

CLEVELAND Jewish News

Siegal pitches her baseball success everywhere she goes



CJN / ED WITTENBERG

Justin Siegal

Justine Siegal talks about her journey in baseball July 28 at the Siegal Beachwood facility.

Posted: Wednesday, July 29, 2015 2:52 pm

ED WITTENBERG | STAFF REPORTER
ewittenberg@cjn.org

Justine Siegal's Cleveland Indians jersey is part of the "Chasing Dreams: Baseball and Becoming American" exhibit at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Beachwood. It's the jersey she wore when she became the first woman to pitch batting practice to a major league team – the Indians – in 2011.

Siegal, who grew up in Cleveland Heights, said it's humbling for her to have her jersey hanging there during her talk, "Breaking the Gender Barrier: One Woman's Path to Baseball History," July 28 at the Siegal Beachwood facility. She also shared a little-known story about the patch on that jersey with the crowd of more than 150 people, which included about 25 members of her family.

Siegal said she wore the patch in honor of Christina-Taylor Green, the 9-year-old girl who was the youngest of six people killed during a shooting spree outside a grocery store in Tucson, Ariz., in 2011. Christina-Taylor

was the only girl on her baseball team, and her goal was to be the first female to play in the major leagues, Siegal said.

"I ended up meeting this girl's mother, Roxanna Green," she said. "I just wanted to say thank you. She asked me to sign a ball, and I wrote, 'Follow your dreams.'"

"About a month later, she emailed me and said she put that ball right next to her daughter's urn. You can't get more humbled than that. That was a great day."

Siegal's childhood dream was to play for the Indians. At age 16, after realizing she probably wouldn't be able to fulfill that dream, she told a coach she admired that she wanted to coach college baseball.

"He laughed at me," she said. "He said, 'No man will ever listen to a woman on a baseball field.' I was pretty crushed because he was my hero; he was who I wanted to be. But I decided I was going to prove him wrong."

Siegal, 40, went to Springfield College in Springfield, Mass., where she served as an assistant baseball coach for three years and earned a doctorate in sport and exercise psychology.

"I was the only woman in the country coaching (baseball) at the college level," she said. "And I will tell you from experience that men will listen to a woman on a baseball field when she knows what she's doing."

Siegal, a graduate of Hawken School in Chester Township who lives in Malibu, Calif., also talked about her experience as an assistant coach with the Brockton Rox, an independent minor league team in Brockton, Mass., and how she got the chance to pitch batting practice to the Indians and five other major league teams in 2011.

"It was a really fun time," she said. "It was nice to do something where I wasn't fighting; I was just having the time of my life."

In 1998, Siegal created Baseball for All, a national nonprofit that provides opportunities for girls in baseball. She serves as its executive director.

"I started it as a women's baseball league in Beachwood, and after three years I realized the future was in girls," she said.

"I've been really fortunate to be able to live my dream. Dreams do come true – I'm proof of it – and I challenge everybody to go after theirs."

Siegal was introduced by her father, Michael Siegal, who explained how she always had to prove herself because she was usually the only girl on the team. Other family members in attendance included her grandparents, Laura and Alvin Siegal, and her daughter, Jasmine, 17.

The program was co-presented by the Laura and Alvin Siegal Lifelong Learning Program at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland and the Maltz Museum.