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(Web exclusive: Jeff Suppan)

August 2007

Q&A: Jeff Suppan, pitcher, Milwaukee Brewers

BY KERRY WEBER

As a sixth grader at St. Bernardine of Siena school in San Bernardino, California, Jeff Suppan wrote an essay stating his goal of one day becoming a Major League Baseball player. Today, after 12 years as a pitcher in the majors — not to mention a 2006 World Series title with the St. Louis Cardinals, and the National League Championship Series MVP title that same year — it's safe to say Suppan, now 32, got his wish.

Of course Suppan's lifelong dedication to his sport is paralleled only by his devotion to his Catholic faith. He is an excellent example of stewardship in action — he supports Baseballers Against Drugs, serves as a member of the board of directors for Crespi Carmelite High School in Encino, California, his alma mater, and participated in the Pontifical Council of Church and Sport in Rome. He also donates \$50 to the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund for each strikeout he pitches. The organization provides assistance to children and families of U.S. soldiers killed in the line of duty. Now a pitcher with the Milwaukee Brewers, Suppan took the time one game day to speak with Catholic Digest about the importance of prayer, pitching, and being a team player.

CD: I was born in Milwaukee. How are you enjoying my hometown?

SUPPAN: I think it's great. When I played for Pittsburg and St. Louis I got to come here a lot because they are actually in the same division [as the Brewers]. I think any town is pretty great once you get to know some places.

CD: Definitely. Have you made it to Leon's Frozen Custard? It's my family's favorite.

SUPPAN: No, I'll have to write that down. I'll check it out.

CD: So in what city do you most enjoy playing ball?

SUPPAN: To be honest, all the major league cities are really great. But obviously I enjoy when I'm home [in California] where I grew up, and my friends and family are able to watch me in Los Angeles.

CD: Well in Milwaukee you've got [Brewers mascot] Bernie Brewer looking out for you.

SUPPAN: (laughing) Yeah he's good for that, I'll tell you. He's a big guy.



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A closer look at Jeff Suppan

What he's reading now: *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Grace* by Scott Hahn

Favorite movie: "Without Limits" — the story of runner Steve Prefontaine. "I can't run as much or as fast as Pre, but I do run."

On his desire to be a Major League Baseball player: "I remember in sixth grade I wrote a paper on what I wanted to be, and that was one of the things."

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CD: How did you become involved with the "Champions of Faith" project?

SUPPAN: It just came through a friendship with John Morales [writer and narrator of "Champions of Faith". I took a trip to Rome with my wife and family, and I participated in the Pontifical Council of Church and Sport in November 2005, and that's where I met John. Later, he asked me about [taking part in] this DVD that was in the works.

CD: What were you hoping to accomplish by your involvement with the project?

SUPPAN: I was just trying to be a good member of the team (laughing), and to really just allow the Holy Spirit to use me in whatever way. I didn't have any preconceived ideas. We got to see the premiere of the film in Arizona, and it was just — wow. It's just an awesome tool that they've created.

CD: I think it is a very powerful and professionally done film. And it has a lot of really good things to say.

SUPPAN: Yeah, you just be yourself and you speak from the heart, that's what you're going to see. You're going to see a side of [the players] that you're probably not used to seeing. I'm looking forward to speaking with kids who'll watch the video and see some of their favorite baseball players talking about the Catholic faith, and I'm interested to see how they respond to it.

CD: Is it difficult to live your faith in the kind of environment that your job sometimes requires — being on the road, being in the public eye?

SUPPAN: I do the best I can in whatever environment I'm in. This is my job and I have to go about it and do the best I can. I think there are a lot of tools I've learned along the way. I continue to study, read, and attend Mass as much as possible, which strengthens me — and, that would strengthen anyone in any walk of life. I don't look at my job as any different than anyone else's. The temptations that are there for me are there for anyone else.

CD: It is hard to get to Mass when you spend so much time on the road?

SUPPAN: At times it can be. I try to go to daily Mass in some cities. In Chicago, Holy Name Cathedral is right down the street, so that's great for me. They're starting to have Masses [for the players] in ballparks. Sometimes it's very hard — sometimes you're getting home between 12 a.m. and 2 a.m., and basically the bus times are at 9 a.m., so that means you have to go to a 7:30 a.m. Mass. Physically, it's hard.



Milwaukee Brewers pitcher Jeff Suppan addresses the crowd at the world premiere of "Champions of Faith" in Phoenix, Arizona. (Courtesy of Catholic Exchange)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1: Closer look at Jeff Suppan

Confirmation name: "Francis. I just went up to Holy Hill [Basilica in Milwaukee, Wisconsin] yesterday and I bought all these DVDs. I bought some of the lives of the saints, including one [about St. Francis] called 'Brother Sun, Sister Moon.'"

If he hadn't become a Major League Baseball player: "I can't even answer that question. I've dedicated so much of my life to baseball. But what I'd enjoy when I'm retired? My wife and I own a restaurant together, Soup's Grill. I think being a restaurateur, we really enjoy that. We enjoy interacting with people."

CD: Sure, especially if you have to play a game that day or travel.

SUPPAN: Yeah, I'm not making excuses. It is hard, but I get to Mass.

CD: Do you incorporate prayer into the game, as well?

SUPPAN: In anything I do, especially my job, which is baseball, I try to spend as much time in prayer as possible. It's always helped me to remain centered and focused on the things that are important. I pray through my angel many times for a little help. On the mound or in the dugout, if my thoughts become negative or I become down on myself, I just ask God to help me to let those thoughts go, and to really help me to focus on what I need to focus on.

CD: Are there any moments in the game when you feel particularly close to God?

SUPPAN: I think the times I feel closer are when I trust God more. When I'm out there and I say, *It's not me. He's helping me*, where I have trust in Him and I'm allowing Him, whatever his will is, to be done. One prayer I do say is that I will be able to accept the outcome — good or bad.

CD: That's certainly a wise prayer for anyone. God's probably not rooting for one team or another.

SUPPAN: No, of course not.

CD: You're involved with a variety of causes that exemplify our call, as Catholics, to serve others. You mentioned the Pontifical Council of Church and Sport, earlier. How did you become involved with that?

SUPPAN: That was a funny story. Basically, I went to a banquet for Baseballers Against Drugs, and there was a trip to Rome up for auction. My wife Dana said to me, "Hey, you should buy that for your parents." So I said ok. Well that night I said to Dana, "I'd really like to go to Rome, would you?" She says, "Yeah, I would." So we decided to go to Rome on a vacation with my parents.

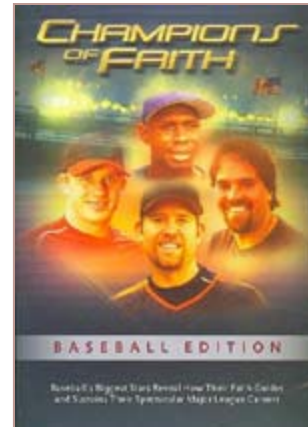
Then I met Ray McKenna, who started an organization called Catholic Athletes for Christ, and he asked me if I'd like to go to Rome to participate in this council. And then Father Kevin Lixey [who is in charge of the council] called me after I decided I was going to go, and he said, "Maybe you should make this a pilgrimage." So it went from a vacation to a pilgrimage, and it really changed my whole perspective on the trip. We got to meet the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, and I really learned a lot and it strengthened my faith.

CD: What was it like to meet the Holy Father?

SUPPAN: I really didn't know what to expect. It is something that I haven't really been able to put into words yet. I had this feeling in my heart that was an excited type of nervous feeling, but it was more like a joy. I got the opportunity to kiss his ring and to look into his eyes. No words were exchanged or anything, but it was very powerful and that really changed me in ways I really don't know. I just know that it changed me.



Let to right: Jeff Suppan, "Champions of Faith Executive



Want to watch the film?

For more information of the film including trailers or to purchase the DVD, visit www.championsoffaith.com or call 877-263-1263.

CD: You're changing lives yourself by giving talks to young people about your faith. What advice do you have to offer when you speak?

SUPPAN: I just talk about my own faith journey and how it grew. I actually took about three hours of footage while I was in Rome on this pilgrimage. I edited it down to about 15 minutes. In my 20s, I started getting interested in apologetics, and I started learning about holy relics, so to actually see that was very powerful. When I speak I explain this video, but I always get a little nervous because I wonder if it is going to hold their attention. I spoke at this one high school and I explained to them that the type of music I picked

hitter Mike Sweeney, and Oakland Athletics designated hitter and catcher Mike Piazza at the "Champions of Faith: Baseball Edition: premiere in Phoenix, Arizona, March 2007 (Courtesy of Catholic Exchange)

was Benedictine chant. This isn't like Eminem or Avril Lavigne, but, surprisingly, the kids watch it.

want to give them a sense of, *Hey other people are out there doing this, not just my parents*. When you're 18 and you go to college, or you go into the workplace, or wherever you go, you have to develop your own faith. You can't take your mom or your dad's faith with you. It has to become your own. That way it will be stronger.

I'm not a theologian, I'm just a baseball player, so I can explain [the faith] the way I know it. I just

CD: You said you started reading up on the faith in your 20s. Is that when you really became interested in your faith, or is it something you've felt most of your life?

SUPPAN: I felt it most of my life, but I felt challenged in my faith the most in my early 20s. That's when I started saying, "I've got to know why I believe in this." I always believed but I couldn't explain to anybody why I believed. It was awesome. I was learning a lot. Sometimes I couldn't recall everything (laughing), but I was still learning.

CD: Sure. Often the answers to our faith questions are there, but we just have to look for them.

SUPPAN: Exactly.

CD: Did your time in Catholic schools make a difference in your faith life?

SUPPAN: I've been blessed. I went to a small Catholic grammar school. I graduated with 21 students, so it was a small community; we received the sacraments together. We had some tremendous leaders. Then I went to Crespi Carmelite High School. It was all boys, and it just made it simpler (laughing). I went on a great retreat called Kairos. It was a great retreat program. I was very blessed to be a part of some great communities, which I still am a part of.

CD: Is there also a sense of community amongst your fellow Catholic or Christian baseball players?

SUPPAN: Yes, there is. It's different, but it's a great community. I've enjoyed everything. There's been many trainers that I've met, and different players just sitting there talking about the faith and I've always enjoyed that.

CD: Did you interact with the other players at all during filming?

SUPPAN: We were all filmed separately, but David Eckstein and I were teammates, and Mike Sweeney and I were teammates. It's kind of how the job is. You move around. It doesn't mean the relationships that you develop with people are gone. It's just that you're not working with each other anymore.

CD: Has your family seen the video yet?

SUPPAN: My wife was at the premiere, with her father, and my parents were there as well. I actually just ordered 100 copies today. What I want to do is send some to high schools in the area where I grew up. I guess there's a companion that goes with it with lessons and how it applies. I'm excited to get my copy.

CD: Sure. It'll be something else to add to your room filled with baseball memorabilia that we see in the film.

SUPPAN: That's right. If you were to see the memorabilia room now, I've changed the room around.

CD: Did you collect any souvenirs during your trip to Rome?

SUPPAN: I did. I brought home a beautiful little Our Lady of Mount Carmel statue that I have in my office. I bought a number of beautiful crucifixes that I bought, and I bought everyone in my family a rosary. Obviously when we met the Holy Father they took a lot of photos, so I got all those photos (laughing), but I don't have a pope room or anything. **CD**

Kerry Weber is associate editor of *Catholic Digest*.



Mike Piazza, Oakland Athletics designated hitter and catcher (Courtesy of Catholic Exchange)

[Click here](#) to read *Catholic Digest's* interview with Oakland Athletics designated hitter and catcher, Mike Piazza.

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