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SPORTS

# From Lake Howell to Nationals' manager, Dave Martinez stays enthusiastic



By **STEPHEN RUIZ**  
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Washington Nationals manager Dave Martinez went to Lake Howell High School.



With a memory bank stuffed with plays from coaching four decades of baseball, Bob McCullough said one mental image remains indelible.

During an American Legion game against Winter Park, McCullough recalled his team's right fielder throwing out a runner at first base on what should have been a single.

It would have been if not for Dave Martinez.

"He was just so easy to coach, because he knew just about everything," said McCullough, who retired in 2010 after a longtime coaching career at Lyman High School. "You may correct him a little bit, but one time. That's all. You never had to tell him [again]."

Martinez, 53, still is exhibiting those baseball smarts, this time as the manager of the Washington Nationals. The Lake Howell graduate earned his first opportunity at the helm in a major-league dugout after a decade as the bench coach for Joe Maddon with the Tampa Bay Rays and Chicago Cubs.

The Nationals beat the Atlanta Braves 6-2 in a spring training game Thursday at Disney World's Champion Stadium.



Dave Martinez

Tampa Bay Rays bench coach Dave Martinez before their game against the Boston Red Sox in game 5 of the ALCS at Fenway Park in Boston, MA Thursday, October 16, 2008. (Gary W. Green/Orlando Sentinel) For Josh Robbins story. (Gary W. Green / Orlando Sentinel)

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"I really try to treat it the same," Martinez said. "The only difference now is, I make the final decisions. You've got to find that everyday routine, and slowly but surely, I've been getting there."

After playing one season at what is now Valencia State College, Martinez began his professional career after the Cubs drafted him in 1983. He played primarily the outfield for nine

major-league teams during a 16-year career.

When he retired in 2001, staying in baseball was not a consideration in Martinez's mental calculus.

"I kind of wanted to be with my family, my kids," said Martinez, whose parents live in Ocala. "It wasn't until Joe Maddon called me in 2006 when I thought about pursuing a coaching career. I didn't know if I wanted to travel anymore, but once I got into it, I enjoyed it and became passionate about it again."

The decision to give baseball a second try proved fruitful well before the three-year contract, with an option year, that Martinez signed with Washington in November.

He never experienced the World Series as a player but has done it twice as a coach, including the Cubs' drought-busting crown in 2016.

"He knows how to win, and he's trying to bring a relaxed environment around us and just let us play, have fun and compete like we know how to play," said Oviedo High graduate A.J. Cole, who started and pitched two scoreless innings for Washington on Thursday.

Nationals non-roster invitee Reid Brignac played five seasons with Tampa Bay when Martinez coached there.

"He hasn't changed at all," Brignac said. "He's always been a players' coach, someone you enjoy being around, always in a good mood, always vibrant, always energetic. I am super-happy for him that he is getting this opportunity, because he's probably been long overdue."

Winning in the postseason has been overdue in Washington.

The franchise is celebrating its 50th season — 36 as the Montreal Expos and entering year No. 14 as the Nationals — and has advanced in a playoff series once. That came in 1981, and it wasn't the World Series.

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Martinez was with the Cubs when they eliminated the Nationals in a National League Division Series last year.

“Absolutely none,” Martinez said of what pressure he feels. “It’s a game to me. We come out here every day and have fun. I prepared myself for years to be where I’m at now, and I try to focus on the here and now.”

McCullough recalled Martinez being in the right spot as a teenager.

As the Nationals’ regular-season opener against the Reds in Cincinnati on March 29 approaches, Martinez is in even better position now.

[Meet Dave Martinez »](#)

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## Stephen Ruiz



Stephen is an online content editor and sports writer for the Sentinel. He is in charge of the home page for the website in the morning and writes sports features, mainly on endurance sports such as running and triathlons. Stephen enjoys rooting for the New Orleans Saints and Houston Astros, working out, reading and cooking. He graduated from LSU.

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