



Bean, Billy (b. 1964)

by Linda Rapp

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Billy Bean on the set of the television program *I've Got A Secret* in 2006.
Courtesy Game Show Network.

Former baseball player and current television personality, Billy Bean was closeted throughout his major league career but has since become a proud advocate for glbtq rights.

William Daro Bean is the son of high-school classmates Linda Robertson and William Joseph Bean, who married in haste upon learning that she was pregnant. The Bean family arranged the wedding, which was held in a mortuary in Santa Ana, California. Even before Billy Bean's birth on May 11, 1964, his paternal grandmother, Carmela Bean, a devout convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, denied his mother entry into her home because the young woman was not of her faith.

When Bean's parents had been married for only about a year, his grandmother urged his father to undertake a two-year Mormon mission. He did so, leaving his wife to fend for herself and their child. The couple subsequently divorced, and Bean's father disappeared from his life.

When Bean was six years old, his mother remarried, but the union lasted only a year. Several years later, however, she entered into a happy and enduring marriage with police sergeant Ed Kovac. Bean, dressed in a rented white tuxedo, accompanied her down the aisle at the ceremony.

Bean was always an avid sports fan and began playing baseball early on. In his Little League days he was usually the smallest player on the team, but he was dedicated and worked hard to hone his skills, traits that were characteristic of him throughout his sports career.

By the time he was in high school, he had developed into a strong athlete, quarterbacking the football team and playing in the outfield for the baseball team that won the state championship in 1982, his senior year.

Because of his combination of athletic abilities and academic achievement, Bean received scholarship offers from a number of universities. After a round of campus visits, he and his parents decided upon Loyola Marymount University, a Jesuit institution in Los Angeles.

Bean quickly made friends there, becoming especially close to his freshman-year roommate and teammate Tim Layana, a pitcher. He was, however, not completely comfortable around teammates who continually boasted of their prowess with women. Bean "found [himself] curiously detached from this behavior, and . . . always felt like an intruder in their erotic world."

Bean was a solid performer on the field, named to the Division I All-America team in his junior year and attracting the attention of professional scouts. He was projected as a second- or third-round prospect until he tore a quadriceps muscle during a game. The injury dropped him to a middle-round pick, chosen by the Yankees. The Mets drafted Layana, but their coach, Dave Snow, persuaded both of them to return for their senior year in order to complete their degree programs. He thought that they would have a good chance of playing in the College World Series.

Coach Snow arranged for Bean and Layana to play minor-league baseball with the Fairbanks Goldpanners of the Alaska League. After a slow start due to his injury, Bean made a strong performance and was chosen as the Goldpanners' player of the year.

As Coach Snow had predicted, the Marymount team went to the College World Series the next year but was eventually eliminated by the Arizona team that went on to win the 1986 championship. Bean's fine showing in his senior year had made him a strong professional prospect again, though, and he was drafted by the Detroit Tigers in the third round.

Although Bean had never done much dating, during his last year at Marymount, he fell in love with fellow student Anna Maria Amato, whom he married in 1989.

Meanwhile, Bean had begun his professional baseball career. Assigned to the Tigers' triple-A club, the Toledo Mud Hens, after spring training in 1987, Bean was called up to Detroit less than a month into the season. In his first appearance at storied Tiger Stadium he batted lead-off and went four for six, tying the major-league record for most hits by a player in his first game. After the Tigers' 13 to 3 victory, manager Sparky Anderson gave Bean the official line-up card and a number of teammates made a point of stopping to talk with him. "They knew it was a special day I'd never forget," recalled Bean.

About two weeks later the Tigers were on the road against the California Angels, Bean's "hometown heroes." His family and friends came out in force, bearing banners in the stands. To their--and his--delight, he acquitted himself well.

Bean had made it to the parent club partly because the Tigers' star outfielder Kirk Gibson was on the disabled list. When Gibson returned, Bean got fewer opportunities to start games, usually coming in as a pinch-hitter or late-inning defensive replacement. At mid-season the Tigers sent him back to Toledo so that he could play on a more consistent basis and continue to develop his skills.

Bean remained with the Tigers organization, "shuttling back and forth between Detroit and Toledo." The Tigers were using him as a utility player rather than a position player, which significantly compromised his prospects for advancement with the club. In July 1989, during one of his stints with Toledo, his agent, Dennis Gilbert, called with the news that he had been traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Shortly after arriving in California, Bean met with Gilbert and mentioned his need to find lodging. To his surprise, the agent suggested "that apartment building you own." Unbeknownst to Bean, Gilbert had invested his and several other clients' money in a property eventually to be converted into condominiums. Bean moved into the building, "located right in the heart of West Hollywood, the gayest neighborhood in L. A."

Bean's girlfriend, Amato, moved in with him, to the disapproval of her parents. Bean proposed that they marry at the end of the baseball season.

Amato signed the two of them up for a membership at a local gym, where, Bean wrote, he "learned the definition of 'homoeroticism.'" He began making friends with other gay men. He was still in denial, yet taking very tentative steps to acknowledge his homosexuality. On a road trip to San Francisco, he took a cab to the Castro, where, hiding in the back seat, he "was amazed to find a place where men walked hand in hand."

He did not find the courage to get out of the cab on that visit, but on the team's return to San Francisco later that season, he went to a bookstore, intending to peruse the offerings on homosexuality. When a

Dodger teammate walked into the store, however, he ducked into a video booth and waited for the man to leave. Bean felt, he wrote, "wracked with shame" and without "the slightest idea how to reconcile my desires with my life inside or outside of the game."

Bean's manager in Los Angeles was baseball legend Tommy Lasorda, whose only son died of AIDS-related complications in 1991, Bean's last year with the Dodgers. Lasorda adamantly denied that his son had been gay or had died of AIDS.

Lasorda took to Bean and "whenever he found himself in shouting distance, he would announce, for all to hear, 'Billy Bean, Billy Bean, the boy of every girl's dream.'" The handsome Bean was uncomfortable with this paean to his supposed heterosexuality, as well as with his manager's homophobic jokes and his denial of his son's sexual orientation, but he never spoke up.

While the drama of the Lasordas, father and son, unfolded, Bean was reconnecting with his biological father, who had followed his career, and upon meeting him after decades of absence, expressed pride in his accomplishments. Shortly after their reunion, the elder Bean died of a massive heart attack.

In 1992, the Dodgers sold Bean's contract to the Kenetsu Buffaloes in Japan, where he spent "a miserable nine-month stint" before his agent got him a minor-league contract with the San Diego Padres for the 1993 season.

Upon returning to the United States, Bean began frequenting gay bars and exploring his true sexuality, but it was in a gym that he found a romantic partner, Sam Madani, an Iranian whose family had fled their native country. He met Madani in January 1993 while Bean and his wife were visiting her parents in suburban Washington, D. C.

Bean had discovered true love. He still had affection for his wife and was loathe to cause her pain, but he realized that he could not remain in the marriage. They separated and began divorce proceedings.

Bean began the next season at the Padres' triple-A club in Las Vegas but was soon called up to the majors again. "Eager to put down roots," he bought a house in Del Mar, and Madani moved to California from Washington, D. C.

Madani had previously been unfamiliar with baseball, but, wrote Bean, he "soon became our biggest booster." One day Bean took him on a tour of the stadium clubhouse, but surreptitiously, after all the other players had left, for fear that the romantic nature of their relationship might be discovered.

In July 1993 Bean hit his first major-league home run and instead of staying in the clubhouse to celebrate with his teammates, hurried home, where Madani, an excellent cook, had prepared a special meal to honor the occasion.

Two well-meaning Padres teammates, Brad Ausmus and Trevor Hoffman, did not want Bean's career milestone to go unmarked, and so they turned up on his doorstep bearing six-packs of beer. Bean hastily hid the dinner plates in the kitchen while Madani secreted himself in the garage.

When the friends finally left, Bean rushed to Madani and "apologized profusely," but, he said, "my proudest accomplishment on a baseball diamond had turned into an occasion of sadness and shame."

Two years into their relationship, in late 1994, Madani was diagnosed as HIV-positive and began a treatment regimen of AZT. Bean was tested and found to be uninfected.

At first Madani's medication seemed effective, but on a spring day in 1995 Bean came home to find him sick and with a high fever. Bean rushed him to the emergency room, but in the early hours of the next day, Madani went into cardiac arrest and died.

Upon returning home, Bean called his mother, who came over to comfort him on the loss of his "friend," but since Bean was still not out to her, she could not understand the true depth of his grief.

Unable to reveal to anyone the loss that he had just suffered, Bean dutifully showed up for a Padres media event later that morning and played in an exhibition game that evening, after which his manager informed him that he was being sent down to the triple-A club.

Bean reported to Las Vegas and decided against asking for personal time off to fly to Madani's funeral for fear that "someone might start asking why I cared enough about the guy to attend."

Bean was back with the parent club at the time of the All-Star break in July and spent his days off in Miami, visiting a gay friend who was one of the few people to whom he was out. The friend took him to a restaurant and introduced him to the owner, Efraín Veiga, with whom Bean was immediately smitten.

Veiga and Bean began a long-distance relationship, which would later turn into a life partnership.

After the baseball season Bean flew to Miami for visits with Veiga and decided to stay until the start of spring training.

In the spring of 1996 Bean's agent told him that the Padres were offering him only a minor-league contract, which Bean did not want to accept. He approached the Florida Marlins in hopes of being picked up by the Miami team, but they, too, only offered a position at the triple-A level. Convinced that he still had the ability to make it in the big leagues but emotionally worn out by the stress of remaining closeted, Bean reluctantly quit baseball.

Bean remained in Miami. Struggling to come to terms with his sexual orientation and identity, he lost touch with his friends from baseball and saw little of his family.

Late in the year he went to see his parents. After a tense couple of days he had a conversation with his mother, who had figured out what he was having such trouble telling her. She was supportive but hurt that he had not taken her into his confidence earlier. In retrospect, he wished that he had. When Bean informed his stepfather and siblings of his sexual orientation, they also expressed their affection and acceptance.

Bean returned to Miami, where he did some sports reporting and also became a partner in Veiga's restaurant, Yuca. In 1998 they decided to sell Yuca and open a larger restaurant.

In the summer of 1999 Bean was shocked to receive a fax, forwarded from Yuca, in which his ex-wife sent condolences for the death of his friend and college teammate Layana, who had been killed in a traffic accident. Bean realized that he had become so isolated that none of his old friends had known how to reach him.

With the new restaurant, Mayya, about to open, Bean was scheduled to do an interview with *Miami Herald* writer Lydia Martin, who asked if she could state that he and Veiga were partners in their personal as well as professional lives. Chagrined that remaining closeted had cost him contact with dear friends like Layana, he agreed.

The national media picked up the story. Bean's coming out was front-page news in the *New York Times*. The

only major-leaguer before him to reveal his homosexuality had been Glenn Burke. None has done so since.

Bean and Veiga were interviewed by Diane Sawyer on the ABC television news magazine program *20/20*. The segment won a GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Television Journalism.

Bean was pleased by the amount of positive reaction that he received and was happy to reestablish ties with old friends, including Ausmus and Hoffman.

There were cautious notes even amid the favorable comments, however. Bean's former manager Jim Riggleman stated that "everyone loved Billy on the club" and that "he was such a good guy that I think it would have been all right on the club. The news crews, that might have made it tough," if Bean had come out while he was still playing.

College teammate Jim Bruske expressed his personal support but opined that Bean "was right to keep it a secret. The guys would have been brutal." While such a reaction would clearly not have been universal, some players, such as Chad Curtis and Andy Pettitte, did state publicly that they would not be comfortable having a gay teammate.

Bean began speaking out for glbtq rights. He appeared at the Millennium March in 2000 and has given speeches at events of the Human Rights Campaign, which he strongly supports. He was also a featured spokesman for the Democratic National Committee in 2000.

Bean published his memoir, *Going the Other Way: Lessons from a Life in and out of Baseball*, in 2003. He wrote candidly and movingly of the joy and the anguish that he had experienced as both a gay man and a baseball player. He also optimistically declared that "baseball is ready" for an out active player but at the same time noted that "there still isn't a single openly gay scout, front office exec, coach, or even umpire."

Bean hoped to get back into baseball in a front office job and undertook talks with Dave Dombrowski, the general manager of the Marlins, about possible places for him within the Florida organization. Before anything was settled, however, Dombrowski quit to become president of the Detroit Tigers. Not wanting to leave Miami, Bean did not pursue employment opportunities in Detroit.

Bean and Veiga's Mexican restaurant, Mayya, had failed to find a clientele and closed after about a year. The couple then opened a successful business redeveloping residential properties.

In the spring of 2006 Bean joined the all gay and lesbian panel of the Game Show Network's revival of *I've Got a Secret*. Bean welcomed the opportunity to do the unscripted show. "How many gay people have the chance to be completely themselves on TV?" he asked. "We've been guarded and monitored forever. I enjoyed just being myself."

As an openly gay man, Bean feels a responsibility to be a role model, especially for younger people who may feel anxious about coming out. "It has been a long, hard journey to me, and I want people to learn from my mistakes, not share them," he stated.

In a 2003 interview Bean was asked to complete the sentence "Being gay is . . ." and replied that it is "just one of the many ways all people in this world are slightly different from one another. Diversity is one of the most beautiful and important things in life. It is so important for all of us in our community to be shining examples of pride and self-respect."

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