





# Skipper Knows Best

*New manager Andy Barkett was written off by every major league team as a player, only to find success and a fresh perspective.*

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**ET'S FOLLOW** the long and winding road the new manager of the Indians traveled on the way to Victory Field. But where should we stop first for a scenic view?

There's Andy Barkett, the college freshman, who got himself kicked off the North Carolina State team.

Andy Barkett, the reformed and all-grown-up Wolfpack graduate, who no major league organization wanted.

Andy Barkett, the determined young man who wouldn't take no for an answer, and ended up playing 11 years in professional baseball.

Andy Barkett, the Pittsburgh Pirate for a month. The most glorious month of his sporting life.

Andy Barkett, the financial advisor, detouring into the world of IRA's, seeking a respite from baseball.

Andy Barkett, his love affair with the game rekindled, working his way up the ladder as a teacher and leader in the minor leagues.

And now Andy Barkett, the 60th manager of the Indianapolis Indians, returning to the city that once gave him a memory he will forever cherish.

"It's hitting me that it's real," he said during the early days of spring training. "I guess I have to pinch myself a little bit, just looking at the journey and my career and how it started, and where I am now."

Indianapolis is a place with a poignant meaning for him. In 2005, he had just signed as a free agent with the Braves' organization, when the first road trip brought him to Victory Field. Just a few blocks away at IU Medical Center, an uncle he deeply loved was in a losing battle with cancer.

"He was in intensive care so I was able to spend five days with him towards the end of his life, talking baseball, bringing him game films," Barkett said. "The city of Indianapolis always has a place in my heart because of that experience. My uncle and I were close, and it was a godsend that I would sign

with the Braves and be in the same city where my uncle and aunt were, and get to meet some really neat people at that hospital who I actually still maintain relationships with today.

"I bet every day I come to that ballpark I'll look out in the distance at that hospital and think about him. It's almost poetic justice in a sense, that I'm managing the team. It's not a coincidence. So I'm looking forward to special things happening both on and off the field this coming season."

But wait. This is Andy Barkett at the age of 42. Maybe we should go back to the beginning, and a little boy growing up in Miami, to understand the fierce competitor who values work ethic, playing hard, and attention to detail above all else.

"It started when you were a little kid watching your parents and your uncles watch baseball," Barkett said. "Hearing them talk about the Big Red Machine and Reggie Jackson and Thurman Munson, and seeing their love for the game, and playing catch. And going to spring training games, watching the Orioles and Yankees play, and just going 'Wow, this is what I want to do.' Falling in love with the game, and then taking the journey all the way through life."

His father George lived five blocks from the University of Miami campus, so young Andy would bike over and hang around football practice during the Hurricanes' dynasty days. Look, there's Vinny Testaverde. Look, there's Michael Irvin. "I was a little sports rug-rat," Barkett said.

For a weekend second job, his father worked as a parking attendant at the Orange Bowl, minding a lot used by Dolphins players. So there young



Barkett (below) fills the void left by former Indians manager Dean Treanor (above) who left for an assistant coaching job with the Miami Marlins. Treanor leaves as the third-winningest manager in Tribe history, but Barkett is up to the challenge.



Andy was, chasing Dan Marino and Mark Clayton, pen and paper in hand. "I'd ask them for autographs every week, and they'd say, 'Andy, I signed last week.'"

He liked to play football. He liked to play basketball. Only one problem. "Slow-footed, can't jump, can't run. That's not a great combination for basketball or football," he said. "Baseball, I knew, was my only hope."

Barkett had a goal, and that was playing for the University of Miami, the place he had biked to so often. So he worked, he practiced, he tried to get better every day. "It became almost an obsession," he said. He did well in high school, his team eventually beaten in the state championship game, a disappointment that taught

him something about how much it can hurt to lose. Then he waited for the Miami dream to come true.

But it never did. Not the last time in Barkett's baseball life Plan A would not turn out.

He ended up at North Carolina State, and things were going fine his freshman season. Well, except for...

"I quit going to class," he said. "Sleeping in, and then going to eat at the training table and then going to practice. I was out of control."

Here he was, a kid from the pulsating social life of Miami, finding Raleigh, North Carolina's pace a tad slow. "So I had to kind of turn it up a notch. It didn't work out good for me. I should have gone to their speed. It would have saved me some heartache."

Finally came the day his coach, Ray Tanner, called him in the office, to say the words Andy Barkett has never, ever forgotten.

"Pack your stuff, get out of here, and don't come back."

His father booted him from the house, with the directive that he needed to grow up. "I was a mess at the time," he said. "A lot of people had written me off."

Barkett ended up at a summer league in Virginia, his intentions to play a little and go to junior college. Then he met the man who changed everything. Dayton Moore was a



coach in the league – he is now general manager for the Kansas City Royals – and sat Barkett down to give him a way out of his current dead end. Get a couple of A's in summer school, find a job, work hard, play well, and Moore would see what he could do about that North Carolina State scholarship.

"Kind of the turning point in my life," Barkett said. "Dayton basically reached out and decided he wanted to help a young man change his life, and I was receptive."

Barkett got his A's, did his work,

earned league MVP and his team won the championship. During the playoffs, he stepped off the team bus in Front Royal, Virginia, and there sitting at a picnic table was . . . Ray Tanner. He had a contract in hand, a zero-tolerance agreement to return to school. Barkett had to go to class, attend study hall, do everything by the book. Foul up once, and he was gone, this time for good.

Tanner is now athletic director at South Carolina and remembers well the maturation of Andy Barkett.

"He never was a bad kid, or difficult. I probably am a little bit guilty of being a little bit too much of a disciplinarian, in hindsight. At times I think I might have been

more difficult than I needed to be," he said. "But again, there is accountability and we were at a point where we were all going to get on the same page, and he did. Watching him go through his career, I'm proud of him. I always was."

Barkett ended up making the dean's list -- "I didn't realize how easy college was when you actually went to class every day" – and was second team all-ACC at first base. He played for the U.S. national team. He's still in the top-10 at North Carolina State for career RBI, total bases and doubles.

"If it wasn't for Dayton Moore I don't know if we'd be having this conversation," he said. "So now part of why I do what I do is to change people's lives. Maybe pour into somebody that nobody believes in anymore, and turn that guy around."

He knew what he wanted after North Carolina State; a chance to play

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professional baseball. But when the draft came, nobody dialed his number. While he was in college, there were 28 major league franchises, and any of them would do fine, from Boston to San Diego.

"I called all 28 teams. I had a paper with lines and checkmarks, yes or no. It was like writing a note to a girl, 'Do you like me, yes or no?' And it was all nos."

That's what you call a deep slump, 0-for-28. "I threw away that paper," he said. "I should have kept it."

Time to give up, and go find a day job? No.

"I just believed I could play. I thought they were wrong. I believed in myself."

Finally, Barkett found out about an opportunity in an independent league. Butte, Montana. He knew the odds. Nobody makes it to the major leagues from an independent team in Butte, Montana, but he didn't care about the odds. He was on a mission.

"If I didn't have that, I wouldn't have been able to play for very long. I would have had that one season in Butte and that would have been it. But I had the drive and determination to make it to the big leagues because so many people told me I couldn't. I had a chip on my shoulder."

With one month left in the season at Butte, the phone rang. The Texas Rangers had an offer. This was 1995. Six years and several minor league moves later, Andy Barkett was in PNC Park, putting on a Pirates' uniform at the age of 26. He was given No. 50, the same number worn now by former Indians pitcher Jameson Taillon.

That was May 28, 2001. "I can still remember just about every part of that day like it was yesterday," he said.



Barkett (left) played in just 17 major league games tallying a .304 batting average in 46 at bats and a home run in the Minnesota Twins' old home, the Metrodome (above). It may have been a brief visit to The Bigs, but Barkett is proud of his time as a major leaguer.

off Minnesota's Joe Mays on June 9 in the Metrodome. Barkett's one and only major league homer, against a man who pitched in the All-Star Game that season for the American League.

"You know you're getting old when you hit a home run in a ballpark that doesn't exist anymore," Barkett said. A young Twins fan who retrieved the home run ball that day would only give it back for something in return. "He was negotiating for one of Brian Giles' bats or something" Barkett said. But a Pirate official, Jeff Banister, happened to be around and worked out the deal. Barkett has been thanking Banister ever since.

"When I hit that, I thought, 'Wow, this guy's having a good year and I just took him deep. I'm not getting sent down anytime soon,'" Barkett said. "Boy, was I wrong."

His major league life would last but 17 games, in which he hit .304. The

The lineup card in the clubhouse with his name on it. Gazing across the field to see Tony Perez -- a favorite of his when he was a kid -- as just-named interim manager of the Marlins. Running out to play left field. The first pitch he saw as a major leaguer from Chuck Smith, and lining it for a double. The roars of the crowd. All of it still freshly painted in his mind.

"It was basically for me the way to say I was able to prove all those people wrong," Barkett said. "For the rest of my life I can say I was a major league baseball player."

The baseball he hit it for that double is now in his 13-year-old son Isaiah's room. So is the ball he smashed



proverbial cup of coffee, but that cup tasted awfully sweet. Flash forward years later, and he was visiting the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown with his son. Anyone who spends 10 minutes in the major leagues gets a private tour of the museum, with a stop in the hallowed records room.

"That's when the man looked at my son and said, 'There's only 19,000 and X people that ever played major league baseball in the last 100-something years, and your dad's one of them.' You had to handle the records with gloves. When I saw that and heard that, it kind of gave me chills. It made it a little bit bigger for me than it's always been.

"I've always been around people who had 20 years or 10 years in the big leagues. I guess I've been more humbled by it than proud of it over the years because it's only 30 days. But then you look at what I had to do to get it, it's like, that's pretty cool I got 30 days."

"Now, just knowing what I know about grading players, I would probably grade myself the same way. I don't know if I would have drafted me either. If I were to write a report on me like I know how to write reports on players now, I'd know exactly why I had 30 days in the big leagues, and I probably shouldn't have gotten that. The reason I got it was because nobody can measure what's inside you. Nobody can measure what will push you to keep going. Nobody can measure your will and determination to improve."

His 11 years as a professional player included three winter league championships for teams in Puerto Rico, the

Dominican Republic and Venezuela. Barkett's long ride as a player ended in 2005, and that's when he became a financial advisor, seeking some distance. "My goal was to get away from the game, it wasn't to get back in. But things have kind of fallen into place."

Dayton Moore interceded again and soon Barkett had a consultant's job in the Braves' organization. Then came a series of managerial stops – his record was 531-506, with a Southern League championship for Jacksonville in 2014 – followed by a year spent as assistant hitting coordinator for the Miami Marlins, and last season for the Pirates.

**“The ultimate goal is for the Pirates to win the World Series ... OUR JOB IS TO DEVELOP OUR PLAYERS TO HELP THAT HAPPEN.”**

And now, Indianapolis, managing for the major league organization that once called him to PNC Park and made his dream come true. "You almost feel like you belong," he said.

Barkett's story represents so much of what baseball is about, for all the Indians who yearn for taking one more step. Surely, their new manager can be an example to them.

"For a long time, I felt uncomfortable about talking about myself to other players, about my journey," he said. "But I think they get it because of how I lead my team. 'I know one way to do things, fellas, and it's this way. That's how I got to where I got, and beat the odds, so to speak. So if I can do that, you guys who've been drafted

and have a lot more talent than I have can do a lot more.'"

Tanner, the old college coach who once gave him the boot: "Nothing was given to Andy. He worked for what he got, he invested in it. He earned his way. I see him as a player's manager. You show up, you bring your lunch pail, you do things the right way, play hard every day, and the game will take care of itself."

Barkett is a family man with wife Brandy, son Isaiah, and daughters Jade and Emma. Jade just played on a high school state soccer champion and is being recruited. "One thing we do have in common which is kind of cool

to watch is the relentless will to fight and win the game. I see that in her," he said. "That's the way I played every night, with my hair on fire, and she plays with her hair on fire, too."

Which is the attitude he plans to bring to the Indians in 2017.

"The ultimate goal for the organization is for the Pittsburgh Pirates to win the World Series, and we want to play a part of that," he said. "Our job is to develop our players to help that happen. If they're playing winning baseball every night then we're all on the same page and we're pulling on the same rope. It's just a mindset of how you're going about your business every day. My job is to put our players in that mindset, and keep them there."

And if any of the players don't understand the value of persistence, they need only ask the manager, about the time every major league team once said no.