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Lunetta: 'Hurt And Disappointment' In Cincy

Even as Riverfront Stadium was transformed into a media circus Thursday morning in the wake of Pete Rose's lifetime ban from baseball, it was, strangely enough, "empty," according to a Jamestown native who was there.

"As contradictory as it seems, most of the people who work for the Reds are born and raised Cincinnatians," said Dan Lunetta, the team's traveling secretary, from his Riverfront Stadium office Friday morning. "These people live and die with the Reds."

So when baseball commissioner A. Bartlett Giamatti announced Rose's banishment for betting on his own team, Lunetta said there was "hurt" and "disappointment" among the Reds' employees.

"It's difficult sometimes to tell how you feel," Lunetta said. "You don't want to feel that way again. It was as if people in the organization and the city were mourning the death of a loved one.

"My immediate reaction to the whole thing was a sense of loss, a sense of sadness."

But Lunetta had been expecting the other shoe to drop.

"Over the course of the last six months, beginning with the announcement of the investigation and all the evidence that became substantial, you assumed and sensed the worst was going to happen," he said. "But even when you expect the worst to happen and the words finally come – life banishment – it's a shock."

The last time Lunetta saw Rose was Monday night at Wrigley Field where the Reds were playing the Cubs. After the game, Lunetta went out with some friends and when he returned to the hotel there was a message from the Cincinnati manager.

"He wanted me to get him home as fast as I could because Carol (Rose's wife) was going to have a baby," said Lunetta, a 1973 graduate of Jamestown High School. "I got it taken care of and asked if he was coming back... He indicated he probably wouldn't be back."

That, Lunetta said, was the second indication that things weren't quite right. The first was Monday night before the game.

"I could sense Pete was feeling some frustration," Lunetta said. "At the end of our conversation, the last comment (he made) was, "I don't have to worry about it because I won't be around here next year, anyway."

Lunetta didn't put it all together until the team landed in Cincinnati Wednesday night and a television cameraman was waiting for them.

When he got home, Lunetta turned on the Atlanta Braves game and heard announcer Skip Caray mention Giamatti's press conference was scheduled for Thursday morning.

"I started to sense that things were coming together," Lunetta said "I began to put two and two together."

Lunetta, who worked with the Montreal Expos in a similar capacity for 2 ½ years before coming to Cincinnati, said he had a good "working relationship" with Rose.

"I was able to see a side of Pete that people on the outside don't get to see," he said. "And I think now more than ever I admire his accomplishments in baseball more than any other player... Pete was a driven man with an enormous intensity and an enormous drive to win. No one worked harder at this game than Pete.

"Whether he's guilty or not is not for me to judge."

Rose's banishment capped what Lunetta called "an extremely difficult year."

"There's been a multitude of things that have really brought a challenge to me because of all the adversity." Lunetta said. "But I believe you learn through adversity. When I was with Montreal, sometimes things seemed to be too smooth. I really don't recall in my days with Montreal any periods that were extremely difficult. In the short time I've been with Cincinnati, it's been difficult basically from spring training after that announcement came out that the investigation was under way. When you're faced with adversity, you have to accept the challenge. If you don't, you'll be defeated, and I don't want to be defeated."

Lunetta said he had only one conversation with Rose about the investigation.

"It was initiated by Pete," Lunetta said. "It was one of those times I caught Pete when he needed to get some things off his chest and I listened."