Staying in the Games

I grew up playing Strat-O-Matic baseball, and I actually created my first fantasy baseball game on an old Prime mainframe when I was in middle school. In high school, I was all-county basketball and baseball.

Monroe High School, in Rochester, N.Y., was a rough place, and there was enough violence at basketball games my freshman year that they instituted a fan ban. No one, not even parents, was allowed to attend the games. We'd play against other schools, and the stands would be empty; it was just the guys on the court. Somebody would make a spectacular play, and all you'd hear was a coach clapping. It was surreal. The next year, I transferred to a private school, and we won the sectional championship in front of 4,200 people, which was quite a switch.

Recently, I saw William Bratton interviewed on TV. He grew up in Boston, and the commentator asked him if he would remain a Red Sox fan if he runs for mayor of New York. He said he supposed he'd switch his allegiance and become a Yankees fan and a Mets fan, and I thought to myself "No!" I may well run for office in New York State someday, and if I do, I hope people will respect the fact that I will love the Red Sox until the day I die.

For the last seven years I've coached basketball at the Carmine Street Rec Center in the Village a couple of nights a week. Manhattan's a strange place. You can spend weeks at a time with no one younger than 22 or older than 50, and there's something artificial about that. It's good to spend some time with high school kids.

I've always been interested in politics. One of the formative experiences of my life was attending an anniversary of the March on Washington in 1988 when I was 18. There were very few people there, and I was trying to decide whether the death of political activism was a good thing because it meant the world had truly improved, or if it meant that people were more cynical and selfish.

I started my company six years ago, when I was 24. Being a 30-year-old chief executive is sometimes an advantage and sometimes a handicap. There's an assumption that because you're young you're sophisticated about the technology but you're not particularly knowledge-
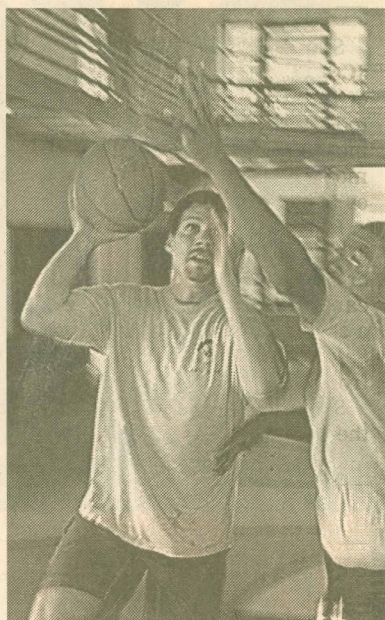
Gary Dunkin for The New York Times

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Chief executive, Small World,
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able about business.

What's great about being the boss is that it lets me have my hand in all areas of the company. I started college as a math major, declared history and political science as my major after my freshman year, then switched to physics and ended up getting my degree in computer science.

My partner and I weathered a lot of crises in the early days. We were working out of the living room of my apartment on West 89th Street, and we had no money. Con Ed came to turn off the power once, and a fire in the building nearly destroyed our office. It took four and a half months to get the T1 connection we needed from Nynex. Then a pipe exploded and destroyed some of our hardware.

It can be dangerous outside the office, too. If you do enough business travel, you end up with a few flying experiences. Twice when I landed in Chicago we touched down and took off again because there was another plane at the end of the runway.

I surround myself with mentors. One of the lessons I learned is from David Ogilvy: hire people bigger than yourself, and you'll end up with an organization of giants. It sounds obvious, but another lesson I learned in the last six years is there's an awful lot I don't know.

Written with Patricia R. Olsen.