

Billy Bean Dies at 60; Led Baseball on Diversity After Coming Out as Gay

As an outfielder, he hid his sexual identity from his teammates for nearly a decade before retiring and becoming a force for inclusion in the organization.

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Billy Bean was baseball's first ambassador for inclusion when he threw out the ceremonial first pitch in 2016 before a game between the Tampa Bay Rays and the San Francisco Giants in Florida. Chris O'Meara/Associated Press



By **Alex Williams**

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Billy Bean, an all-hustle outfielder for the Detroit Tigers, Los Angeles Dodgers and San Diego Padres who retired in 1995 because he thought baseball was not ready for an openly gay player, but who went on to become the first diversity chief for Major League Baseball, died on Tuesday. He was 60.

Major League Baseball said in a statement that the cause was acute myeloid leukemia. It did not say where he died.

Bean was only the second major league player to come out as gay. [Glenn Burke](#), an outfielder for the Los Angeles Dodgers and Oakland Athletics, announced his sexual orientation after he retired in 1982, although — as was not the case with Bean — it had been of little mystery to Burke’s teammates and managers.

Bean broke new ground when he was named Major League Baseball’s first ambassador for inclusion in 2014. Since 2022, he had been the organization’s senior vice president of diversity, equity and inclusion.

His duties included working with all 30 clubs educating players on inclusion and social justice initiatives, and spearheading baseball’s [Spirit Day](#), a social media-based anti-bullying campaign to support L.G.B.T.Q. youth.

“He made baseball a better institution,” the baseball commissioner, Rob Manfred, said in the statement, “both on and off the field, by the power of his example, his empathy, his communication skills, his deep relationships inside and outside our sport, and his commitment to doing the right thing.”



Bean made a thrilling catch while playing for the San Diego Padres in a game against the Dodgers in Los Angeles in 1994. He retired the next year, weary, he said, of hiding his relationship with a man. Credit...Eric Draper/Associated Press

Bean, a light-hitting outfielder known for his fearless play, spent the early years of his career married to his former college girlfriend even as he grappled

with his sexual identity. After they split, Bean began a live-in relationship with a man but labored to keep his sexuality secret from even his close friends in the clubhouse.

He did not want to “[embarrass what I hold sacred](#) — my family and baseball,” he recalled in a 1999 interview with Robert Lipsyte of The New York Times.

As one of those “scrappy scrubs who will do anything to stick in the show,” as Bean described himself, he found that his same-sex attraction only compounded the pressures of big league life. “For nine years,” he told The Times, “I felt like I had one foot in the major leagues and one foot on a banana peel.”

Drafted by the Tigers in the fourth round of the 1986 draft, he got off to an explosive start. In his major league debut, on April 25, 1987, he tallied four hits, including two doubles, as Detroit trounced the Kansas City Royals, [13-2](#).

Despite that promising start, Bean played in only 26 games that year, batting .258. He spent much of 1988 with the Tigers’ Triple-A affiliate, the Toledo Mud Hens, where he shared a locker room with a player he was often confused with: Billy Beane, who went on to become the storied general manager of the Oakland A’s (he was portrayed by Brad Pitt in the 2011 film “[Moneyball](#)”).



Bean, No. 40, colliding with Craig Biggio of the Houston Astros at home plate at the Houston Astrodome on Sept. 5, 1989. Credit...Tim Johnson/Associated Press

The Tigers traded Bean to the Dodgers in 1989, but he batted only .187 in 51 games with the club. He spent the next few years in the minor leagues as well as in Japan, where he played for the Kintetsu Buffaloes of Nippon Professional Baseball before landing with the San Diego Padres.

Bean appeared in fewer than 90 games each of the next two seasons with San Diego and retired in 1995, weary of hiding his relationship with a man.

“I’d finally achieved the sense of security and stability I lacked while I was locked in the big-league closet,” he wrote in “Going the Other Way,” a 2003 memoir written with the journalist Chris Bull. “There was no way I could go back to hiding.”

At 31, he believed he had more baseball in him. But, he wrote, “Baseball, I knew, wasn’t ready for a guy like me.”

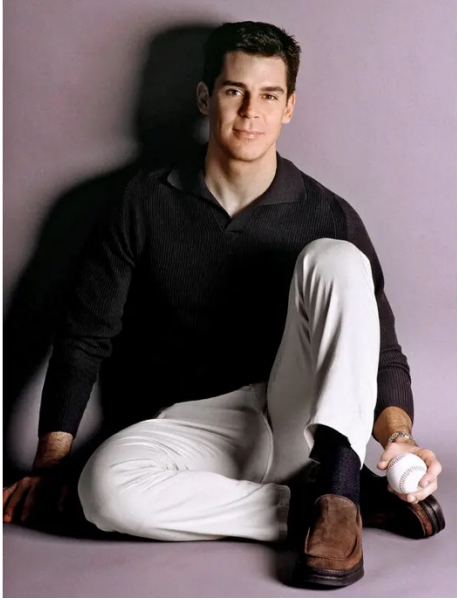
William Daro Bean was born on May 11, 1964, in Santa Ana, Calif., to William Bean and Linda Robertson, former high school sweethearts who married after she got pregnant at 17. The couple divorced when Billy was 6 months old. His mother, a meter maid and police dispatcher, eventually married a police sergeant, Ed Kovac, a former Marine.

Despite being the smallest player on his team, Billy was a Little League all-star by the time he was 12. At Santa Ana High School, he had a growth spurt and became a multisport standout, dating his football coach’s cheerleader daughter and leading the baseball team to a state championship.

He graduated in 1982 and accepted a baseball scholarship to Loyola Marymount University, a Jesuit school in Los Angeles, where he hit over .400 and was named to the Division 1 All-America team.

As a handsome, successful athlete, Bean had no trouble attracting women. In his senior year, he wrote, he started dating a “classic beach girl,” Anna Maria Amato. “I fell hard,” he added. “Yet even as we developed an intense sexual bond, it dawned on me that I didn’t share my teammates’ intense attraction to the opposite sex. There was always something missing, and I felt a restlessness I couldn’t shake.”

One day, a male trainer began to massage his thighs suggestively during a routine rubdown in the locker room. “I pretended nothing was happening,” Bean wrote. “But the furtiveness of this spontaneous act was intoxicating.”



Bean in 1999, the year he disclosed his sexual orientation in an interview with a gay columnist for The Miami Herald. Credit...David Vance, via Associated Press

During his rise through the minor leagues, Bean dealt with no shortage of homophobic banter from teammates, but he would always avoid any suspicion by producing a photo of his girlfriend.

The two shared an apartment in his first season with the Dodgers, and they were married in November 1989.

Still, his dawning realization that he was gay weighed on him. “My confusion was hard to shake, even at the ballpark, which had always been my sanctuary,” he wrote. “I would stand in center field, my every move scrutinized by 40,000 screaming fans, worrying about my parents’ reaction to the inevitable tabloid headlines about the queer ballplayer.”

Two years into his marriage, he had his first gay sexual experience with a man he had met at a cowboy-themed gay bar in Albuquerque while playing with the Dodgers’ Triple-A affiliate.

He eventually left his wife and started a relationship with Sam Madani, an Iranian expatriate whom he had met in a gym. Madani learned that he was H.I.V. positive in 1994 (Bean tested negative) and died of AIDS the next year. Bean did not attend his funeral for fear of being seen as outing himself.

Bean finally came out to his parents in 1996. Three years later, he disclosed his sexual orientation in an interview with a gay columnist for The Miami

Herald. “He was right to keep it a secret,” Jim Bruske, a former college teammate, told The Times. “The guys would have been brutal.”

After retiring from baseball, Bean began a relationship in Miami Beach with Efrain Veiga, the proprietor of a trendy Cuban-fusion restaurant. They remained together for 13 years before breaking up in 2008. Bean went on to marry Greg Baker. The couple lived in New York City until Bean’s death. (Information on his survivors was not immediately available.)



In the 1999 Times article, Bean recalled his efforts to hide his sexual identity during his playing days.

“I went to Hooters,” he said, referring to the sports-bar franchise known for its scantily clad female servers, “laughed at the jokes, lied about dates because I loved baseball. I still do. I’d go back in a minute. I only wish I hadn’t felt so alone, that I could have told someone, and that I hadn’t always felt God was going to strike me dead.”

[Alex Williams](#) is a Times reporter on the Obituaries desk.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/07/sports/baseball/billy-bean-dead.html>

I may have been a lifelong baseball fan, but I too had “Billy Bean” and “Billy Beane” confused. This must have been a daily annoyance for them. But now, being Billy Beane, part-owner of the Athletics, and senior adviser to the owner, John Fisher, the most hated man in Oakland might be more inflammatory and dangerous than being Billy Bean, MLB’s senior vice president of diversity, equity and inclusion.

<p>William Lamar Beane III (born March 29, 1962) is an American former professional baseball player and current front office executive. He is currently senior advisor to owner John Fisher^[1] and minority owner of the Oakland Athletics of Major League Baseball (MLB) and formerly the executive vice president of baseball operations. He is also minority owner of soccer clubs Barnsley of the EFL League One in England and AZ Alkmaar^[2] of the Eredivisie in the Netherlands. From 1984 to 1989 he played in MLB as an outfielder for the New York Mets, Minnesota Twins, Detroit Tigers, and Oakland Athletics. He joined the Athletics' front office as a scout in 1990, was named general manager after the 1997 season, and was promoted to executive vice president after the 2015 season.</p> <p>A first-round pick in the MLB draft by the Mets, Beane failed to meet the expectations of scouts, who projected him as a star. In his front-office career, Beane has applied statistical analysis (known as sabermetrics) to baseball, which has led teams to reconsider how they evaluate players. He is the subject of Michael Lewis's 2003 book on baseball economics, <i>Moneyball</i>, which was made into a 2011 film starring Brad Pitt as Beane.</p> <h3>Early life</h3> <p>Beane grew up in Mayport, Florida, and San Diego, California, the child of a career military family.^{[3][4]} His father, a naval officer, taught him how to pitch.^[3]</p>	<p>Billy Beane</p>  <p>Beane in 2012</p> <table border="1"><tr><td>Oakland Athletics</td></tr><tr><td>Senior advisor</td></tr><tr><td>Born: March 29, 1962 (age 62)</td></tr><tr><td>Orlando, Florida</td></tr><tr><td>Batted: Right Threw: Right</td></tr><tr><td>MLB debut</td></tr><tr><td>September 13, 1984, for the New York Mets</td></tr><tr><td>Last MLB appearance</td></tr><tr><td>October 1, 1989, for the Oakland Athletics</td></tr><tr><td>MLB statistics</td></tr><tr><td>Batting average .220</td></tr><tr><td>Home runs 3</td></tr><tr><td>Runs batted in 29</td></tr><tr><td>Teams</td></tr><tr><td>As player</td></tr><tr><td><ul style="list-style-type: none">New York Mets (1984–1985)Minnesota Twins (1986–1987)</td></tr></table>	Oakland Athletics	Senior advisor	Born: March 29, 1962 (age 62)	Orlando, Florida	Batted: Right Threw: Right	MLB debut	September 13, 1984, for the New York Mets	Last MLB appearance	October 1, 1989, for the Oakland Athletics	MLB statistics	Batting average .220	Home runs 3	Runs batted in 29	Teams	As player	<ul style="list-style-type: none">New York Mets (1984–1985)Minnesota Twins (1986–1987)	<p>Tara Beane (nee Graves) was born on August 11, 1964, in San Diego, California. She and Billy were childhood friends and they really got along well. After Billy divorced his first wife, Cathy Sturdivant, he and Tara started dating each other. This blossomed into love and they finally tied the knot in 1999. Since then, they have been together for 24 years.</p>  <p>Billy and Tara Beane in Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters v Oakland Athletics - Preseason Game</p> <p>Billy and Tara have two children. They gave birth to twins Brayden and Tinsley Beane. However, Tara is also the stepmother to Casey Beane, Billy's first daughter from his marriage with Cathy Sturdivant.</p>
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Another subject to not “touch with a ten-foot pole”—mine is eleven, and it’s kind of heavy and awkward—but I don’t know when locker rooms will ever be “diversity friendly.” For all sorts of reasons, many athletes are uncomfortable, often unstably so, when in the presence of (especially intimately in showers and near-naked at lockers) someone suspected of being gay. Sports flirt with all sorts of homoerotic practices—those sleek and shiny football pants for instance—veneration of physiques and masculine power, with violent violations of personal space (tackling, rugby scrums); anyone who “enjoys” this for more than *maschismo* reasons is not welcome. Further, as Billy Bean discovered with the trainer rubbing his thighs, revelations of homosexuality can surprise and then unnerve people determined to remain resolutely heterosexual. Many people so exposed also do not consider these “diversity” feelings as being “natural” or equal to “straight” ones; rather, they are classed as “sick” or “demonic” or “perverted” with the test of maturity being disavowal and aggressive defense against them. They are thought to be so appealing only as “forbidden fruit” coming from a relentless source wicked in its intent. I have reluctantly learned the hard way that the demonic does indeed exist, slippery as it can be to identify.

I know of a young couple with a daughter where the wife was an avid fastball/softball player. In response, I suspect, to the advances of one of her “butch” teammates, she was drawn-surrendered into a lesbian relationship. When her very straight husband found out, the marriage ended and their child spent the next dozen years moving week by week between two homes. Her mother had decided she was not gay after all, and remarried a very masculine guy fond of big dogs. Who is to blame for what this girl has had to endure? Who can sort it out without prejudice?

Whatever the case, the fact is that “such people” have always been part of the human scene; such propensities have been in locker rooms and showers from the beginning and will keep reappearing till the very end, innocently, unknown, and safely far more often than not, especially if viewed and managed differently. The Diverse are no more “responsible” for being “the way they are” than “straight people” are. What they, like straights, are responsible for is how they conduct themselves and respect the preferences of others. Sexuality is primarily a private thing, to be kept there, with any flirting being carefully conducted in appropriate arenas (e.g. bars, with other public venturing into these matters being restrained). This is what many “tolerant” straight people object to: “I’m OK with them being whatever they are. I just wish they wouldn’t throw it in our faces like they do at Gay Pride Parades.” Personally, I would no more go to a Straight Pride Parade than a Gay Pride one. Yet it is not so simple. I might take exception to flagrant flamboyant outbursts of queer sexuality expression, but the society I live in is also prone to flagrant and flamboyant expressions of heterosexual sexual signaling. (“Sex sells everything” with titillation and teasing being a disingenuous (and dangerous) political game played out, “mandatory” in competition.) What goes on in heterosexual arenas can be as objectionable as the histrionics and deplorable, often violent, goings-on to which homosexual relationships are prone. That being said, I still know homosexual pairings that are better at being “married,” committed, loving, and faithful than many straight couples can manage. And if I can’t get my mind around anal sex, I think it going too far to expect me to. When will we ever work these issues through making peace between erotic beauty and modesty? TJB