

Student Scores as Red Sox Ball Girl

Haley King (COM'16) is ready for every hop, liner, foul ball, and pop-up

WITH THE CRACK OF A bat, former Red Sox outfielder Daniel Nava sent a line drive screaming down the Fenway Park right field line. While the grounds crew ducked for cover, Haley King instinctively extended her arm and snagged the ball in her gloved hand.

“My natural reaction is to field the ball when it comes toward me, because I played softball,” says Red Sox ball girl King (COM'16), who played outfield on the Terrier softball team as a freshman. “But Fenway Park is tricky. It’s hard to judge balls when they hit off the wall because they ricochet differently every time. There’s no real practice you can do to prepare yourself.”

Many Red Sox fans may covet the access enjoyed by King, but her rewards are earned by demanding responsibilities. King must not only protect fans from errant balls, but also help run pregame ceremonies, offer tips during the ceremonial first pitch, and hand out foul balls to eager fans. Oh, and make some spectacular catches.

King learned about the gig freshman year from a friend who’d heard the Red Sox were hoping to hire ball girls with



Haley King and her family attended game six of the 2013 American League Championship Series and got her own World Series Ring.

prior softball experience. She sent in a highlight video of her ground ball skills along with a résumé and was called in for an interview. “I almost passed out when I found out I got the job,” says King, a Worcester native who has been at the job for three years. “I’ve been a huge Red Sox fan my entire life.”

At Fenway, in a role akin to a team ambassador, King shares her love of America’s oldest pastime with both children and adults. She is charged with picking the child who leans into the mic at the start of every game and says, “Play ball!” She admits weighing the “cuteness factor,” and looking for those dressed in Red Sox gear and for kids who won’t be shy up on the mound.

Next come her instructions for the first pitch ceremony: “Don’t step on the foul line. There will be a ball sitting on the mound when you get out there. It’s the game ball—don’t touch it. I will give you the ball you are throwing. And lob it, don’t try to fire it in there.” (That last bit of advice was ignored by actor Mark Wahlberg, who ended up hitting a fan when he threw the first pitch a few

years ago.) Once the game starts, King and a second ball girl take up posts at either the first or third base side. Armed with a glove, a helmet, and a bucket to sit on, she prepares for every hop, liner, foul ball, and pop-up that comes her way.

The worst crime for a ball girl to commit, she says, is interfering with a fair ball.

“My rule of thumb is that if I’m on the first base line, I will not move to my right,” King says. “The first base side, the foul ground is very tight as compared to the third base side. If it’s really close, and you have to wait to see if the ball is fair or foul, I’ll usually let it go. You don’t want to be booed by 38,000 people.”

Such a moment would inevitably end up on *Sports-Center*’s “Not Top Ten” list. Fortunately, some of King’s best catches, like the time she came to the grounds crew’s rescue, have been caught on camera and live forever on YouTube. She passes her successful catches to a nearby kid or a fervent fan.

The job comes with more than a few perks. King scored tickets for her family and herself to the legendary game six of the 2013 American League Championship Series that sent the Red Sox on to play—and win—against the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series. And maybe the biggest thrill: she got her own World Series ring, with her name engraved on the side.

And there’s no rule that says the job has to end when she graduates. If she gets a job in Boston, she may continue. **AMY LASKOWSKI**



Emmy-nominated writers Mike DiCenzo (left) and Arthur Meyer help *The Tonight Show* dominate late night TV.

Writing for *The Tonight Show* Starring Jimmy Fallon

Alums reflect on working for late night TV’s most popular host

Growing up, Mike DiCenzo had a dream: he wanted to reunite the cast of one of his favorite shows, *Saved by the Bell*. As a senior writer on NBC’s *Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, he not only was able to make that happen, but had a boss willing to star in a sketch that brought Zack, Kelly, Jessie, and Slater back together.

DiCenzo cast Fallon as a Bayside High classmate of the four, and he persuaded *Saved by the Bell* stars Mark-Paul Gosselaar, Mario Lopez, Elizabeth Berkley, and Tiffani Thiessen to take up their old personas and dress in ’90s duds. The eight-minute skit was an instant hit when it aired last February and has been viewed on YouTube 31.5 million times since.

“My job is awesome,” says DiCenzo (COM’05), who admits he still has “holy s--t!” moments when he realizes he’s writing for a late night show with millions of viewers. He was the first writer Fallon hired when he succeeded Conan O’Brien on *Late Night* in 2009, and he went with him when Fallon took over the *Tonight Show* from Jay Leno last year. “Just the nature of the show and who you get to work with is amazing—I got to write lyrics for Paul McCartney,” DiCenzo says. The personal payoff is good, too: “My grandma’s definitely proud of me.”

Joining DiCenzo at the *Tonight Show* writers’ table each day is Arthur Meyer (COM’06). The Emmy-nominated alums pen sketches and celebrity bits that have helped the show dominate competitors such as *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* During last February’s sweeps, *The Tonight Show* beat its competitors by more than a million viewers.

The BU scribes met only briefly in college. DiCenzo, who wrote for BUTV10’s now-defunct *Overexposed*, landed a gig at the satirical news website *The Onion* before going to work for Fallon. He began to use his Brooklyn neighbor Meyer in some of the *Late Night* skits, drawing on Meyer’s background in sketch comedy as a member of BU’s comedy group Slow Children at Play and then of Pangea 3000, a sketch comedy group he belonged to in New York after college. His talent for sketch comedy helped him get hired as a *Tonight* staff writer.

“It taught me how to collaborate with other comedians, and that’s a huge part of doing comedy,” Meyer says. “The only way you can write a good sketch is to collaborate and be open to other people’s ideas.”

The *Tonight Show* is known for goofy humor, good-natured interviews, and skits like Michelle Obama “mom dancing” and Tom Hanks performing slam poetry. “It’s a very sincere show, a positive show,” says Meyer. “It celebrates more than it takes down.”

The two writers credit Fallon with setting the tone in the writers’ room. “A lot of the show’s best ideas are inspired by him,” says DiCenzo. And from Meyer: “He’s the hardest worker I’ve ever seen.” Fallon expects the same work ethic from his *Tonight Show* writing staff. “I’m thinking of ideas for jokes when I get on the subway at 7:30 in the morning,” says Meyer, who is still working from home at 11 most nights. “You have to be pretty on top of news and current events so you can reach as large an audience as possible.” **AL**