

# Childhood dreams come true for Campbell

*Oakville Trafalgar grad enjoying first season behind Blue Jays' mike*

By Jon Kuiperj  
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

Had Jamie Campbell's parents been more conservative, the Oakville native might not be where he is today.

The 38-year-old sports broadcaster, in his first season as play-by-play announcer of Toronto Blue Jays telecasts on Rogers Sportsnet, credits much of his passion for baseball to the time he spent as a youngster, traveling by himself on the GO train to a number of Jays games each year.

"My parents (Nancy and Peter) must have been a little loose upstairs because, by the time I was 11 or 12 years old, they would let me get on a train and come to the games. I'm not sure I understand why," Campbell said Saturday at the Rogers Centre, hours before broadcasting the Jays' 4-3 loss to the Minnesota Twins — one of 103 games he's scheduled to work this season. "But I made it and I'm self-sufficient now. I never thought anything of it at the time."

Campbell estimated he went to 20-30 Blue Jays home games per season, usually by himself, and often managed to fit in a visit to the visiting team's hotel beforehand. He would collect a few autographs and the odd free ticket, but his main objective was to converse with the players and get to know them.

"I used to be a bit of a junkie in that regard. It was born of a desire to be a very young age to be a professional athlete... but I realized very early I wasn't good enough (at baseball or hockey). I decided at a very young age that I wanted to be as close to that scene as I possibly could, and that was the best way I knew how," recalled Campbell, who also made similar trips to Toronto Maple Leafs games. "That's possibly one of the reasons I'm doing this for a living now."

In his youth, Campbell primarily played hockey with the Oakville Rangers and remembers the thrill of seeing his name in The Oakville Beaver's rep reports ("I still have them," he said).

He also played a lot of baseball at Wallace Park, and even gave football a shot during his days at Oakville Trafalgar High School. Most of his free time after school, however, was consumed by his trips downtown.

It was in Grade 10, under the tutelage of O-T teacher Dave Wagman, when Campbell began to think he could transform his love of sports into a successful career.

"(Wagman) was a real liberal-thinking social studies teacher, and he drilled it into all of us



Campbell interviews Jays catcher Gregg Zaun before Saturday's game against the Minnesota Twins.



PHOTO BY TARA WALTON / SPECIAL TO OAKVILLE BEAVER

Oakville native Jamie Campbell is enjoying life as the play-by-play man for Rogers Sportsnet telecasts of Toronto Blue Jays baseball.

that we could do whatever we wanted to do," said Campbell. "There was no reason why I'd have to go to university and study to be a taxidermist, for goodness sakes, and do something I wasn't cut out to do. I decided I would direct my passions towards something I wanted to do."

After five years at O-T, Campbell studied at Ryerson University, then landed his first media job in 1987 as a librarian for CBC Sports. He gradually worked his way up the broadcasting ladder, first by providing game updates for Toronto radio station CJCL 1430 (which eventually became The Fan 590), then working as a sports anchor and reporter for an Edmonton television station in 1993 before becoming sports anchor at Ottawa's CJOH television in 1997.

A year later, Campbell received a call from Scott Moore, who was assembling talent for the fledgling CTV Sportsnet. The opportunity to be one of the first to work for a national sports network, based close to Oakville, was too much for Campbell to pass up.

"To be perfectly honest with you, I was plan-

ning on staying (in Ottawa) the rest of my life. I thought I'd buy a house there, get married there, raise my kids there and have a cozy little job as sports guy in Ottawa," said Campbell, who turned down an offer to be TSN's Ottawa correspondent several weeks before the Sportsnet opportunity. "But I didn't feel I had anything to lose and, truth be told, I probably could have come back to Ottawa. Sportsnet was a fairly significant pay increase and a chance to be 40 minutes from my hometown, so I jumped at it."

Campbell co-hosted the first prime time update show in Sportsnet history, along with Daren Millard. Since then, he has reported from major events such as the last six Super Bowls, the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics and three Major League Baseball all-star games, done play-by-play for several Canadian Football League contests and served as in-studio host of the network's MLB coverage, all in addition to anchor duties on Sportscentral and Sportsnetnews.

When Rogers Sportsnet executives decided last year to replace Rob Faulds as the network's Blue Jays play-by-play man, Campbell was a leading candidate for a number of reasons.

"Jamie carries a passion for baseball and a deep knowledge of the game. His play-by-play work... on the CFL," said Rick Briggs-Jude, the network's vice-president of production. "Fans will enjoy his warmth, his approach and the natural enthusiasm he brings to every part of his life. From broadcasting to collecting memorabilia to charity efforts, Jamie always makes an impact."

Still, Campbell faced a daunting challenge, one he was well aware of. Blue Jays fans, perhaps spoiled by the years they spent listening to the smooth tone of former TSN broadcaster Dan Shulman (now with ESPN), seemed to be seeking a play-by-play man with baseball knowledge, integrity and — possibly most of all — experience.

"I'm not where I want to be with this job. I'm not nearly as good as I intend to be or want to

be," Campbell said. "There's a lot of criticism that comes with being a new face or new voice. When I hear that criticism, it stings a little bit, but on the other hand... what's my alternative? To quit and wave a white flag — well, forget it! Anybody else who was given the same opportunity would take this job in a heartbeat."

Although he's still trying to earn the trust and respect of Blue Jays fans, Campbell has resisted any temptation to emulate the style of

established broadcasters like Shulman, long-time Jays radio man Tom Cheek, CBC mainstay Brian Williams, Los Angeles Dodger's play-caller Vin Scully and former NBC voice Tony Kubek. Instead, he has taken "bits and pieces" from each, along with former CBC working partners Chris Cuthbert and Oakville resident Ron MacLean, to try and build his own approach to sports broadcasting.

Other integral parts of being a quality play-by-play broadcaster, according to Campbell, are an understanding of the game and the willingness to do plenty of research. Campbell said he actually works more on days he isn't broadcast a game, poring over the Internet looking for baseball information or watching a number of games on television.

The time commitment required for such a job — Campbell left Sunday for a two-week stretch that includes stops in Seattle, Oakland, Chicago and Houston — means a lot of time away from Campbell's wife, Alison Redmond, who he wed earlier this year.

"Luckily, I don't have any kids yet. (Alison's) been very cool with this new gig," said Campbell, who now resides in Toronto. "The best part about it is it's such a heavy schedule in the summer, so I'll get a good portion of the winter off and we'll make up for it then."

It's a sacrifice, but one Campbell's more than willing to pay.

"To turn down an opportunity to spend the entire season calling Major League Baseball...," he said, "you might as well line me up in the middle of the Gardiner Expressway and have the first truck come by and smack me."

\*Jamie Campbell

## Blakelock hoping for another crack at Notre Dame after loss in final

By Kevin Nagel  
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

Jason Scully's two-run double to right field in the bottom of the sixth inning proved to be the margin of victory for the Notre Dame Fighting Irish in its Halton high school baseball championship win over T. A. Blakelock on Friday.

Pitchers had a tough time at Nelson Park as the Irish outgunned the Tigers

13-11 in the seven-inning game.

The Halton baseball team was on the line, but both teams will continue their quest for a Golden Horseshoe Athletic Conference title and, ultimately, a Blue Jays Cup win.

Both teams had 14 hits and further aggravated the hurlers by committing a total of six errors on a windy but beautiful day for baseball.

"I don't know what was going on today," laughed Notre Dame coach Paul

Ferguson after handing out medals to members of his team. "We had our two top pitchers going, too."

The Irish looked to have the game wrapped up after scoring three runs in both the third and four innings to take a 10-4 lead. Blakelock didn't fold, however, scoring three, two and two runs in the next three innings.

For the Tigers, who finished the regular season at 5-2 (one of the losses a 6-3 setback against Notre Dame), Cole

Mahoney-Bruer had three extra-base hits. A two-run homer and a couple of doubles produced three RBIs.

Tigers' Zach Dickson homered in the seventh inning, scoring Jason Tuske, who had tripled, to narrow the Irish's lead to 13-11, but Irish reliever Mike Bonanno induced starting pitcher Brad Leeming to pop out and Anthony Muir to ground out to third to end the game.

The fact that the Halton final was a sudden-death situation didn't change

game strategy for either head coach.

"Absolutely not," said Blakelock coach Cam Evans. "Halton is (very important). It would have been nice to win it, but we'll just keep chugging along."

Ferguson echoed Evans' statement. "The Halton title certainly means a lot to Notre Dame and these kids," he said.

Blakelock was in action yesterday (Tuesday), playing a G-HAC challenge against host St. Mary's of Hamilton.

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