Hall of Famer David Justice on Prostate Cancer

Rana R. McKay: Welcome. We're so glad you're here. Thank you. We're just going to kick it off. When Michelle reached out and gave me your contact information, I was like, I know you've done a lot of events with a fresh start and just wanted to ask what drew you to want to come speak with us this afternoon?

When I got a call and they told me it was a prostate cancer, I have five of my closest friends, five that have all had prostate cancer and they've all had the surgery. Five of my closest buddies. All of them have dealt with it in different ways. One of my buddies, he literally, when he was diagnosed, got his prostate taken out 30 days later. As soon as he get it out, he got it out. He was just so scared. When it's your friend, I want to know everything about it because I'm about to be 60 in April. I'm in that age that it could become knocking out.

I'm not going to speak it into existence. Of course, I'm asking every question possible because I want to know all about it. Honestly, I believe I'm here today really to gain more understanding and awareness because I think it's my duty to get this information out to as many of my athlete buddies, my entertainer buddies, my golf buddies, because it's amazing how many people don't go to the hospital. As an athlete, we always had to go every year to the doctor. One of my buddies he watched his for three years, he hadn't been to the doctor in nine years. Nine years hadn't been to the doctor, which was unheard of to me.

I think really that the good Lord has called me to come here today, and we'll see how it goes going forward. We're glad that you're here. [Applause] Prostate cancer, as we've talked about, is just so common among men and even more common among African American men. I think your presence here, the message of reaching out. You all are the foothos to go back and spread the message, spread the word, talk to your doctor. It's not taboo. I think men's health, I think it takes a very different form than the health of others. I think really to focus in on that.

I think as we talk about your career and everything that you've been through, I know you were part of that worst to first team for in your history. How do you handle situations where you're labeled in that category and digging in and finding the strength to actually see yourself in a different fashion and go from worst to first?

That 1991 season, I don't know how many baseball fans we have here, but the Atlanta Braves in the '80s were like the walking mat of the National League. But in the Minor Leagues, I was drafted in 1985, Ron Gant was 83, Lemke was 83, Jeff Blowuser is 84. Any of you Braves fans would know these names. John Smoltz Glavin was 84. John Smoltz came in '88. What was going on is when we were in the Minor Leagues, coming up, the Braves just did a great job of drafting quality young guys. Here we all of us playing together in the Minor Leagues and winning.

We were winning in the Minors, even though the Braves were a terrible team. 1989, we won the Governor's Cup in AAA. That's the championship. I remember celebrating on the field, y'all, with our manager, Jim Beacham, who would later become one of our coaches on our Major League staff. I remember jumping up and down with Beach going, hey, Beach, we can do this in the big leagues. Two years later, y'all, August of 1991, we have captured America. We go from 3,000 fans to 50,000 fans in Atlanta. It's the Tomahawk chops. It was the most unbelievable experience. I think we got there because of that brotherhood that we built in the Minor Leagues together.

You got to have a genuine love for your teammates. You have to have a genuine love for their success because baseball is a tough sport, a lot of ups and downs. There's times in which your teammates need you. When you're over 25, you need a teammate to come hug you. We need to go out to a late night dinner or something to talk because that's a stressful situation. I don't know if that really answers that question, but in 1991, I think we had the mindset. We were young. Just to expound a little bit more. In 1991, we beat the Dodgers.

The Dodgers had a veteran laden. [Applause] Oh, yes, this is going to get even better. I got good Dodgers stuff. But the Dodgers were veterans. It's all you Dodger fans, so Earl Hershiser. They had Darryl Strawberry, Eric Davis. I think Kirk Gibson might have still been there. Then we were a bunch of babies in Atlanta. As we're fighting the Dodgers in September all the papers are coming to my locker. I'm just my second year in the big leagues, and they're like, hey you guys are young. The Dodgers have all this experience. How are you guys going to overcome them?

I remember we were looking at each other as young guys, we were like, if the Dodgers beat us, it's not going to be because of our lack of experience. We're not scared. We truly believe we can win because of this to this brotherhood and we just won in AAA in '89. I love that believing in yourself. Yes, we believe we could do it. Then we ended up if you all remember, 1991, came down to the last game of the season. We had the Houston Astros in Atlanta. They had one foot in the car and one foot on the field. They ready to go home.

That's what we call teams that didn't go into the playoffs. That last game, they're ready to go home. But the Dodgers always have the Giants. You all know that rivalry. If the Giants can't make it, they're not going to let the Dodgers make it. The Giants beat the Dodgers on that final game, and we beat Houston, and we went to the playoffs. It's amazing. It's such an incredible story. I think believing in yourself when nobody else does, I think is really a really fantastic message to find that strength inside to be like, no, we got this, you know?

For sure. That's awesome. I think you've been through a lot throughout your career, and maybe you can speak a little bit to that mental resilience that you need when different things are coming at you. You're faced with a lot of challenges, you're faced with injury, your body may be changing. How do you have the mental resilience to continue to pick it back up, put your foot forward, I'm going to come back even stronger than I was before?

I had a lot of injuries in my career. Everyone has their journey. That's the one negative of my career is the amount of injuries. I've always been the glass half full guy, I'm telling you. In 1996, I only played six weeks of the season. I hurt my shoulder week. We're coming off our World Series championship where I hit the home run to win the World Series in case y'all don remember that in 1995. [Laughter] Case y'all was somewhere and didn't happen to watch TV that night. We won the World Series, won nothing. The next year, in 1996, I hurt my shoulder six weeks in season ending injury, you guys.

It's terrible for me because I'm a big part of our team. Sometimes the Lord sits you down so he can let somebody else rise. A young Jermaine Die came up to take my place. I could have been one of them athletes like, hey, you taking my place?

I ain't helping him with nothing. No, I embraced him because I was one of the leaders of our team, and I know he's going to play my position, but I need to bring him in the right way. His dad would later thank me for how I treated his son. But that's just how I was raised. My mama raised me like that. But it was an opportunity for Jermaine Die because if I don't get hurt in 1996, Jermaine Die doesn't come to the big league in 1996 and he may have never come to the big leagues.

As an athlete, I coach my son and both of my boys who had the athletic gene, played football. My youngest son, I remember we won a little league championship in Pow Way here, but it was one of the games. My youngest son was a hell of a baseball player. But he gets out his last at bat. We're on our way home, and I'm driving. He's in the back seat. He's 12-years-old and he's a little misty eyed. He had a great game. He had two hits, but he got out last at bat. I'm like, son, what's wrong?

He starts complaining about that last at bat. I said, son, let me share something with you, and I'll share this with you all. I said, as long as you play a sport, you're going to have days in which you get your butt handed to you. I said, that's just part of being an athlete. I said, got to understand something. God can't shine on you every time. He got to shine on the pitcher sometimes. [Laughter] The pitcher got a mama, daddy, grandmama might be coming to the first game. Auntie just flew in. Lou Johnny finally got you out. I said, he can't shine on you all the time, son.

I said, but think about all of them other times when you hitting them home runs. Look how much shining God is putting on you. I see him start to smile. It's so funny because as he progressed as a heck of a football player, we would have these moments like that when his confidence is a little shaken. I would say, hey, son, remember I told you, God can't shine on you all the time. He was playing football this time. I said, God got to sign. He shine on them cornerbacks now. He was a wide receiver. You know what I mean? You don't get a catch.

God shining on the cornerbacks today. Baseball is one of those sports you guys wear. There's so much failure. You all know a 300 hitter is a great hitter, but that means he got out seven out of 10 times, you are walking back to the dugout. If you can't rationalize failure, you have a hard time being a baseball player. I used to look at, look, the greatest hitters. You can think of whoever your greatest hitter of all time you think, at some point during the season, he will have a slump at some point. The great ones have maybe one slump. The average does might have three or four, but the great one's going to have a slump.

I used to joke whenever I got in the slump. I remember one time we were in Kansas City, y'all. We are beating Kansas City 14 to two. I'm with the Cleveland Indians. We are killing them. I'm the only guy in the lineup with no hit. Listen. When I get out, y'all and come back to the dugout, I'm yelling to the pitcher. Don't worry. I'll be back and got eight more guys you got to go through. But I will be back up to help you out. The whole team is laughing. You know what I mean?

We're going to be here all night if nobody makes it out. I'll be back in a minute. But I used to look at a slump like, I know it's coming at some point, but when it comes, I embraced it like a cousin, a family member that come to town. Y'all get a family comes down, you hope they only be there for three days and they go back. That's how I used to look at a slump. Let me do the little things I need to do to get out of the slump. But it's coming. I always feel like the ability to rationalize failure and accept it is very important.

I'll give you one other thing. In baseball, Dodger fans, so you guys understand this. They're the best team at baseball right now. They are pushing all the buttons. I got nothing but respect for them. I love watching them play, and I'm a brave. I'm a brave hard heart, but I love watching the Dodgers play.

Dave Roberts like my little brother came up with Cleveland Indians. I used to drive him in my passenger seat in my Porsche in spring training. Come on, D Rob, get on here in the car and now he's a great manager.

I tell people all the time. You play 162 regular season games. If you win 100 games, you most definitely going to be in the playoffs. Your Dodgers won 93 games this year. But that means they lost 69. They won 93, lost 69. Now let's apply that to life. Live your life like a baseball player. I'm trying to go 162 in my life. That means I'm trying to get as many wins as I can, and I know I got 62 losses over here, but I'm going to be a champion. I'm going to the playoffs. The point of that is, we got to accept the fact sometimes, y'all, that we're going to have tough days.

We just got to accept that. That's part of life and that's all of us. That's everybody in this room. I'm just trying to have less than you. You trying to have less than Rana. Rana tried to have less than you. You know what I mean? The goal is to stack as many good days. Let's get 100 wins. I love that. But you're still going to lose 62. I love that so much because when you're at the top of the mountain, you need to have a plan for how you're going to handle adversity when you're in the valley. You're going to need to have a plan because when you're in the valley, your mind is not working right.

You're not going to make great decisions when you're in the valley. When you're at the top of the mountain, you need a plan for how you're going to handle adversity. It's like you have a friend or a partner or whatever. You're going to argue with them, whatever. When you're in the midst of the argument, you're like, I did this right and you did this wrong, and you did that right and you did this

wrong. But it's hard to get to a solution when you're both in that negative argument. Before you ever got in the valley and you're having your good old times, you say, you know what?

When we do get in the valley, let's make a pack with ourselves. Let's decide that it's not going to be me against you. It's going to be us against the problem. Let's decide it's not going to be if I win or you win, let's decide that it's going to be on we're going to resolve the problem. We're going to decide that when we're at the top of the mountain. Because when we get to the valley, we're not going to be able to make that decision. I love what you said about, you know the slump is coming. You know you're going to get in that negative position, and you're going to have a mindset of this is what I'm going to do, this is going to be my tactic.

I'm going to try to handle this. That, I think is really a nice, strong message. I love that. I love you mentoring up and coaching up your son. That's awesome. This room is filled with patients and caregivers, loved ones, partners that support everybody in a different way. Maybe you could speak a little bit to the role models in your life, the people that have helped you and what the role of the caregiver is in somebody's journey here who may have prostate cancer. Like I told you, my friends, five of them, have gone through the surgery. My buddy that he watched it for three years.

I swear I'm his partner. I'm always staying in touch because I can understand the mental stress that that must have. It's easy to sit here and say what I would do if I had prostate cancer because I don't have it. But I can totally understand the level of stress that must come upon a person when they first hear it. I literally was talking two days ago, one of my buddies who I told him I was coming here. He was going to show up, and then he'd be trying to sit right here and talk to, and I couldn't bring him. But [Laughter] the next time I hear. You know what I mean?

But he ran down the whole prostate cancer from day 1 and it was fascinating to listen to him in his journey.

David Justice: As a caregiver or a friend or the whole key is trying to remember that we really only have two day. I'll take it back to baseball. I've been in slumps where I was four for 40. When I think of that, it's almost impossible to go four for 40. But there I was. Well, the next game, you can't go in there saying, I'm four for 40. You got to go into the game saying, I'm all four. I'm just going to play today's game. See, if I go two hits, two for four, the next shop, two for four. I ain't thinking about the four for four.

I can't do nothing about that. When you apply that to life, same type of thing. When you're dealing with a stress or an issue or something, serious like this, I call it, you have to have a mantra, win the day. Guys, 2019, I'm at opening day with the Atlanta Braves. I'm in a fraternity, and I call my fraternity brothers to come hang out, go hang out in the Braves Suite, all the good stuff. I'm going to have them come down and enjoy it. We have a great time. Two days later, he calls me. Hey, I went to the doctor. He says they found a mass in my colon.

Now, I had already had a buddy of mine at age 44 die of colon cancer. When he said it, I think I heard him right, and I said, what you mean?

He said, they were talking about some Stage 4. I'm sitting there, y'all, on the other end of that line, and this is my boy. I love this dude. Of course, he got the diagnosis. They told him 6-8 months if he doesn't do chemo, two years, if he does chemo and beyond, whatever. I couldn't imagine getting that information. But I remember talking to him, and I'm like, listen, brother. We're going to take it one day at a time. Our mantra is going to be win the day. Let's win the day. I would call him. That first week, I called him every day.

Hey, let's win the day. I'm in there with you, man. Let's win the day. Something funny, just get his mind off of it. I can imagine, God, just how your mind when they give you that news. I say, it's so important for us when it's our loved ones to understand how psychologically it could be really wrecking them, but try your best to keep them focused on today, the next hour. Let's win the next

hour. Then we get there, let's win the next hour because all of us, we all know, we stay thinking about the past or the future. A lot of us, I'll raise my hand.

I'll find myself dwelling on the past that I can't do nothing about and then worrying about the future instead of focusing on what's right here today in front of me. That was my experience. Well, my buddy he passed away. He was eight months, he lasted with the chemo.

What that did, even though this is prostate, that had me on my quest as I'm the colonoscopy guy amongst my friends. Y'all remember Kid and Play?

Anybody remember Kid and Play? Thank you. Kid is my man. I call Kid. He two years older than me. Kid, you ever had a colonoscopy?

No, I ain't been to doctor in five years. I'm going to call you every day until you go to Dr. Bro. Every day, he went to the doctor. He went. He was clean. He good. I got another buddy of mine did the same thing too. He had polyps. He thanks me like I saved his life. He just polyps would be benign. He was fine, but he's thanking me all the time like I saved his life. But the point is, y'all, and you said it definitely in our communities, this is a serious thing. The prostate and colon as well, are serious things.

Many of us do not go to the doctor. I'm on the quest. I'll meet somebody for the first time and we had a cigar crew guys. All of a sudden, some new guy come, and he looks like he's up around my age, I'm my man yet colonoscopy yet. I know we just met five minutes ago, but let's get to the important stuff first. We can get a drink in a minute and a cigar, but let's talk life real quick.

Rana R. McKay: I love that.

David Justice: It's important. I'll tell y'all, whether you want me to or not, I'm going to continue raising the awareness on the colonoscopy stuff and the prostate stuff too.

Rana R. McKay: Doctor Caruthers here. He's a gastroenterologist. He does most of his work is on colon cancer screening. This is awesome. Maybe one final parting word, and then I do want to open it up for a couple of questions from the crowd. any final messages for this group of men and caregivers that have prostate cancer final message.

David Justice: Caregivers, just know that you are appreciated. You know what I mean? You are appreciated. [Applause] That's a solid level of humanity that you have to want to really care for somebody and see them, in a better position. Continued success in that, and that's all of us to up our humanity with each other. You know what I mean? Look out for each other. For those of you that have the cancer or you're dealing with some form of it right now, again, let's win the day. Just win the day. If we win the day, now let's go tackle tomorrow. Let's stack how many days we can put.

We're going to win 100 now. Remember, but there's going to be some days it was going to feel like we lost. Just take the loss that day and get ready to win the next day. That would be my message.

Rana R. McKay: I love that. [Applause] Isn't that awesome?

We got a couple of questions here. This is Darnell. He's actually visiting us all the way from Virginia. Has a very amazing story to share. Darnell, your first question.

Darnell: Hello, Mr. Justice.

David Justice: How you doing?

Darnell: Thank you for coming. First of all, I'd like to let you know that I am a cancer survivor, 14 years. Prostate cancer, had it radically removed. One of the things I want to ask you is when it comes to African American men, we're at high risk, twice as likely been in color, twice as likely

being in the military, and then the environments and stuff we work in with the carcinogenics and things of that nature. One of the things we have a problem with is trust, T-R-U-S-T, being able to trust the doctors, being able to trust what's being said in our communities from a faith based community, we want to listen to our leaders, but how do you deal with that trust and breaking down the barriers?

Because I'm like you. Everywhere I go, I try to pass the word on. I wrote a book I want to give to you at the end on peeling back to an and prostate cancer as a thank you for your work in the area.

David Justice: I agree with you a lot. I'm telling you, there's so many guys I know that don't go to the doctor, which just makes no sense to me. But I just think you just have to stay on your friends. Also, we have to rely on our friends to help us. Sometimes we won't even ask our friends, simple stuff like, Hey, who's the best doctor that you know of that handles prostate cancer?

Or you know what I mean? Start asking people, I say it all the time, just like in sports, there's Hall of Famers, there's Hall of Famers in the prostate world, there's Hall of Famers in the Golden world. There's Hall of Fame doctors out here. In baseball, you get your shoulder messed up, you're going to see Dr. Job. He must be the Hall of Fame guy.

Darnell: Yes, sir.

David Justice: There's these guys, they exist. You just got to ask around. Go ask your partners, man, who's everybody going to?

You know what I mean? With this situation? They'll give you a list of people, and now you're in the right direction that you can go to some people that you can trust because so many people have given their trust to these individuals.

Darnell: Thank you very much. [Applause]

Rana R. McKay: Thank you. Any other Dr. Cain?

Dr. Cain: Thank you. David, if I can call you that, Mr. Justice, thank you so much for coming. You're inspiring, everybody. I'm a huge baseball fan. The highlight reel of your career is just spinning through my head right now and the great teammates that you played with. I'm just curious, a couple of things. I'm an Oakland A's fan, and I grew up in the Bay Area, Oakland Hills, went to school there and stuff. the Raiders, the A's, the Warriors were my teams. Now, sadly, it's the Sacramento soon to be Las Vegas A's. All my teams have moved. I'm suffering, but you're inspirational, and, every day, I'm going to try to do better here.

But when you came to the A's at the end of your career, that was really nicely reflected in the movie Moneyball. You made a big difference. You were the veteran presence of what became a really, unexpectedly special team, the streak. Everybody knows the story. They depicted you in that movie as having a relationship with Billy Bean. What was your process in that movie?

Did they ask, how that was?

David Justice: Maybe you saw Bunny Ball.

Dr. Cain: How realistic was that depiction?

David Justice: The role didn't call me the date of Bert Shaw Bubble in this movie I don't think. [Laughter] However, first of all, not one of my scenes actually happened. No team is so cheap that you got to pay for a soda. Billy Bean didn't come into the batting cage to say to me that I got to come on board, and they paying me seven, whatever they said. I would never talk to a general manager or a coach like that. My mama would kill me if I ever did something like that. I would never do that. I was the leader of that team, the first day of spring training.

It's my last year in the big leagues. I'm 35 at the time, about to be 36. Some of these dudes were like, 23, 22. They grew up watching me. I come in already, Sixth World Series, all my personal accolades. They're like, our leader is here. I walked in, like, Yes, I am. Let's go. They reminded me of the Young Braves. We had the young pitchers, Mark Mulder, Barry Zito, and Tim Hudson. That's Glavin Madison Smoltz there. We had Miguel Taha to won MVP that year. Then we won 20 games. We set a record 20 games in a row. I played on Great Braves teams, Cleveland Indian teams.

The Yankees never won 20 in a row. We break the record.

Dr. Cain: Awesome.

David Justice: Here I am. I'm a leader. I call the team meeting. We're in Minnesota. We done won 20. I feel like I need to let these young guys understand what they've accomplished. Not only understand it, but look at themselves like a team that can win the World Series. I call a players only meeting. I get up, guys, I play with the Braves. You know all of them. We never won 20. I go down all the teams. I start naming Jeter and all the guys all the great players I play with. None of us ever won 20, but we have won 20.

That's how I want y'all to see yourselves. One of the best speeches I ever gave y'all. I'm telling you, I have won the best speeches ever. We went out that night and lost. He come in after the game, and they're like, DJ, how are you going to talk to us?

I'm like, I thought y'all took good direction around here. Y'all was one of the best speeches I ever gave. Y'all messed it up. But that was so funny. I'll never forget that. But the movie, I'll tell you this about the movie. First of all, Art How was one of the nicest managers known to mankind. I thought they depicted him wrong. Here's the bubble that's going to get burst. Y'all saw the movie? Large part of the movie is the relationship between Brad Pitt and his daughter. Big part of the movie in the music store, looking at guitars, all that. The movie even ends with him listening to her song.

Remember that, guys? We're at the premiere. I see Billy. No, I was literally like the assistant JM on the team Billy and I talked all the time, because I'm the veteran. I see Billy. I thought Billy and I had become really close. I'm like, Billy, dude, how are you going to tell me that your daughter can sing and play an instrument like that?

Billy goes, DJ, my daughter don't sing or play an instrument. There's your moneyball movie. Next time you watch it, just know that girl's singing and all that, she don't even do that for real. There it is. Right there. Thanks for the question on Moneyball.

Rana R. McKay: Thank you, Chris. Paul. Beat me the final part.

Paul: I think you might have it wrong. We're not Dodger fans here. Most of us are probably Padre fans. Do you have any Tony Gwynn stories?

David Justice: Tony, I absolutely do.

Paul: You remember him, don't you?

David Justice: I think I got two. I got no, one. When we go play a team, you guys, we're all in there, and we go over team meeting. Raina Reyno come up. They'll say, hard end, soft away. She'll chase high fast balls with two strikes. Got it. Now we're going down to Padres team. We get the Tony Gwynn. Our pitchy coach goes, throw it down the middle and hope he confuses himself. Because you don't know if you want to pull it or hit it the other way. Just throw it in the middle. That's literally everybody will laugh like you just did, and we go to the next player. We go that's it.

Because if you throw him inside, he going to come down to me in right field. You throw him away. He was just an unbelievable great hitter. It can't be that easy. But that used to be so funny 'cause it

got so funny that when we were in those meetings against Padres we all know what's coming. they get the Tony Gwynn. then they'll get to it, throw it down the middle, hope he confuses himself.

Rana R. McKay: Well, this has been absolutely amazing having you, David, speak with us, share your stories, messages of hope, your time in the game. It's just been awesome. Thank you so much for your time.

David Justice: Thank you.

Rana R. McKay: Thank you so much. For all of you all listening. It's really amazing.

David Justice: Thank you. [Applause]