

# The man who turns hits into millions

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Lyness Stewart was frantic. The bids for five agent fees encompassed all women faculty were falling in a couple of million from the California Angels. A few hundred grand more from the Yankees. A higher bid from San Diego.

Another phone call. The Angels agent in awe.

"Step in, step in," pleaded Stewart, sounding like a gambler who wants to put his winning from the table before the dice roll again.

The \$1 million Stewart wanted had been offered by the Angels, the team the Southern California wanted to join.

"Get me right," Stewart begged his agent. "Somebody else is going to offer me another million and I'd look like a fool if I don't take it."

The agent smiled. With his client's best interests at heart, he decided not to bid in the race for what he wanted.

Three days later Stewart sat down with the Yankees, gave Jell's bid, and wrote his name on a contract with the Angels. For two years of baseball, Stewart would be paid \$140,000 annually through 1980. It added up to \$2.8 million, the highest baseball contract ever. The agent, Abdul Jell, was still smiling.

A private weekday morning in downtown Oakland. The young man wearing a white suit and a white jacket is sitting in a car. He is smiling, but his look is not exactly like the man who will stand outside from last

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—Gabe Paul

night, a couple of blocks away, waving at fans on the girls who work the night shift.

He could sit in there.

His office is handsome. Not a real office. No clutter of books and papers, just a handsome. The leather jacket falls open, revealing a bit of shirt with the 10-11 symbol of South Beach printed on it. He watches the silver Cadillac on the \$10,000 vehicle parked at the curb. There is another car at home in the garage, but when this one is out of the garage.

Abdul Jell checks in, ignoring the guests. The printer like machine brings into pieces, giving him the silence of a vibrating third strike.

remember Jell's face at the border as writing opened. He has to check twice, three times, before being so really can't think of much to say either way about Jell the agent.

"But I'll tell you this," says Stewart, struck more by the memory of Jell in street clothes than in a suit. "He was very personable. The girls were attracted to him."

"He has a flare for that kind of thing," said Stewart, referring to Jell's work as an agent. "He's not afraid to ask. He's confident. I don't see him asking for anything."

Jell's passenger tumbles with the door of the Buick. The parking mechanism isn't exactly as familiar as the one on the Ford back at the office.

"Forget it," says Jell, also ignoring the two women he's pulled up in front of, outside a bank. Inside, a woman executive greets her approach.

They get down to business. "And I've got to have the date for that purchase check. Debra and Bruce Taylor. Just I need \$11,000 for the agent."

The woman looks scribbling notes, but smiling as if she's always in a state of grace. She says or more. Jell perhaps a read of little that a first transaction. The rest and a couple of other checks are brought with the same disregard as the selected Buick inside.

A desk across the bank provides him a glimpse of the woman's glasses as usual.

"It's all psychological," says Jell, explaining his negotiating style. "Once I figure out the person I'm dealing with, the rest is easy. Sometimes they even give you things you haven't asked for, just because they've heard you're going to ask for them."

The people he deals with must have him, or at least be filled with respect, right?

Not quite.

Gabe Paul, the former New York Yankees general manager who now holds the same job with the Cleveland Indians, has dealt with Jell. His first reaction is not to speak of outrageous demands or inflated salaries at the negotiating table.

"Jell? He's a damn good agent."

Paul agrees Jell's military demeanor in street clothes is arranged for a West Coast business trip just as he was that the agent's dinner table again.

"The agents aren't our downfall," says Paul of baseball's old guard. "If anything we're our own downfall. We can't blame it on anyone else. We've got to investigate the modern era."

Debra Taylor, the new Yankees GM, agrees with his predecessor.

"Jell looked like a damn good agent."



Agent Abdul Jell, and one of the benefits that goes with negotiating \$3.3 million contracts

higher game, and a contract that allowed him to be a free agent after his contract expires. The Yankees Association, after a decade of negotiation, was the same fight for its members — but only after six seasons of major league play. A year later, there was a two-year contract for \$100,000.

"It's the game," explains Jell, all too aware

of the game. The Stewart management doesn't spend too freely of the agent.

But they also don't speak too freely about him. They are like Bill Lucas, the No. 2 man on the Atlanta Braves' organizational chart. Lucas was a key man in accepting the history-writing terms of Stewart's contract. He has been hearing about it ever since.

