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By Benoit Denizet-Lewis

Bill Morgan doesn't like his car. Sure, it's a hot car, but hot doesn't necessarily get you anywhere on time, nor does it understand the orthopedic particulars of infielder Nomar Garciaparra's left wrist or pitcher Pedro Martinez's right shoulder or any other body part of earth-shattering importance. Morgan's car is an Audi TT Roadster, and if you've ever seen one, you know it can make an ugly man look downright appealing. Morgan doesn't need wheels for that (he has been accurately described, albeit by his PR person, as "the kind of guy women are attracted to and players want to have a beer with"), but he does need to get from St. Elizabeth's Medical Center in Brighton, where he chairs the orthopedic department, to Fenway Park, where he serves as the Red Sox team physician. And right now, Morgan is behind schedule, stuck in traffic, and driving a moody car with a thing for mechanics.

Still, life is good for the pleasant, energetic 50-year-old with the curly gray hair, the pale face prone to burning, and the tanned arms and legs he attributes to his "Irish freckles coagulating, creating the appearance of a tan." Only 30 minutes ago, William J. Morgan successfully excised the contracted cords in the hand of a man suffering from Dupuytren's contracture, a genetic condition mostly affecting men of Celtic descent.

(In a nutshell, your fingers start out fine, eventually lose the ability to straighten out, and finally, as punishment for being the kind of tough guy who never asks for directions and never goes to the doctor, get stuck in your palm). "Typical Irish guys," Morgan says with a laugh. "They blow it off for years while everyone is telling them, 'You know, you might want to get that checked out.' "

Today's surgery apparently went well, but it also went longer than expected. "One thing you can't rush in life is surgery," says Morgan, who often states the obvious as if he is breaking news. "It's not like you can stop and say, 'Hey, this has been great, but I've got a Sox game in two hours.' "

But Morgan does have a Sox game in two hours. And considering how players rallied around him recently, the good doctor has an extra incentive to get there early. On April 10, the Red Sox announced a three-year partnership with Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, making it the club's official hospital and health care provider. That would normally leave Morgan, on staff at St. Elizabeth's, out of the equation. But Red Sox players, who lobbied hard for Morgan, are finally happy with their medical care after years of sporadic discontent with longtime medical director Arthur Pappas. (Garciaparra once lamented loudly in the clubhouse, "When are we going to get a doctor who doesn't

screw up the players?") Particularly vocal were Garciparra and Martinez, two guys whose opinions matter. So, while Beth Israel Deaconess now provides medical care for the Sox fans and front-office personnel, the players still deal with Morgan.

"Some of the guys apparently went to bat for me," says Morgan, who, in addition to often stating the obvious, has never met a cliché he didn't like. "And I guess the ownership listened. It's a lot different from the old regime, when the players weren't really asked their opinions about much of anything. But that's water under the bridge now."

Morgan pulls his Audi into the players' parking lot, stopping a few spaces down from a significantly larger Hummer. As Morgan walks through the clubhouse toward the training room (he wears a stylish suit that he will soon remove in favor of his trademark red team jacket), Sox players welcome him with a chorus of "Hey, Doc," "Wassup, Doc?" and one "Hey, MoMaaaaan," courtesy of infielder Damian Jackson. "I have no idea why he calls me that," Morgan says with a chuckle.

In the training room, Morgan's first order of business is Johnny Pesky's monthly vitamin B-12 shot. (Pesky suffers from pernicious anemia, an inability to absorb B-12 through the bowel.) "Johnny can do it himself, but he likes when I give him the shot," Morgan tells me. The 83-year-old Pesky, who batted .307 in a 10-year Major League career, now works as the club's special assignment instructor.

Morgan rubs Pesky's left shoulder. "Yeah, warm me up, Doc," says a smiling Pesky, who sits in uniform, his legs dangling from the edge of the training table.

"You been working out?" Morgan jokes, handling Pesky's thin left arm. "Look at all these muscles."

"Yeah, yeah," Pesky says. "My wife has bigger arms than I do."

The two banter for a minute, after which Morgan finally sticks the needle into Pesky's shoulder. "Thanks, Doc. You're a gentleman and a scholar," Pesky says. "Now I'm going to go irritate someone else. I already sent [Tim] Wakefield running. He was in here relaxing, and I chased his ass out."

There is more than an hour until game time, and during the next 30 minutes, Morgan keeps busy with relatively mundane medical tasks: Jackson asks Morgan for the name of a pediatrician for his son. ("Don't forget," Jackson tells him, "because my wife keeps bugging me about this.") Morgan confirms, with the help of a dermatologist, that a rash on outfielder Manny Ramirez's face is a simple case of dermatitis that he sometimes gets when going from hot to cold climates. He examines the finger of a front-office guy, who apparently injured it while bowling. Finally, he fails to fall for the shenanigans of infielder Kevin Millar, who intentionally kicks a table on the way out of the training room and yells, "Oww."

(It is still several weeks before Morgan will really have to earn his paycheck. In June,

three pitchers have health problems: Martinez strains his shoulder, Casey Fossum develops shoulder tendinitis, and Robert Person injures his hip. Morgan also operates on two promising minor leaguers, including one who was injured during an on-field fight. As the game begins, Morgan - who attends most home games, where he is also responsible for the visiting team's medical care - takes his customary front-row seat next to the Sox dugout. When a scorching foul ball nearly ends our lives, I ask him what would happen if a ball ever took him out. Does the team have a backup doctor who could attend to him? "Nah," Morgan says with a laugh. "I guess I'd be out of luck."

I've only known Morgan for an hour, but already I understand why players like him. He has a laid-back, youthful, frat-boy energy to him, but he combines it with a consistent aura of professionalism and intelligence. He comes off as honest. He is also polite and attentive, and he has the rare ability to make you feel as if you're the only person in the room. Most important, perhaps, he understands that his job is as much about psychology ("I have to get into the heads of these players") as it is about fixing rotator cuffs. And surprisingly (to me, at least), he treats minor leaguers, bowling-impaired front-office personnel, teenage pitchers, and stubborn Irish guys with bad hands with the same level of respect and care as he does Manny Ramirez. This endears him to just about everybody.

Tonight's game turns out to be mostly uneventful on the medical front, which Morgan says is exactly how he likes it. "Knock on wood, but this season's been a cakewalk so far," he says. I ask him where he learned to use two cliches in one sentence. "I learned it from the best," he says. "I've spent far too much time in baseball clubhouses."

Bill Morgan was never much good at baseball. What he was good at was skipping classes at Boston University, spending his weekday afternoons at Fenway Park. "That made getting into medical school a little more challenging," says Morgan, who grew up in Dorchester and Quincy. He eventually went to graduate school at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston (where he met his former wife, with whom he has three daughters in their late teens and early 20s) and then to medical school at the University of Texas in Galveston. Intent on being a plastic surgeon, he returned home to intern at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in Worcester in 1981.

There, he was turned on to orthopedic medicine by Arthur Pappas, then the professor and chairman of orthopedic surgery at the Worcester hospital, the Red Sox team doctor, and a part owner. Like everyone who first meets Pappas, Morgan was taken aback by his eyebrows. They are truly extraordinary. Preposterously thick and bushy, they appear to take up half the available space on his forehead. Not only that, but the left eyebrow curves dramatically, covering a section of his cheekbone, as if being weighed down by an imaginary Christmas ornament.

"He seemed larger than life to me, and not only because of his eyebrows," recalls Morgan. "He just has this intimidating presence that commands fear in some and respect in others. And I think that because I was a little irreverent, he kind of liked me. We

developed a father-son type of mentoring relationship."

Pappas says that Morgan stood out among the interns both for his personality and his medical ability. "There are plenty of orthopedic surgeons who are great technically, and Bill certainly is that, but most don't have the personal skills that Bill does," Pappas says. "He was a natural at this."

Soon, Morgan—a baby-faced 33-year-old in 1986—was filling in for Pappas on his days off from Fenway. "I was just a kid," Morgan says, "and I felt like a deer in headlights. Here I was taking care of some of the best athletes in the world. I was scared out of my mind."

Helen Robinson, who for years operated the Fenway switchboard, didn't help matters. "In those days you couldn't call into the park or out of the park without going through her," Morgan says. "Everything went through Helen. So I call her on one of my first days, I'm nervous as hell, and I say, 'Hi, Helen. This is Dr. Morgan.' Dead silence. Then finally she says, 'Well, who the hell are you?' I say, 'Well, Helen, I'm Dr. Morgan. I'm covering the game tonight for Dr. Pappas, and I need to call UMass.' Silence again. 'Well, what the hell's the number?' she says. So finally she puts me through, and now I'm trying hard to make her like me, because I'm getting the feeling that this woman could really ruin my life here. I say, 'Helen, it's really a nice day out there, isn't it?' She says, 'Well, how the hell would I know? I'm half blind!' "

That same week, Morgan learned a valuable lesson for any team doctor: Don't mill around in the stands if you don't have to. "I was so excited to be here, I would get to the games four hours early and just walk around the park," Morgan says. "So I'm out in the stands, soaking it all in, and all of a sudden this guy comes up and says, 'You're the doc, right?' I said, 'Yeah, but I handle the players.' He says, 'Well, there's nobody around, and that guy over there looks like he's having a heart attack.' So I go over, and the guy's choking on a hot dog. I do the Heimlich, and the hot dog comes out. But now he's having chest pains. Back then, we didn't have defibrillators at the park, so we had an ambulance come. I ride with him in the ambulance, and all of a sudden he barfs all over me. So now, of course, he's feeling better. I take a cab back to the park, and I have vomit all over me. That was the day I learned not to get to the park too early, and when I do, to stay in the clubhouse."

The players liked Morgan, but it was still Pappas's show. Widely respected as a godfather of sports medicine, Pappas was also something of a local legend. While Sox players came and went, he never went anywhere. For 25 years, Red Sox fans who picked up their morning paper invariably read some reference to Pappas. Usually, they were basic medical updates (so-and-so has some tightness in his shoulder), but increasingly the story became about him.

In 1995, Sox second baseman Marty Barrett won a \$1.7 million malpractice suit against Pappas for misdiagnosing a 1990 knee injury. In the late 1990s, Butch Henry, Tim Lincecum, Lou Merloni, and Brian Rose all complained that Pappas had misdiagnosed

their injuries. And in 1999, an unusually vocal scene erupted in the Sox clubhouse when pitcher Tom Gordon announced to team mates that the torn ligament in his elbow was not improving. While Pappas had said the tear was healing, a renowned orthopedic surgeon, James Andrews, disagreed and recommended an MRI. Players joked loudly about the medical care they received from Pappas, and when manager Jimmy Williams limped through the clubhouse with an injured foot, one player suggested he get it checked out.

"I know who you shouldn't let look at it," another player said, referring to Pappas. While Pappas has devoted supporters—including Morgan, many orthopedic doctors, and current and former Red Sox players and professional athletes—his small ownership stake in the team provided the appearance to some of a conflict of interest. Several players wondered whether they were being rushed back to service because Pappas was more worried about wins and losses than their health. Pappas has always denied this allegation.

There have been no similar charges against Morgan since he took over for Pappas two years ago. "Everyone on the team likes him," says infielder Millar. "The fact that guys on this team asked that he stay as doctor is a testament to how much people respect him. You just trust the guy."

Morgan has endeared himself to the players by following what he says is a simple philosophy: "I treat the players like my patients first and as employees of the organization second. These guys move around so much, many don't have primary care physicians. So I take care of them, I take care of their families. Mostly, I try to treat them like I would any other patient."

But it's not quite that simple. Most of Morgan's other patients aren't worth millions of dollars, nor are their employers obsessed with their MRI results. After all, team doctors report to management. Still, Morgan says that he's only required to reveal what would negatively affect a player's performance on the field. For example, if a player were to test positive for HIV when the test is offered each spring, Morgan says that information would stay between him and the player. "HIV doesn't impact on their ability to do their job," he says. "Fortunately, we haven't had that situation come up."

The same confidentiality goes for a player on steroids. "If I suspect a player, I will take him aside and have a conversation about the downsides of the drug," he says. "The remainder of the discussion is based on the honesty that ensues. But I'm not going to lecture him. The fact is that these guys are professional athletes looking for any edge to be the best they can be. Fortunately, if I look around this team and think about who I might suspect, I would say the percentage of players on steroids is very low."

Morgan says that he must be increasingly careful about what he tells the press. In May, strict new Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act guidelines made it illegal for doctors to reveal any medical information without getting the permission of the patient. "A few weeks ago, if a writer came to me and asked, 'How's Nomar's wrist?' I would say, 'Well, it's doing well. We did this, we did that,'" Morgan says. "But now, because of HIPAA, players have to sign a form that says I can talk to the press. In the

past, I would never talk to the media anyway without running it by the player first, but this just makes it more complicated, and I can say a lot less. My general philosophy is to say very little. I'm not sure who that upsets more: the press or the hard-core fantasy-league guys who spend their spare time reading injury reports."

Pedro Martinez strolls into the Red Sox training room wearing blue spandex shorts, a red long-sleeve shirt, a white bandana, red socks, and blue flip-flops. It's the bottom of the fourth inning on a February-like Friday night in May, and Martinez, who is coming off a stellar outing in a 12-3 blowout of the Texas Rangers, is in a good mood.

"Everyone is getting hot at the same time," the pitcher says, taking his shirt off and sitting on the training table. Morgan has three body parts on the agenda tonight: Martinez's right shoulder, which is arguably watched more closely than any right shoulder in the history of the world; his left knee, which is emitting some sort of popping sound; and his right groin muscle, which he pulled two starts ago.

Martinez likes Morgan enough to let me sit in on this checkup, which is normally off-limits to anyone who has ever written for a living. Martinez rarely speaks to the media, which only adds to the endless intrigue surrounding his health. But he loves talking about Morgan, and in a prior conversation, he told me why so many Sox players trust their doctor. "He looks you in the eye, he's honest, and he's one of the best in the business," Martinez said. "He takes time to explain everything, so you understand the options. He respects you as a person. With my shoulder, he was looking at every option except surgery."

Morgan usually examines Martinez the day after his starts. Today, he stands behind Martinez and orders him to raise his arms. As he runs through several exercises to test his strength and fluidity of motion, Morgan playfully compliments Martinez on his shoulder. "Look at that muscle mass," Morgan says, although, unlike with Pesky, he isn't kidding. Martinez has bulked up considerably during the last year, and his upper body (particularly his shoulders) looks healthy and strong. Martinez smiles and flexes his muscles.

With his shoulder in the clear, Morgan moves on to Martinez's left knee. "It pops," Martinez says. Morgan suspects it's a simple case of synovialplica (a thickening of the lining of the joint), but he extends the knee and puts pressure on it to check that there isn't any torn cartilage. There isn't.

Finally, it's on to Martinez's groin, which he complains is still sore. Morgan tells Martinez to lie on his back, stretching his right leg out to the side. Morgan says he's palpating the muscle, looking for any tears. "Cough real loud," Morgan says. Martinez coughs real loud. "Does that hurt?" Morgan asks him, pulling Martinez's leg out to the side again. Martinez says it doesn't. Later, Morgan tells me that he was checking to make sure the soreness isn't actually a hernia. "I just wanted to be sure we weren't missing the

boat," he says.

With the pulling and stretching done, Martinez sits up, and we all watch the Sox game on the training-room television. "Hey, Doc, weren't you in that list of top doctors that Boston magazine does?" Martinez asks out of the blue. Morgan says he isn't sure. "You should be," Martinez says. "Your name comes up all the time as one of the best."

"Well, there's no accounting for taste," Morgan says, exhibiting his occasionally self-deprecating sense of humor.

Morgan smiles, but he looks tired.

A self-described workaholic who leaves his house in Boylston at 5 a.m. and doesn't return until midnight after night games, Morgan knows he has traded a social life for the chance to take care of the Red Sox. He says it's not a difficult choice, and only partly because being the team doctor of a Major League club does wonders for a career.

"There's no doubt that the perception out there is that if you're good enough to take care of Nomar and the Red Sox, then you must be good enough to take care of Joe Blow," Morgan says. "Having your name in the paper all the time keeps the phones ringing, and it does wonders for [my practice] at St. Elizabeth's. But that's not what it's about for me. I do this because the chance to take care of elite athletes is just too exciting to pass up. What these guys can do is really superhuman, and being around that and helping them perform at their peak isn't really work to me."

The players notice Morgan's dedication. "The doc probably should try to get out more," jokes Millar. "He's here all the time."

On a frigid May night at Fenway, Morgan says he "wouldn't have it any other way. If my other option tonight was sitting at home with a beer watching the tube, I'd rather be doing this."

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