

BEAUCHAMP

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debut five years later.

He spent a decade in the majors mostly as a part-time player.

"People have kind of lost focus about what it was like to play in the major leagues back then," Kash Beauchamp said. "My dad used to have to come home and get a job, either driving a propane truck or selling cowboy boots at a buffalo ranch."

When Kash, a 6-foot-3, 165-pound center fielder, found out he was likely to be a high first-round pick in the January 1982 draft, his preference was to go anywhere but Toronto, which had the first pick and where Jim was a minor-league coach.

Beauchamp preferred Boston, his favorite team. But Toronto picked him, passing on future Hall of Famer Kirby Puckett, who was picked third by the Twins.

"I would say living up to the standard my dad set and being drafted No. 1 overall were the two things that I allowed to put a lot of extra pressure on myself," Beauchamp said.

Beauchamp remembers traveling to Atlanta a few years ago with friend Chris Carminucci, a minor-league executive.

One night, the two were meeting Jim, then a roving instructor with the Braves, and Atlanta outfielder Jeff Francoeur for dinner.

When Jim saw Francoeur, he gave his protege a hug. When he saw Kash, he greeted his son with an emotionless handshake.

"I don't know if it's because we're from Oklahoma and we're hard-nosed," Kash Beauchamp said. "That's what's embedded in us. We're just men's men, I guess."

Jim was a disciplinarian to Kash and his brother, Tim. When Kash brought home a report card with a 'C' on it or acted up in school or at home, he knew he was in for a whipping.

He was strict with daughters Ann Rene, Shanna and Lauren, too, but they more frequently witnessed his softer side.

"I saw it come across even more with my daughter — his granddaughter, Brooke," said daughter Lauren Lee. "He had a real soft spot in his heart for her."

It rubbed off on his son. Kash admits he's sometimes easier on daughter Kaleigh (15) than on sons Kyle (19) and Kobe (10).

"My dad, with my sisters, was the most kind, gentle-hearted person, and I'm the same way with my daughter," Beauchamp said. "But my sons are my sons, and there's a different kind of relationship. Everything is business and man-to-man."

Kash Beauchamp was enjoying one of his best seasons in 1986, and the Blue Jays were taking notice.

After tearing up Double-A, Beauchamp was in the midst of a productive stint in Triple-A before suffering a broken scapula in a collision at home plate.

Beauchamp was out for the season and later found out he was to be promoted to Toronto the next day.

"The fact that I never made it to the major leagues, I am totally, totally fine with," Beauchamp said. "It doesn't bother me at all. I know I gave it all I had."

Beauchamp played in six major-league organizations but never rose above Triple-A. In 1993, he was the first player signed by an affiliated team out of independent ball and he spent the end of that season in Double-A with the Cincinnati Reds organization.

Beauchamp's most trying year came in 1989, when he played for Jim at Richmond, the Triple-A affiliate of the Braves. The team won the league championship, but Beauchamp didn't see the field as much as he would have liked.

Beauchamp's respect for his father made it difficult for him to complain directly to him, so hard feelings about spending too much time on the bench were aired to Pam, Kash's stepmother.

"He was a little harder on Kash than he was on anybody else," said Pam Beauchamp, Jim's wife of 30 years. "I think some fathers would try to push their kid ahead, but Jim's not that type of person. He wanted so bad not to look like he was showing any favoritism that he overdid it."

In July 2001, Beauchamp was arrested for a domestic incident involving his girlfriend outside a restaurant in Lincoln, Neb.

Beauchamp, a first-year manager for the Lincoln Saltdogs, eventually resigned. He spent the night and part of the next day in jail, but the charges were dropped after Beauchamp completed a diversion program.

"That was the toughest time in my life, there's no doubt about it," Beauchamp said. "I never thought I would be the type of person that would go to jail."

Beauchamp denies hitting the woman, and Lincoln president Charlie Meyer gave Beauchamp a strong recommendation when the Wingsnuts were looking for their first manager six years later.

"I talk to him all the time," Meyer said. "He was a great player and a great manager for our organization. It was just an unfortunate situation, and from a public relations standpoint we accepted his resignation and moved forward."

Beauchamp would have five

more jobs — including the rest of 2001 as a player with the Yuma (Ariz.) Bullfrogs — in independent baseball before becoming a candidate for Wichita's first manager.

Wingsnuts general manager Josh Robertson looked into the Lincoln incident and was satisfied with Beauchamp's account.

"It looked bad in the community, regardless of him getting exonerated of everything," Robertson said. "But (Lincoln) said if that hadn't happened, he'd still be their manager. When they told me the story, they still had his back."

Beauchamp was married for the second time on April 3. His wife, Jennifer, is a law enforcement agent. He was divorced from his first wife, Kerri, in 1997 after a 13-year marriage.

Romans 8:28 is the Bible verse Beauchamp leaned on when it became evident he would never reach the major leagues. It reads: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God."

He would find those words comforting in the spring of 2006, when Jim was diagnosed with a blood disorder and told that it could progress into leukemia.

About a year later, it did, and he was given four months — until October — to live.

"My father always made us go to church as kids, every Sunday," Beauchamp said. "That's something I'm very thankful for, because that's what's gotten me through the tough times in my life — reading the Bible and seeing what's in the Bible."

The oldest of Jim's five children — three with his first wife Judy, and two with Pam — Kash tried to ensure his siblings stayed positive as their father grew weaker.

"Kash kind of always wanted to talk about something else," Lee said. "He didn't want to realize it was actually happening. He wasn't in denial, but it was better for him to not talk about it. He's kind of always the life of the party and he wanted to cheer everybody up."

Kash was working in the offices of the independent South Coast League, about 90 minutes away from his father's home in Atlanta, when Jim was diagnosed.

"I think that was a very good time for Kash," Pam Beauchamp said. "In baseball, with the jobs they had, they didn't get to see each other very often. They talked a lot — they were always calling each other and they talked about everything in the world. Baseball and OU were the main things."

"It was a real blessing that Kash was in the area and able to be around his dad. We never know why things work the way they do, but we know in hindsight sometimes."

Jim Beauchamp died on Christmas Day 2007 at 68. He hung on long enough to see most of Oklahoma's football season and the birth of Lee's baby, Rebecca, on Sept. 19.

"He fought and battled and scrapped and clawed," Kash Beauchamp said.

Several ex-major leaguers attended his memorial service and Francoeur, Braves manager Bobby Cox and former general manager John Schuerholtz gave eulogies. The Braves this season are wearing patches reading "Beach" on their jerseys to honor Jim.

"That's such a bittersweet thing," Pam said. "Every time I see it, I'm happy and it's such a great honor. But it makes me really think more about the fact that he's not here."

Even though Kash grieved during his father's illness and prepared himself for the inevitable, he found himself turning back to Romans 8:28 to get him through each day. Words by the pastor during the memorial service also provided comfort.

"This is a deal where God said, 'What better gift to give my son Jesus than the gift of Jim Beauchamp on his birthday,'" Beauchamp said. "That's the way he put it — God took control of this one."

Beauchamp has found his dream job in Wichita. It's close to home, but now it has become home — he lives alone in a downtown apartment but plans on buying a house in the suburbs with Jennifer.

A favorite of players during his 10 years managing in independent leagues, Beauchamp has been embraced by the Wingsnuts.

"He's real big on hard-nosed guys who can hustle, guys that don't really take plays off," outfielder Blake Gailen said. "He's big on fundamentals, so if you do things right you're going to succeed for him."

Beauchamp had time to grieve for his father during Jim's illness, but the memories of his father will never fade. He still tears up when describing their relationship.

"I think the grieving process is just beginning," Pam said.

He is also close to his mother, who is still living. During her marriage to Jim, she traveled with him while Kash stayed in Oklahoma to play baseball and live with his grandmother, Beulah.

But the bond between father and son was unbreakable and not based solely on the game they both loved.

"One thing that my father always did, as tough and as hard-nosed as he was — he always told his kids that he loved us," Beauchamp said. "He was not too big of a man to tell us that he loved us. Every time we talked on the phone — 'I love you.' That's the greatest gift my dad ever gave me."