**“We Are a Blue Jays Family” podcast transcript**

Jordan Adler (JA): Welcome to another episode of *Blown Away: A Fandom Podcast*! *Blown Away* is a class project of JAMS 855: Participatory Cultures in the Digital Era. I’m your host, Jordan Adler, and today’s episode is called “We Are a Blue Jays Family.”

In this episode, I talk with the biggest Toronto Blue Jays fan I know: my mom, Lisa. In 2015, she became an especially passionate and devoted fan of our city’s baseball team – and that enthusiasm has not gone away. In this episode, I will talk to my mom about what makes a good baseball fan, her fondest ballpark memories, and why a Taylor Swift parody about the Blue Jays is one of her favourite things on the Internet.

This conversation was recorded on Nov. 28, 2020.

JA: So I wanted to first ask, When did you become a Toronto Blue Jays super-fan?

Lisa Adler (LA): Well, I became a Toronto Blue Jays fan when the Toronto Blue Jays first came into existence, and I was a little girl. But I guess I became a super-fan around the time that they were making a push toward their second World Series win, in about 2014, 2015, was when I went from being what I would call a regular fan to being more of a super-fan.

JA: What was the push that really took you from being a casual fan to a super-fan?

LA: There were a few things. First of all, I think at that time it had been a long time since a Toronto team had done anything exciting in the world of sports, post-regular season. And so, as I could see that this was going to happen for the Blue Jays and being that I was already a baseball fan, it was like a natural fit. And as they kept doing better and better, and the stakes kept getting higher and higher, and I thought they were going to get toward a World Series or at least the post-season, it became much more exciting. Because I got more excited, I watched more games, I got to know the players better, and then all kinds of things started happening in the city, like they made parody songs about the team, and the [radio] announcers were talking about them all the time. Also, at that time, I had a girl in one of my classes whose father was one of the announcers. She talked about the Blue Jays regularly, and it gave us a way to connect. And I guess it came from there.

JA: And the push toward the playoffs happened, [it] started around the middle of June, which was the time where you as a teacher, you get off work…

LA: Correct.

JA: … and you had the summer to yourself, and this became a fan-ish sort of practice, because you had the time to really engage with it.

LA: That would be absolutely true. And it was a great outlet for something to do, because we have the stadium, obviously, in our city, and it’s not hard to get to. And we have tickets, so prior to that year, they had had a few terrible years, so tickets were easy to come by and it was a lot of fun to go to the game.

JA: I’m now going to bring us into some fan scholarship. We read a really interesting article by John Fiske… called “The Cultural Economy of Fandom.” And in this article, John Fiske is exploring what makes a fan or someone who wants to be a part of a fan community. I’m going to read a quote:

“Much of the pleasure of fandom lies in the fan talk that it produces, and many fans report that their choice of their object of fandom was determined at least as much by the oral community they wished to join as by any of its inherent characteristics.”

So, were you interested in becoming a Blue Jays super-fan because you wanted to be a part of a sort of community?

LA: I have never really thought of it that way, to be honest. But I did find that I would spend time on the Internet looking up things about the Blue Jays. And often, I would be drawn to the comments that other people made. And I found, and still find actually, that some of what I find to be most interesting about following them on social media and on websites is what other people think is going to happen.

So I think maybe being a fan of a sport… A fan of a sport means you never really know how it’s going to go. One of the reasons I like baseball as opposed to some other sports is I think there’s a lot of psychology behind it. Because of its slow pace, which a lot of people don’t like, I think one of the things I like about [baseball] is that I see the thought process that goes into all the different things. And because of that, something that I always find interesting, is to read about or listen to what other people think.

At the same time as I became more of a fan, I started listening to sports radio a lot, most specifically when they would talk about the Blue Jays. And although the people around me, you know, when the game would be over, they would all be, like, OK, let’s switch on the music... I was like, No, I want to hear what the fans had to say about the game. I want to hear what the announcers think and what do they think it’s going to mean that this player, you know, was able to hit two home runs this game, and what does it mean that the pitchers are getting tired, and how’s that going to make it [more difficult] in the next game.

JA: So you were interested in the analysis and commentary because you wanted to learn…

LA: Absolutely. Because I wanted to learn more about the game.

JA: So would you consider yourself part of a fan community?

LA: I have never really considered myself to be part of a fan community. But I definitely must *want* to be, if I’m not already, because I find myself wanting to go to the baseball game, because I like being surrounded by other people who are also cheering for the same team. I will give up other things in my life that I like to do so that I can watch baseball and listen to the commentators. I like to watch it on TV because I like to hear the behind-the-scenes, you know, them discussing the plays. I seek out opportunities to see baseball in other venues. I’ve tried to make arrangements to go see the Blue Jays play in other places. I’ve been to Boston to see them. And I find myself happiest when I’m surrounded by other people who are also excited about baseball. So I guess so, but I’ve never thought of it that way before.

JA: So one of the forms of fan production that [Fiske] writes about is called textual productivity, which is when fans produce and circulate certain texts among their communities. So I don’t think you’re someone who makes or circulates videos or tweets…

LA: Absolutely not, but I love to read them, but I’m not somebody who makes them.

JA: But you’re part of a community that likes to receive some of this fanfare and engage with it.

LA: Absolutely.

JA: What are some of the fan-made materials that you’ve enjoyed?

LA: I follow the Blue Jays account on Instagram, and then from that account and some of the things that I’ve read on there, I follow something called Blue Jays Memes, which is where people sort of poke fun at the game in a way but it makes me laugh about it. I also will, if the Blue Jays are in the playoffs, I might follow the other team they’re playing, to get a sense of how those fans are feeling about the game. I definitely follow their… in Toronto, we have the Sportsnet broadcasters and they have a website and they have an Instagram page, and so I follow those things too.

JA: Do you think part of what makes Blue Jays fandom interesting is that it’s more tied to a nation maybe as much as it is tied to a city, with Toronto being Canada’s only team and there being rivalry between north and south of the border?

LA: I don’t think it started that way.

JA: Right.

LA: And personally, I don’t think of it so much. To me, it’s about the city. But I find myself especially liking the games when they go to Seattle. When they go to Seattle, it’s like being at a home game even though it’s across the border. Because all the people in Western Canada rarely see them in Toronto, they all flock to Seattle when [the Blue Jays] play in Seattle. And I find those things very exciting.

So, I guess I like that they’re the Canadian team. I remember last year when they were talking briefly about the Tampa Bay Rays splitting their time between Tampa and Montreal, there’s a part of me that was disappointed: I wanted the Blue Jays to be the only Canadian team. But I don’t know that I think about it regularly.

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JA: Ok. One thing that I think is interesting to talk about is sports fandoms. Sports fandoms can be rousing and inspiring, but also they can be toxic environments. Some people become too obsessive over how a team performs, and there have been controversies even that I know, when fans of the Toronto Blue Jays act belligerently at games or throw beer cans onto the field.

LA: That was only once!

JA: Well, that was only once, but it was during a wild card game, and so it’s something that people remember. It’s something, you know, it makes our city and Blue Jays fans look bad.

[CLIP: Bad fans]

JA: I’d like to know, in your opinion, what makes a good Toronto Blue Jays fan?

LA: I think a good Toronto Blue Jays fan is somebody who doesn’t give up hope, because the time that they’re doing well seems relatively short-lived, and then you have to live through the growing pains and the re-build and some bad before it might get good again. So I think you have to be dedicated. I think one of the things about baseball in general, baseball’s a long game, and I think the people who just, you know, if they’re losing by a few or winning by a few in the sixth or seventh inning and then they give up… I don’t like that. I think you have to be willing to stay all the way to the end. I think those are the people that are really fans of the game, in addition to the team, because anything can happen. And some of the most exciting games are when they come back in the ninth inning.

I was very upset when Blue Jays fans, I believe it was twice in the same post-season, that twice they got angry and did things by throwing things on the field. And I was embarrassed, as a Torontonian and as a Canadian, to have that happen in my city. It made me angry. Even if the game was going badly, I never think it’s good to handle it like that. I think you need to stay positive. Umpiring is another thing. Very often, big baseball fans get very hung up on the umpiring. I try not to, because I think it needs to be about the game, the players, the psychology. That’s what should be important.

JA: Who are your favourite players on the Toronto Blue Jays, past and present?

LA: Well, I think my favourite player of all is Kevin Pillar. He was a Blue Jay. And I think that because I had the opportunity to meet him in person at a charity event. And I was extremely inspired by how hard he worked to get to play Major League Baseball, and how much he had learned from the experience of not making it for so long. And then [I] remember feeling very disappointed when he made some inappropriate comments that I did not agree with at all, and how personal it felt that somebody who I had looked up to so much also was human and made mistakes, and atoned for them in some ways. So he’s definitely my favourite.

I also love José Bautista. Again, he worked really hard to get to where he was. He came across a little bit arrogant, which I don’t necessarily like, but he was somebody who I really believed really cared about Toronto. I guess the not-so-smart baseball fan in me wishes that there was more about trades and team-building that had to do with loyalty and caring about a city and a place, rather than all about dollars.

I really like Bo Bichette. He’s new. I like his spunk and his energy and his positivity, and also that he’s using his platform to do good things, which Kevin Pillar did for most of his career. Way before then, I had lots of favourites along the way. When I was younger, it was all about the good-looking baseball players and the ones that were fun to watch from that perspective. I always like good hitters, I think, and players that do really cool things in the field. Interestingly, I’ve never been a huge fan of a certain pitcher, even though a lot of people would say that pitching is the most important thing about baseball and the most important mental part of the game is all through the pitching. It’s never been the area that I’ve most enjoyed, and probably know the least about.

JA: Do you think it’s because it’s often very intense to watch a pitcher work, because every single thing they throw, it’s make or break?

LA: I think that’s part of it. I sit and watch the games with people and they’ll go, Oh, he’s going to throw a slider! And I have no idea what he’s thrown. And I really study the game and I read a lot about it. But I would say the two things I don’t know much about are… how you tell by how he’s holding the ball what pitch is coming. I hear the commentators and people that I’m with say, Oh he should throw a slider now, or he should throw a high fastball. I don’t know why they should do that. I don’t know very much about the business side of baseball and how the whole trade system works. I know about Rule 5 players and drafts, but I don’t really understand all of that. So it might be the intensity of the pitcher, but I also think it has to do with me understanding less. To me, he throws the ball and the guy either hits it or not. I know if it’s a good pitch, but I might not know what kind of pitch it was.

JA: Are there any particularly fond memories you have watching the Toronto Blue Jays in a ballpark, either at Rogers Centre (or Skydome) in Toronto or elsewhere?

LA: So I’ve been very lucky. I was at both the game where, again during the 2015, 2016 run, Edwin Encarnacion hit a “hat trick” of home runs. And it was just so cool because people started throwing their hats on the field, but because “hat trick” is really a hockey term, a lot of the players had no idea what was going on. You could see it. But the fans knew, because most Toronto fans also know about the Toronto Maple Leafs. And then I also got to see the day in-person where Josh Donaldson hit three home runs in a game, and the same thing happened.

[CLIP: Hat Trick]

I’ve gotten to see one post-season game, in-person, way from the outfield, you couldn’t see very well at all, but was totally excited to be there. Actually, no, I’ve seen two [post-season games]. One way in the outfield and one more up close. One was in the season where they were winning more, and one was in the season where they were playing the Cleveland Indians, and I think they only won one game of the series, and I happened to be at the game they won. And a funny story was, the next day was going to be the elimination game and they started losing, and the person who I had been to the game with the day before called me in about the third inning and said, We better go down [to the ballpark]. Because if you go, maybe they’ll win! I think that was the season where every game I saw in-person, they won, which hasn’t been the case ever since.

I also loved seeing them in Fenway Park, because I was so excited to go to Fenway Park. It is a world-renowned baseball park, and the whole feel of being in that stadium was incredible.

JA: You listen, as you’ve mentioned before, to a lot of sports radio and commentary, which makes me think you have a lot of thoughts about the state of baseball and Major League Baseball today. So, where would you like the game to go in the future? Maybe in terms of some issues that are happening right now in terms of players being caught in cheating scandals, and issues like that.

LA: So, I was extremely upset when I heard about the [Houston Astros] cheating scandal. In our home, we have people who are Astros fans, and prior to this year, once the Blue Jays were out of the playoffs or didn’t make the playoffs, I often cheered for the Astros because I really liked them as a team. I was devastated when I found out that they had done so much cheating. I understand that sign stealing is part of the game, but not in the way they did it. I don’t like cheating at all – maybe that’s the teacher in me.

I always get very upset when I find out about players who use performance enhancing drugs, because I feel like they’re being deceitful not only to the team but to the fans and to themselves. But I think it’s really not fair that a team can suffer for a decision that a player makes for themselves. Baseball, although it is very much a game of statistics and personal statistics, and players obviously do better financially when their personal statistics are good, I think that it’s also a team game. Part of that back-and-forth between the individual and the team is what is so interesting about it. I don’t like the cheating.

I was disappointed in some of what happened this year, with the pandemic. I thought there could have been more done to keep players safe. And I’m going to be very disappointed if next year, as a result of the pandemic, people in Canada are again deprived of baseball. The Blue Jays can’t play here [because of border closures with the U.S.]. I understand it, but It’s still sad.

JA: What are your hopes for the Toronto Blue Jays next season? They had a decent season this year. They got into the postseason. Unfortunately, it was short lived because they were the eight-seed.

LA: They were the eight-seed. They had to play the top seed. If I could’ve had a wish, I would’ve loved to see them win just one of those three games, in the elimination round. I just think one win would’ve really been amazing for fans. You asked a little earlier about how it affects me. I can find that if they’re on a losing streak, it can personally make me feel down, which I know it shouldn’t – it’s a game – and I have no control over it. I would’ve liked to have seen them win one of those games.

I don’t know that I loved all the rule changes that came in this year, because I guess, again, I’m a loyal fan and I want things to stay the same. I do, however, agree, that baseball’s a very long game and for that reason, they have a hard time attracting fans. It’s slow moving, it’s long. I think without having fans in the stadiums, it’s hard to sit and watch TV for three-and-a-half hours to watch a game. It was especially hard as a Blue Jays fan this year, or maybe all teams, the commentators couldn’t go to the games. So they were really reporting on what we are all seeing on a television rather than being right there in the thick of it.

JA: I think that was Toronto-specific because [the commentators] couldn’t be in the United States [due to border closures].

LA: That might be true. So I hope that that goes away. I would say I watched upwards of 98% of the games this year, but I ‘d like to go back to a little more normal. And I’d like to be able to go see them in person, it’s a highlight in my year.

JA: What can you tell us about the song, “First Place”?

LA: Oh my God, I love that song! To this day, it still makes me happy. When I’m having a really bad day and I need a little pick-me-up, I will sometimes go up to my computer, Google it, and listen to it.

[CLIP: “First Place”]

LA: Back then, when they were on their way to being first place, my daughter was a huge Taylor Swift fan, so I knew the tune of the song. I was lucky enough to go with her to a Taylor Swift concert. So I also, I guess, had this hook into Taylor Swift, which is the melody of the song. And I still love it because it reminds me of what, up until now, has been my favourite time in Blue Jays history, for me.

I know that they won two World Series, and I was excited about that. I remember the night they won the second World Series, I remember exactly where I was when I found out, but I wasn’t watching the game. I was at a party, maybe that was why, it was a very good friend’s birthday, but I felt way more involved in it through this second run, in the [2015, 2016] years, when they started doing really well. I love the song. This year, I was hoping that they would come out with parodies for the fact they actually were making the playoffs. But they didn’t, that I know of anyway.

JA: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

LA: I was thinking about, as we’ve been talking, I think that being a fan of a sport, maybe being a fan of anything, but being a fan of something adds a dimension to your life that can be positive. Heartbreaking at times, but it’s nice in this very busy world where people work way too many hours and are really trying to support the people around them, it’s nice to have an outlet of something that can bring joy to the masses. And even though they might be fair-weather fans or bandwagon fans, when the team is doing well and I’m surrounded by people who I care about who also care about the Jays – because, mostly, it’s just me – it’s fun! It makes people feel good, I think it’s a good thing.

[CLIP: “First Place”]