

# Little Joe

By: Jack Greiner on October 13, 2020 on [graydon.law](https://graydon.law)

I was watching the ALCS on Sunday night when a runner dove back to first on a pick off play. For some reason, it made me think of a play in the 1975 World Series when Joe Morgan dove back to first on a pickoff throw by Luis Tiant and screamed “balk” as he slid in. And of course, he was right. I saw Morgan the next day on NBC with Joe Garagiola explaining exactly what Tiant did.

On Monday, I read that Morgan had died. And that makes me incredibly sad. Joe Morgan was the best player on the best team ever. And I’m not sure we Reds fans appreciated him fully back then. I really think if you ask most fans my age about who the best player was, you’d get more people saying Johnny Bench or Pete Rose than Morgan. And if you asked for their favorite player, Joe might slip to #4, after Johnny, Pete and Tony Perez.

The pickoff throw reminds me of Joe’s key attribute - excellence. He was excellent in every phase of the game. He could hit, run field and throw. And he didn’t rely solely on physical skills. He was 5’7. Plenty of scouts thought he was too short to make it to the major leagues. But he studied the game and his opponents to gain whatever advantage he needed. He stole bases not because he was the fastest guy in the league (he wasn’t even the fastest guy on the Reds) but because he studied the opposing pitcher’s move and the opposing catcher’s arm.

And I can’t help recall how upset I was when the Reds traded Lee May, Helms and Jimmy Stewart for Morgan, Jack Billingham, Dennis Menke, Caesar Geronimo and Ed Armbrister. I couldn’t imagine the Reds without Lee May. But my dad, in his quiet and calm way assured me the Reds made a great deal. And of course he was right. My dad was pretty excellent too.

So what sticks with me about Morgan was his dedication to excellence. And there are lessons for all of us there. Excellence requires we work hard, know our craft and never stop learning and improving. And while Joe’s ability to hit a curveball isn’t transferrable, his dedication to excellence is something all of us can emulate.