

A Hit with Students

Red Sox's Fred Olsen '97 Connects Classroom to Career

Monday, March 24, 2014

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Fred Olsen '97 addresses a standing room only audience about his journey from UNH to the Front Office of the Boston Red Sox.

What are the odds of a kid growing up in Durham, never pursuing baseball beyond t-ball, and yet becoming a valued contributor to two World Series Championships with the Boston Red Sox?

Fred Olsen '97 not only reached this singular achievement by the time he was 38 – he's got the key to Fenway Park to prove it.

Last month, Olsen came back to campus to share his journey into the highest ranks of Major League Baseball as part of the Center for International Education's "Happy Returns" program. The two-day event called for Olsen, an International Affairs and business administration dual graduate, to deliver a public lecture as well as several guest lectures at Paul College and the College of Liberal Arts.

When students heard a key member of the Red Sox was coming, reports are that front row seats were a bit more in demand than usual.



“THE ENERGY WAS INCREDIBLY INTENSE,” SAYS FRED OLSEN OF THE 2013 RED SOX SEASON. “I can honestly say that students asked more questions during his 20 minutes in my classes than they’ve asked all year,” quipped Bill Knowles, who teaches managerial accounting.

“It’s always great when someone from the business world comes into a classroom setting,” agrees lecturer Scott Berube. “It reinforces that they can use what they are learning in their careers.”

If positive reinforcement was a key point, Olsen hit the point out of the park. He recounted his valuable international exposure at UNH, where he participated in a bank internship in Greece, belonged to the French Club, and took international affairs

classes. A dual citizen of the U.S. and France, Olsen graduated from UNH with a genuine thirst for adventure.

His adventure began on Wall Street, where, he says, he did what any red-blooded business graduate might do in the 90s: “I wanted to see if I could make a million bucks. I quickly discovered I wasn’t motivated primarily by money.” He left the financial capital of New York for the political capital of Washington, D.C., where he earned a master’s degree in international commerce and policy while rubbing shoulders with diplomats and entrepreneurs working at the European Institute, a public policy forum that focuses on transatlantic relations. In 2005, the newly minted M.A. and his wife, Meredith, returned to Boston, which could at the time arguably be called the baseball capital of America.

And so Olsen, urbane, well-educated, and experienced, did what any life-long Sox fan would do: He took a pay cut to work in the ticketing office.

“What can I say?” Olsen told his audience. “I was born a Red Sox fan and have always loved sports. But I was clear about my goals and told management that I intended to work my way up.”

That message resonated with students such as Brian Finney, a sophomore business major from Pelham, N.H. Finney says Olsen’s pursuit of his true passion impressed him most of all. “He left a fantastic job to pursue his dreams. That took guts,” says Finney.

It’s one thing to get hired by a major league ball club; it’s quite another thing to thrive in it. Yet, this is exactly what Olsen has accomplished since 2006. Taking on extra assignments and building networks within the organization, in 2009 Olsen jumped at the chance to serve as the project director for the NHL’s Winter Classic hockey contest at Fenway Park.

Unlike the two previous classics held at other North American venues that featured a single professional game, Olsen and his team paired a game between the Boston Bruins and Philadelphia Flyers with two college games. The series of events was dubbed “Frozen Fenway” and featured a dramatic come-from-behind win by the UNH women’s hockey team over Northeastern University.

The event was so successful that Olsen quickly found himself in charge of all non-baseball events at Fenway, including movie nights and international soccer “friendlies” featuring Liverpool FC, the fabled English soccer club his bosses John Henry and Tom Warner bought in 2010.

As the director of special projects – a job title as understated as the man himself – Olsen also assumed responsibility for post-season Front Office operations. Last year, this meant living and dying each and every moment of the Sox fairy tale comeback from the team’s epic 2011 collapse and the emotional aftershock of the Boston Marathon bombings.

“The energy was incredibly intense,” Olsen says. “Our offices are much closer to the stands and playing field than people realize. On game days, there’s a lot of excitement and enthusiasm coursing through the halls.”

Olsen's got a business card that any UNH student would covet. On one side are his name and contacts. On the other side are a big red "B," the words "World Series Champions," and the dates of each championship – with plenty of room left for more.

Originally published by:

UNH Today

- WRITTEN BY:
[Staff writer](#) | Communications and Public Affairs

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University of New Hampshire

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The stories are written by the staff of [UNH Communications and Public Affairs](#).

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