

On the road with Ray Fagnant '86,
the Red Sox Northeast Regional
Scouting Supervisor



The Dream Maker

By TROY WATKINS

He watches more than 500 baseball games, in person, each year. A six-hour car ride from one game to another is routine and there have been many days when he has arrived at a field at 7 a.m. and left it at 1 a.m. It's just part of the job for **Ray Fagnant '86**, now in his 16th year as a scout for the Boston Red Sox. "It's a labor of love," he says.

“I got a great four-year Assumption experience, an education that helped me down the road.”

A talented and recruited baseball catcher coming out of high school, Ray Fagnant chose to attend Assumption after visiting with his father during the spring of his senior year of high school. “I walked on the campus and I just knew it was the right place,” Ray said. “I knew about the College’s reputation from others who had attended, but I remember walking through Kennedy Hall on my tour and passing by a calculus class where they were about to answer a question and I said, “Hey Dad, I know the answer.” It was a brief moment that made Ray feel like he belonged.

“I also valued my parochial school education and related to the religious education offered at Assumption. I was very comfortable there. It seemed like a natural progression.” **Mike LaBrie ’79**, Ray’s legion baseball coach, also steered him toward AC. Ray explained, “Mike said one thing that held true to form for me, ‘Your lifelong friends after college are a function of your freshman-year geography.’ My closest four friends today were my neighbors on the third floor of Founders Hall my freshman year.” Ray thrived at Assumption and on its baseball team. He graduated as the College’s home run king with 23 career round-trippers (currently 5th all-time).

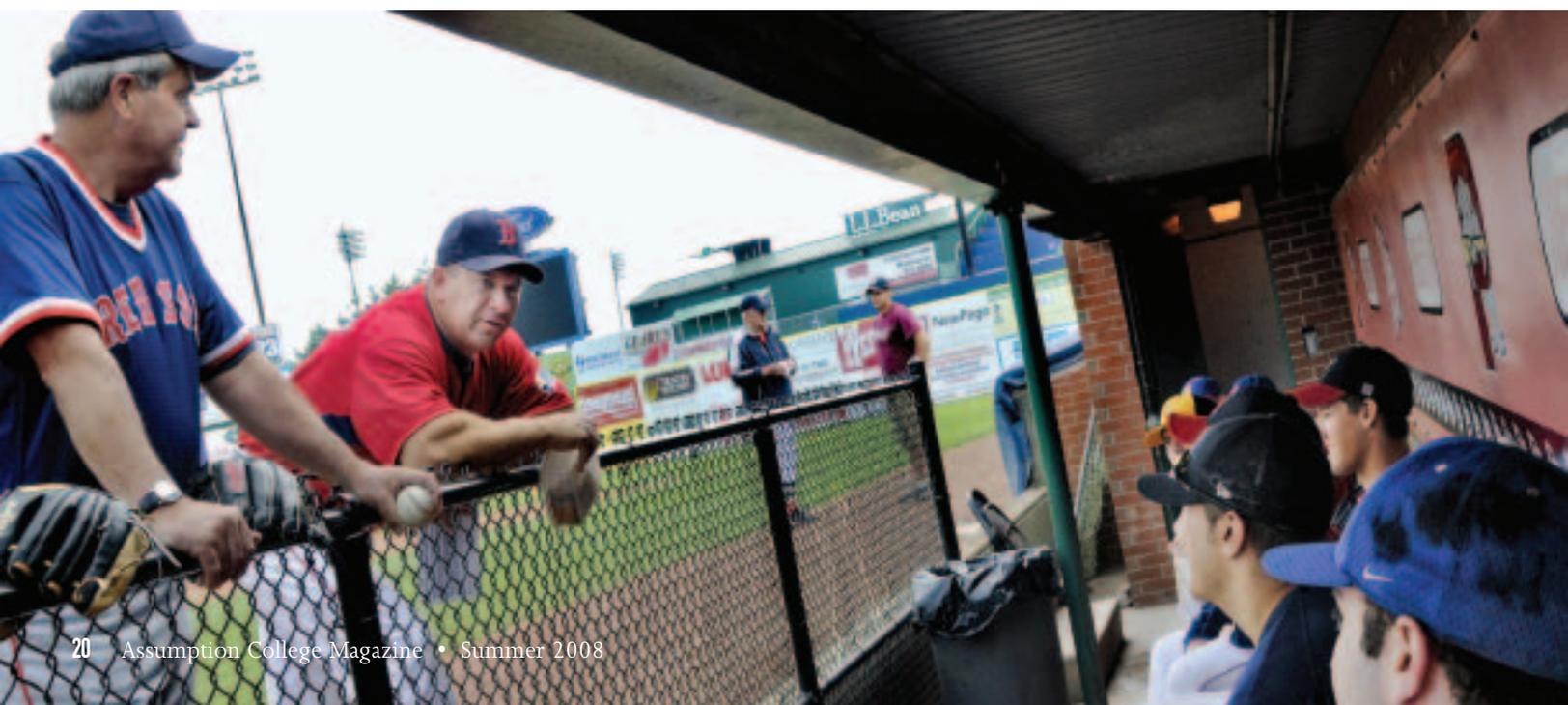
“I got a great four-year Assumption experience, an education that helped me down the road and I was able to play professional baseball.” A hand injury forced Ray to sit out his sophomore year, but allowed him to return after graduating in 1986. He began pursuit of a master’s degree (later earning a MBA from the University of Connecticut) and worked as a graduate resident assistant in what is now Salisbury Hall, while playing his final season at Assumption in 1987. Soon after, he signed with the Pittsburgh Pirates. After two years in the Pirates organization he was released, then picked up by the Boston Red Sox and played in the organization for three years before his release.

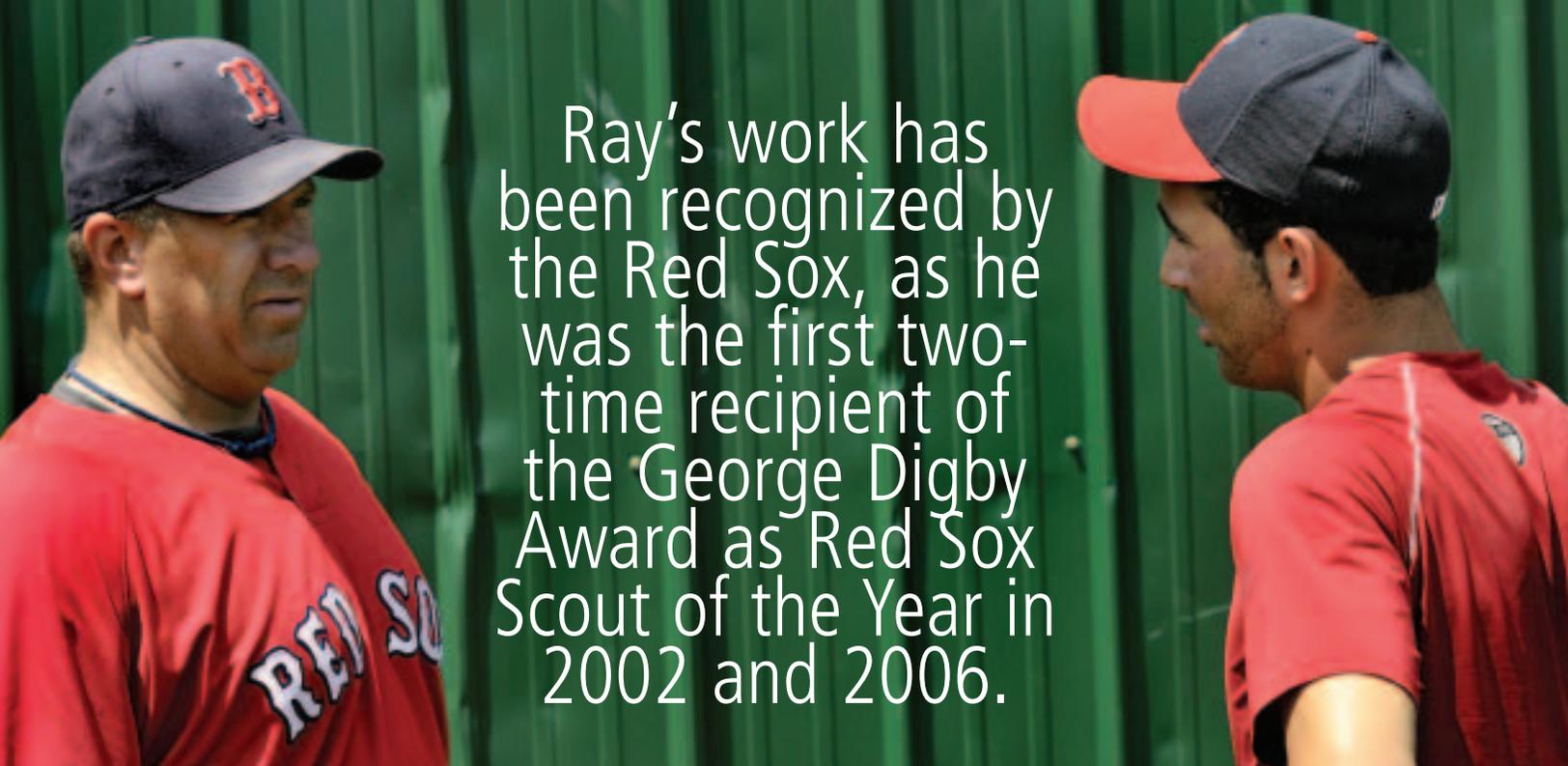
Ray went back to work at CIGNA, as he had for the previous five off-seasons, putting his math degree to work in the company’s actuarial division. He was called by Bill Enos—a major League

Baseball scout for more than 50 years and the senior member of the Red Sox scouts. Ray explained, “Bill was retiring and he asked me if I was interested in taking his spot. It was early in the spring and I was waiting to hear from a couple of teams, but I knew that it was what I wanted to do because it was a chance for me to stay in baseball. When I called my girlfriend (Suzanne, now his wife) she said ‘I’m sorry and congratulations.’” She knew how much playing baseball meant to him, but was happy for his opportunity to continue working in professional baseball.

He started in the spring of 1993 and today is the Northeast Regional Scouting Supervisor for the defending World Series champion Red Sox. The hours are long and the travel is extensive, but Ray is doing something that he loves and is able to join wife Suzanne and their boys Christian (7), Matthew (4) and James (2) almost every night in their East Granby, CT, home. “The most important thing to me is my family and the Red Sox organization believes in it as well. I’ve brought my family with me to many games and events and we’ve gotten to play and run around the field at Fenway together. Chris has taken pictures into school of him hitting from home plate or pitching from the mound at Fenway. What a thrill for him.” The job has some obvious perks.

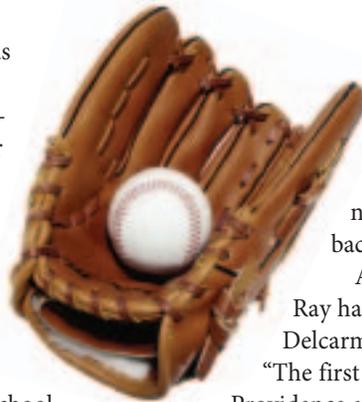
“When I go to a game, I know who I’m going there to see but I have been pleasantly surprised by other players.”





Ray's work has been recognized by the Red Sox, as he was the first two-time recipient of the George Digby Award as Red Sox Scout of the Year in 2002 and 2006.

Ray scouts players from all levels—15-year-olds to major leaguers—year round, identifying and/or evaluating players that have been previously identified as professional prospects. He is responsible for New England, New York, New Jersey and eastern Canada. “When I go to a game, I know who I’m going there to see but I have been pleasantly surprised by other players,” he said. “Up until the draft in June, I’m looking at players who are eligible for the draft. Once the draft is over, we start planning for next year.” During the summer, he’ll see numerous leagues, including legion, high school amateurs, the college summer leagues (New York and New England collegiates and Cape Cod) as well as pro leagues from ‘A’ ball to the majors.



Over the years the availability of the statistical information on players has increased, which has made his job easier. While Ray used to have stats faxed or e-mailed to him from team officials, now he utilizes web sites to retrieve information and check box scores. The Red Sox also have a very comprehensive system to maintain statistics, evaluations and medical reports for prospects and players. “I’ll see a player, write a report, put it in the system, and upload it to Boston so everyone in the organization has instant access to it,” he said. “We don’t make a player transaction before doing exhaustive statistical analyses, but you can’t scout a player on just statistics or ‘tools’ (talent) alone. Scouting is an opinion, so the more opinions we can get about a player, the better we’re able to evaluate him.”

Ray’s work has been recognized by the Red Sox—he was the first two-time recipient of the George Digby Award as Red Sox Scout of the Year in 2002 and 2006. George Digby was a Red Sox scout for 50 years (1944–94) and elected to the team’s Hall of Fame earlier this year. Ray said his performance is evaluated in a way similar to how most workers are reviewed by their supervisors. “Ultimately, they have to decide if I put the Red Sox in the

right position to potentially select these players,”

Ray said. “If I properly evaluate a player where I think he should be, there’s a one-in-30 chance (there are 30 MLB teams) of getting him because we need to select him in the draft. We need to find out about the player as a person, his background, character, make-up and family.”

Among the numerous professional players Ray has scouted and signed are Lou Merloni, Manny Delcarmen, Craig Hansen, Carl Pavano and Brian Rose. “The first game I ever scouted was Holy Cross vs.

Providence and the leadoff batter was Lou Merloni. To scout him and sign him was wonderful. Now it’s 15 years later and he had a very good career, made the most of his ability and was tremendously well respected by his community and everyone in baseball. He’s starting to do some radio and TV work and may become more successful behind the microphone.”

Although a vast majority of the players signed by scouts don’t make the major leagues, Ray doesn’t measure his success in that manner. “I’ve never been disappointed to learn that someone I signed, has failed,” Ray explained. “I have been disappointed if they failed for the wrong reasons ... such as a lack of effort or conditions that prevented them from succeeding. Some of the kids I’m most proud of are guys that didn’t make it out of ‘A’ ball, but maybe they got a lot out of their ability, they were well respected, or they became high school coaches and just good people.”

With the Red Sox’s recent success, Ray is the owner of two World Series Champion rings, though he’s never worn more than one at a time. “Wherever I go, people love to see it. I take it off, let them put it on their finger and take pictures. I’m thrilled to be able to share it. And my oldest son has been so spoiled by the success that he recently said, ‘Daddy, win one more and all three of us boys will have one.’” Keep dreaming, kid ... you never know. ❖