you’ve done to this particular moment come rushing to the forefront when you have to make a decision. Without even asking any part of you to make this decision, you’re making a decision based on experience, based on wisdom, based on tremendous mentors. These are the kind of things that don’t get talked about, and I don’t even think that a lot of people consider them important anymore.

I think more today, people are looking to control resources as opposed to empowering young people or resources in order to become better at what they do. They’re concerned about people making a mistake or doing something inappropriate or wrong in regards to decision making and how that’s going to reflect on them. So, we’d rather use math and data in an attempt to stay ahead of a possible mistake, as opposed to permit people to go out there and possibly make a mistake. But this is what you got. Think of all this stuff. This is the information I want you to consider. This is your decision. Go out there and make it. Empower it. I’m going to be here to back you up. And if it doesn’t go right, I’m going to be there to pick you up, and we’re going to make it right. That’s the process to me that’s important, and I’d like to see more of it in baseball, and in general, in today’s process in regards to how we teach—you know—people that become leaders.

[00:23:56] **Jesse Thorn:** Baseball managers, in particular, are famously risk averse. And I don’t mean risk averse in terms of, you know, never taking a risk in game strategy, but rather

being hesitant to depart from orthodoxy. Because—for very natural reasons, which is their job is almost always on the line. Baseball managers are very easy to fire and get fired a lot. And things always go wrong. You know, no baseball manager's team is good every year. And if you did something weird and things went wrong, then it's very easy for you to get fired. So, there's a lot of incentive for baseball managers not to do anything weird.

It seems like when you got your first full time job as a major league manager, the fact that you had a boss who was just nearly as fresh to the field as you were meant that you kind of had permission to do weird stuff. Like, did you have a conversation with Andrew Friedman where the two of you were like, “Eeeh, are we allowed to do some weird stuff? Yeah, probably, right?”

[00:25:15] **Joe Maddon:** No, you're 100% right. I mean, that was the perfect kind of like a petri dish—right?—for this whole thing. And Andrew was on board with everything. I ran everything by him. We used to go out—when I got the job, I'm in Tampa. I'm a single guy. He's single in Tampa. We'd go out every night during spring training, because we had spring training right in Tampa and actually worked out in St. Petersburg, so we were together a lot. And I ran a lot of my stuff by him, and actually, when I went for that interview, 2005 during the world series, I brought my notebook with me. And I went over a lot of the stuff that we had talked about. And even Jerry Hunziker was an assistant at that time to these guys.

I love the fact that you used the word weird, and I appreciate that. But it's like it's stuff that everybody does now that back then was considered weird, but now it's become mainstream. So, it's just about fortune favors the bold. We're not going anywhere if we don't take any chances. If you want to go with conventional wisdom, by god, go ahead, but I promise you're never going to play the last game of the year and win it. It's just not going to happen. So, I was empowered by these guys, and I was supported by these guys. In 2007, I'm riding my bicycle in Brea, California, up in these little hills—Baston Cherry and Rose and Birch Street. And I was trying to come up with a concept that I could sell the players to 2008 spring training that would permit them to understand we could go from nothing to something just like that.

And I'm writing, and I'm writing. And I came up with nine equals eight—nine players playing nine innings hard will permit us to win nine more games on offense, nine more games on defense, nine more games through pitching. That's 27 more wins. And so, I'm gonna sell the point of nine equals eight, and then we become one of the eight teams in the dance in the playoffs. I got back off the bike ride, immediately called Andrew. “Andrew! Andrew, this is what I got.” And he loved it, right? So, when your guy loves it, and he supports it, and he's gonna back you up on it? Here we go. So, here comes the season. I had Westy, our clubhouse guy—I wanted him to make nine equals eight signs. That's it. No explanation. I wanted esoteric nine equals eight above a urinal. I want nine equals eight on the back of a stall. I want nine equals eight as you're coming in from the parking lot.

And then, as the year went on, I wanted to reveal exactly what nine equals eight meant. And eventually we got the t-shirts. And the t-shirts—and so, we're playing—we went six games in a row in Orlando, between the Blue Jays and I think the Rangers, maybe. Six games in a row, we went on the road in Orlando. We're coming back to play the Red Sox. The shirts are ready, and they come up to me and they ask, “Can we pass out the shirts right now? We've just won six in a row, is this going to jinx us?”

I said, “Pass the shirts out.” So, that's where everything started. Nine equals eight. And then, it just took off from there. But at full support of Andrew. Then, I have the Ed Hardy road trip. The red Ed Hardy t-shirts. I got Don Zimmer sitting right there to my right on an airplane, full boiler. And I mean full boiler. That t-shirt was stretched out as far as it can. But there's him laughing at me, giggling with me, wearing an Ed Hardy t-shirt right next to me.

[00:28:17] **Jesse Thorn:** He was a—for those who don't know—a very, very, very long-time baseball coach and manager, who also was roughly spherical in shape.

[00:28:27] **Joe Maddon:** Yes, and he was also very conservative in shape and tough, tough as they come. And—but the thing that happened with Zimm and I, Zimm finally figured out I'm him and he's me. Because as a manager, Zimm took all kinds of chances. Bases loaded, hit and run with one out. He did that. I was looking for that opportunity. We talked about that. He's the one that taught me the safety squeeze that blew up the Cardinals in the playoffs in—I don't remember what year it was. But anyway, Zimm there with that Ed Hardy t-shirt on absolutely validated everything we were doing at that point. So, yes, if you want to embrace conventional wisdom, and if you don't want to walk outside a little bit, and if you don't want to embrace the bold moves, you're never gonna—you're never—I'm going to say no, you're never going to play the last game of the year and win it. Ain't going to happen.

[00:29:17] **Jesse Thorn:** We'll finish up my conversation with baseball manager Joe Maddon after a break. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:29:27] **Promo:**

Music: Upbeat, quirky banjo music.

Dan McCoy: I'm Dan McCoy.

Stuart Wellington: I am Stuart Wellington.

Elliott Kalan: I'm Elliott Kalan.

Stuart: And together, we are *The Flop House*: a long-running podcast on the Maximum Fun Network where we watch a bad movie and then talk about it.

Dan: And because we're so long running, maybe you haven't given us a chance. I get it, but you don't actually have to know anything about previous episodes to enjoy us. And I promise you that if you find our voices irritating, we grow endearing over time.

Elliott: Perhaps you listened to one of our old episodes and decided that we were dumb and immature. Well, we've been doing this a while now. We have become smarter and more mature, and generally nicer to Dan.

Stuart: But we are only human, so nooo promises!

Dan: Find *The Flop House* on MaximumFun.org or wherever you get podcasts.

(Music ends.)

[00:30:08] **Transition:** Upbeat, chiming synth.

[00:30:13] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Joe Maddon. He's the former manager of the Angels, Rays, and Chicago Cubs.

You did a lot of things with the Devil Rays that were unconventional at the time, which—as you mentioned—are now conventional. I mean, I ran into a *New York Times* article about you from your early days with the Rays that was headlined something like, “Joe Maddon, king of the shift” for the modest amount of defensive over shifting that you were doing that, you know, later came to be something that was done with most batters, against most batters. There were also moves that you write about in the book that, if you took them by their direct and literal contributions to winning, would not necessarily make sense. You mentioned hit and runs, which is where the runner on base runs with the pitch, and it's the hitter's job to try and hit that pitch. And it's done to keep a double play from happening or—but runs the risk of the batter missing the pitch or hitting the pitch right to someone, and the runner getting caught stealing or getting doubled up that way.

And I think if you looked at the long stretch of baseball history, you can count how often that works and how often it doesn't work and how much benefit it is. And mostly people don't do it very much anymore, because it doesn't work that great. But you can also make the argument that it works in other ways. (*Chuckles.*) Right?

[00:32:00] **Joe Maddon:** Correct. That's right, that's right.

[00:32:02] **Jesse Thorn:** That like people on the field being excited about what they're doing and extra engaged and, you know, a lot of squeeze bunts, for example. Like, there are definitely times when squeeze bunts make sense. But you liked squeeze bunts in part just because... it injected a kind of verve into what was happening, for lack of a better way of putting it.

[00:32:27] **Joe Maddon:** Yeah, you're right, that's a great explanation. The safety—it's more the safety squeeze. The safety squeeze is runners on first and third with one or zero outs. And you got a situation where we're trying to bunt the ball on the first base side, because if you do, the first baseman comes with the ball, the second baseman's covering second base, the runner at third scores easily, the batter runner bunts the ball. He's safe at first. Now, you have first and second, nobody's out, and a run scored. And on top of that, it's particular hitters within your lineup. It's not just everybody. Guys that really maybe are not very good at driving runs in, guys that may be more prone to hitting the ground ball double plays. There might be a sinker ball pitcher on the mound who gets a lot of ground balls, and you got the guy that's propensity is to hit the ball on the ground.

See, there's so many different things going on there. It's not—it's like the ocean. It looks maybe a little bouncy on the top, but it's very calm underneath. You gotta know exactly what's going on here. So, you have to—I would evaluate everything quite frankly, and you're picking the right spots. It doesn't happen that often for the first and third, but when it does, man, it can be devastating to the other side. And it's an easy point, and it does do something to the other team internally. The hit and run. Again, you kind of said it there too. Instead of a double play, say there's like two real aces pitching, like really good pitchers, right-handed

pitchers. And these guys, you don't score a lot of points against them, and it's hard to advance a runner. I have two options. Maybe just blunt the runner over to second base because I want a guy in scoring position, or you go hit and run, and you just might roll one through. And all of a sudden, it's first and third against a pitcher with like a 2.1 ERA that nobody on my team can hit, and I know that.

So, these are the kind of chances you take. Instead of a double play, possibly go first to third, which may then set up to hit the safety squeeze. Just because runners are on third doesn't mean he's going to score by letting him swing. There's so much going on here that needs to be evaluated that's not; it's just not. Baseball today primarily—when I see the breakdowns, whether it's on ESPN at night or via a rundown in a newspaper, it's always about relief pitching decisions. We're teaching baseball fans that the only thing there is in a baseball game is to make a right or wrong bullpen decision. And anytime a relief pitcher gives up a run, it's the wrong decision. These guys are held to an impossible standard. There's so many more things that led up to that particular 7th or 8th or 9th inning decision that nobody ever discusses. Whether it's a—not an error, but a play that wasn't made that should have, as an example.

All these things are things that I have to consider on a nightly basis. Every night is interconnected. You alluded to that earlier. Everything in a game of baseball is interconnected to what had happened the day before, what's going on right now, what may happen tomorrow or the next day. As a manager, you're evaluating not only the next inning or the inning after that, you're also evaluating Wednesday and then Thursday and how this impacts that. So, these are the kinds of—and after the game, you can't talk like that. Because if you do, it oftentimes sounds like you're making excuses when you're just trying to give people the full scope of what you're thinking in that moment. So, anyway. Your questions are right on. Your evaluation is very good. And that's the point. There's so much more to think about when you're making these decisions. Maybe to try a hit and run. Maybe to go ahead with a safety squeeze. Maybe to let your guy swing away. Secret ball pitchers are problematic, man, especially when there was a shift going on. So, these are the kind of things that you have to evaluate before you decide to try something.

Last point, the decision not to do something is also a decision. And nobody ever knows that. I decide not to do whatever. I decide not to put the end run on, or I decide to not bring that pitcher in. But nobody will ever know that, because I'm not going to bring up the fact that I chose not to do something. That is also a decision.

[00:36:06] **Jesse Thorn:** When you became a major league manager, 17 years ago, it was a big deal that you had never played major league baseball. That was still very unusual. It was a big deal that you did things like sent the pitcher to left field for a batter so that he could come back in to face the next batter. It was a big deal that you used big defensive shifts.

Now, you know, you have a book that came out, and half the press of the book is “Joe Maddon hates analytics; Joe Maddon is hidebound and old fashioned”. Are you—like, were you surprised that things changed that quickly from Don Zimmer to guys with advanced degrees?

[00:37:03] **Joe Maddon:** Yeah, it's all the narrative. Whoever wants to create the narrative, whoever has the biggest stick at the moment is going to create it. I am so into analytics and always have been. I was at the forefront of that. I was actually doing it before it became analytics. I had my own cocktail that I'd put together prior to each series for my managers, and I'd post them on the wall. I'd have all kinds of stuff taped on the wall, my own version of analytics and how to approach it that night. The part that's not reported upon closely enough, I'm not opposed to analytics at all. And also, I think with analytics, people don't speak about it enough. Its primary purpose should be acquisitional. That's where analytics really shine, but nobody ever talks about that. Nobody ever talks about what happens in November and December when you bring somebody into the fold, and then it gets way too much press and credit for the actual daily running of the team when it doesn't deserve that whatsoever.

The players you bring in, they're the ones that deserve all the credit. They're the guys. And that's—whoever you bring in the door should be influenced heavily by analytics when it comes down to this. Who's our shortstop mixture? God, it's a close call. Let's dig underneath the hood. Let's look at different things. What is the separator here that we're looking for that I just can't see with the naked eye? Give me the truth. Give me the data underneath all that. That's where data really shines. The fact that it's kind of like sold as though, on a nightly basis, data and information have a huge impact on the game. It's no different than it had been 30 years ago. It's called scouting. It was advanced scouting. It's a little bit more sophisticated now, but it's the same thing. Players win games. Players with free and clear minds win games. Players without too much going on in their brains during a game, they're the guys that win games.

So, you can't overload it right now. What you're talking about now is experience vs. control. Experience is not necessarily sought anymore. Control is. What's going on right now when you hire big analytical departments, everybody is trying to get a bigger analytical department. That's the goal right now. It's not to gain more experience on the bench, more experience in your minor league system, or more experience as a coach or manager. You want control based on math and data and information. So, you don't want to control. You want players to play baseball. And I think it's starting to trend back to that. But truth be told, when it comes to analytics in our game, I was at the very forefront of that, and I still utilize it heavily.

[00:39:23] **Jesse Thorn:** What's something that you learned about baseball a year ago or two years ago?

[00:39:28] **Joe Maddon:** Wow. Woof. I'd have to think about that specifically. You know, I'm watching it more again every night. What I've learned, I think, is that—maybe not learned, but this is an observation. Like, I'm trying to describe it right now. Sometimes I get too emotional or animated, but the game is the game, and it needs to be taught in its most pure fundamental form and then brought to the present time. And incorporate any kind of data information that you may want. And there's a lot there. There's a lot of data and analytical stuff that actually teaches physical mechanics too that could be beneficial to players. It's not just a spreadsheet that you take into the dugout and try to incorporate during the game.

So, the thing that's obvious, everybody likes the game all of a sudden again. Why? It's quicker. The pitcher's getting the ball and throwing it. Why? Because base runners are trying to steal bases without being concerned about getting thrown out. Believe me, nobody was

running for the last 10, 15, 20 years, because if you did and got thrown out, somebody's coming down to the office after the game and asking you why that guy ran. And then, once you give the explanation, a coach has to go talk to the player, and then eventually you lose that component of the game, because you stifle creativity or aggressiveness or athleticism, because you're constantly criticizing it when it doesn't go well. I just—it's obvious to me, people want real baseball being played again. And I think that's what you're seeing, and I hope it continues to trend in this direction.

[00:40:55] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, Joe Maddon, I'm so grateful for your time and so grateful to get to talk to you. And wish I could say that I won't resent you for the rest of my life, because the only major league baseball playoff game I ever went to was game six of the NLCS in 2016, where I was rooting for the Giants and sitting with two Cubs fans. But I—

[00:41:21] **Joe Maddon:** That was a good game. (*Laughs.*)

[00:41:22] **Jesse Thorn:** Nah, it was awful. One of the baseball games ever. A truly horrible game that will go down in history as a horrible nightmare that no right-thinking person will ever be able to forget.

[00:41:35] **Joe Maddon:** It was pretty special. (*Laughs.*)

[00:41:36] **Jesse Thorn:** Joe, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me. It was really nice to get to talk to you.

[00:41:40] **Joe Maddon:** And thank you for your prep. I mean, you're very thoughtful in your questions. You're very insightful, and I appreciate all that. I do.

[00:41:48] **Jesse Thorn:** Joe Maddon. His book is called *The Book of Joe: Trying Not to Suck at Baseball and Life*.

[00:41:56] **Transition:** Brassy synth with a thumping beat.

[00:41:58] **Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Here at my house, we're putting some awnings on the windows. A little passive energy savings.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson, our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey, our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Bryanna Paz. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is “Huddle Formation” by the band The Go! Team. Our thanks to The Go! Team. Our thanks to their label, Memphis Industries Records.

Bullseye is on Instagram, [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#). I hope you will follow us there, see behind the scenes pics, and see how we do and why we do what we do, and hear clips from episodes. And we're having a lot of fun there on Instagram.

And I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

[00:42:57] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

(Music fades out.)