

COMMENTARY

Jim Abbott who threw no-hitter still resonates

Bob Nightengale
USA TODAY

Jim Abbott is 57 years old now and hasn't thrown a pitch in a quarter-century, but on this day his voice slightly quivers, realizing the impact he has made in not only baseball, but this world.

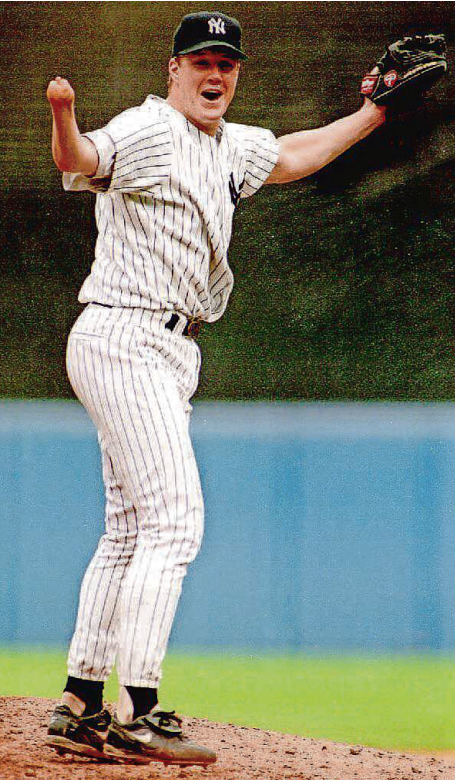
Abbott's documentary "Southpaw: The Life and Legacy of Jim Abbott" hit the airwaves July 13 on ESPN, and there will be kids and young adults learning about him for the first time, the inspiring tale of the man born without a right hand who once pitched a no-hitter at Yankee Stadium and had a 10-year major league career.

"I've been the subject of very kind pieces for awhile," Abbott tells USA TODAY Sports, "but I was touched when ESPN Films wanted to do this, and dig deeply as they did.

"Having the impact of being different, growing up with one hand, and how some people connected with that who were like me, and others who weren't like me, has been incredibly rewarding."

The documentary is powerful with Abbott sitting at his kitchen table in Southern California listening to former Los Angeles Angels public relations director Tim Mead, and later the Hall of Fame president, reading handwritten letters from children inspired by him. The film also features interviews with some of those same kids who are now adults, thanking Abbott for making a difference in their lives.

"I couldn't believe it," Abbott says. "There were some of the personal experiences that I had back in my playing days, at the ballpark, that weren't



Jim Abbott celebrates his no-hitter in 1993. MARK D. PHILLIPS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

always publicized, and now to see some of those same kids and families interviewed now, my jaw dropped."

One of those letters was from a little girl, 8-year-old Tracey Holgate, from Windsor, Ontario, whose letter was read by Mead. She is now a 44-year-old teacher, married with four children.

"Dear Jim, My name is Tracey Holgate. I am age 8. I have one hand too. My grandpa gave me a picture of you today. I saw you on TV. I don't know anyone with one hand. How do you feel about

having one hand? Sometimes I feel sad and sometimes I feel okay about it. Most of the time I feel happy. I hope to see you play in Detroit and maybe meet you. Could you please send me a picture of you in uniform? Could you write back please? Here is a picture of me. Love, Tracey."

"It really gives you pause, to be honest," Abbott says. "You know when you're playing, you're competing, and it's such a fight, it can be a little insulating and you protect yourself.

"This film really helped me to see how many people are watching, and how many people are connected to it that you've never even seen.

"It's just amazing. It's very, very heartwarming."

There is Shaquem Griffin, who became the first NFL player with one hand, thanking Abbott. There is Nick Newell, 39, the veteran MMA fighter born without a left arm, thanking Abbott. There is Carson Pickett, born without most of her left arm and playing for the U.S. women's national soccer team, thanking Abbott. They all let Abbott know how much they were inspired by him, knowing that they, too, can overcome all odds.

"They saw something in me that related to their own experiences," Abbott said, "with kids and families looking for hope."

Abbott, born in Flint, Michigan, and attended the University of Michigan, spends much of his summer in the state, watching baseball and rooting for his childhood team, the Detroit Tigers. He's like every other Tigers fan, hoping this could finally be the year, the year they win their first World Series title since 1984.

"I just love when the Tigers are doing well," Abbott says, "because the whole state just goes crazy. Hats are out, and my friends are excited and talking about the Tigers again. I would love to see the Tigers keep it up. They're incredible."

While living most of the time in Southern California, he too has been caught up in the exploits of Los Angeles Dodgers two-way star Shohei Ohtani and Clayton Kershaw's brilliant career.

"It was really cool to see Clayton Kershaw get that 3,000th strikeout the other night," Abbott says. "He's been such a classy presence in Southern California for so long. And God, how many people are ever going to do that again. It's one of those, you know, immortal accomplishments.

"And, of course, I love Shohei, just like everybody else. I just marvel at what he's doing. Having struggled to be a starting pitcher, and knowing how important routine and structure is, the fact that he does both is just unreal. It's incomprehensible."

The film ends with Abbott speaking in front of a crowd, telling them of the time his daughter had a question for him in a classroom, asking, "Dad, do you like your little hand?"

"I have to tell you," Abbott said, "I do. I like my little hand. I haven't always liked it. Times I hated it, but that's who I am, and it's taken me to places I never would have gone without it.

"It's taught me important lessons. It's taught me that life's not always easy, and it's not always fair. My hand has taught me that you know you can do things a little bit differently, but you can still do them just as well as anybody else.

"I hope we always believe that."

Lawyers in NCAA settlement could get \$750M

Steve Berkowitz
USA TODAY

A federal judge on July 11 awarded lawyers for the plaintiffs in three athlete compensation antitrust cases against the NCAA and the Power Five conferences more \$520 million in legal fees and costs.

U.S. District Judge Claudia Wilken also granted the lawyers the right to apply annually for an award of fees and costs "for work in monitoring and enforcing compliance" the settlement, which is set to last 10 years. Those amounts — which will be based on a small percentage of the money that schools spend on new benefits and compensation for athletes allowed under the agreement — could end up totaling \$250 million more over the life of the settlement, according to the request for fees and costs that the plaintiffs' lawyers made to Wilken in December 2024.

The settlement calls for a combined total of nearly \$2.8 billion in damages to be paid over the 10 years, which also is the time span over which the basic fees-and-costs award to the lawyers is set to occur. The fees-and-costs award will come from the damages pool.

In addition to the damages, beginning July 1, the settlement allowed schools to begin paying athletes directly for use of the athletes' name, image and likeness (NIL). Also, for schools that choose to make NIL payments to athletes, the NCAA's prior system of sport-by-sport scholarship limits is being replaced by sport-by-roster limits. As a result, numerous schools have said they will increase the number of athletic scholarships they award.

The settlement includes a per-school cap on the value of new benefits that they can award. The NCAA has informed schools that the cap will be \$20.5 million for the 2025-26 school year, but that figure is being audited by



The NCAA trophy was displayed before the Women's National Gymnastics Championship at Dickies Arena in Fort Worth, Texas. JEROME MIRON/IMAGN IMAGES

the plaintiffs' lawyers and regardless of the audit's outcome, the dollar value of the cap is scheduled to increase during each year of the settlement.

Citing from an economic expert for the plaintiffs, Wilken wrote in her order granting final approval of the settlement that the new benefits and compensation to athletes will total at least \$19 billion over the 10 years covered by the agreement.

In addition to saying that the

fees-and-costs award is "well below" local judicial benchmarks that allow fees-and-costs awards of 25% of a damages pool, Wilken wrote: "The reasonableness of the fees in question is confirmed by the fact that such fees are commensurate with the extraordinary results that Class Counsel achieved for settlement class members, the risks and costs of continued litigation, the skill and experience of Class Counsel, and the fact that Class Counsel committed substan-

tial resources on a contingency basis for the benefit of settlement class members."

The lead attorneys for the plaintiffs are Steve Berman of Seattle-based Hagens Berman Sobol Shapiro LLP and Jeff Kessler of Winston & Strawn's New York office.

Wilken also approved specific financial awards for the named now-former-college-athlete plaintiffs in the lawsuits that they will receive in addition to any damages.

Those amounts include \$125,000 each for swimmer Grant House, women's basketball player Sedona Prince and football player Tymir Oliver, and \$50,000 each for former football player Chuba Hubbard and track and field athlete Keira McCarrell.

The settlement is set to face seven appeals to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, based on filings made by a deadline that passed the night of July 7.

None of the appeal notices were accompanied by a motion seeking to put at least a temporary stop to the going-forward aspects of the agreement. However, the settlement says that in the event of appeals of this nature, the NCAA and the conferences would begin making damages payments, but the money would be held in escrow — not paid to athletes or lawyers — until appeals are completed.

In her fees-and-costs ruling, Wilken specifically wrote that the amounts that the plaintiffs' lawyers requested were "unopposed." She added in footnote that seemed aimed at the appeals process: "Some objectors who opposed" final approval of the settlement "argued that the fees that Class Counsel request ... are indicative of a conflict" in their responsibility fairly represent all of the athletes covered by the settlement. "Those arguments have no bearing on the question of whether the fees ... requested ... are fair and reasonable."

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