

DAN DEAN: staff photographer

Roger Craig, the Detroit Tigers' pitching coach in their 1984 world championship season, autographs copies of his book "Inside Pitch" at the Paper Tiger bookstore in Livonia. Earlier this month Craig announced that he was retiring from his coaching position with the Tigers.

Ex-Tiger makes pitch for book

By Richard Lech
staff writer

ROGER CRAIG admitted his arm was getting a little tired, but no reliever was warning up.

A steady stream of fans at the Paper Tiger bookstore in Livonia kept Craig busy autographing copies of his book "Inside Pitch."

Craig is the pitching coach who guided the Detroit Tigers through their 1984 world championship season. "Inside Pitch," with Tiger manager Sparky Anderson's "Bless You Boys," is one of two insider's accounts of the Tigers' super season that have been released so far.

"I hear your book's better than Sparky's," a fan said to Craig.

"It is," Craig said with a big smile, then paused.

"Sparky'll tell you that."

THE RECENT appearance at the appropriately named Paper Tiger was one of 22 Craig and his co-author, Livonia resident Vern Plagenhoef, have made in recent weeks to promote "Inside Pitch."

Praised by critics as an insightful look at the team, the book, which takes the form of a diary, already has sold out its first printing of 20,000 copies, Plagenhoef said. A second printing is on the way.

"A diary is a personal thing, and there are a lot of personal things in the book that you normally don't see," Craig said.

With his cowboy boots, glasses, balding head and southern accent (by way of North Carolina), Craig was reminiscent of a low-key Lyndon Johnson as he scribbled a personal note to each fan.

He wore a big gold belt buckle with a Tiger's head on it, a gift from his wife, and his '84 World Series ring, one of

four such rings Craig has earned.

Although he was there to promote his book, Craig genially signed anything handed his way — slips of paper, book markers, posters, "Boar of '84" books, even copies of Sparky's book.

THE AUTOGRAPH seekers seemed just as interested in the 1985 season as in the '84 championship year. Specifically, they wanted to know if Craig was coming back next year or going ahead with his plans to retire.

"Don't quit. We need you," said one fan.

"I hope a lot of people talk you into it," said another.

"I've a lot of them talking to me," Craig said. "It just makes the decision a lot tougher."

Four days later Craig made that "tough decision" and told the Tigers he was not going to be the club's pitching coach in '85.

"My wife wants me to retire," he said. "The travel is the part I don't like. I love teaching, love coaching, love the ballclub, love Detroit."

"But I've been in professional baseball since 1950, and we have a nice pension plan, and I'll be able to live fairly decent."

CRAIG, 53, said he wants to spend time at his home in San Diego, where he and his wife, Carolyn, can be with their family year round. Craig said he intends to just play golf, ride his horses and play with his five grandchildren this winter.

Recent rumors suggest that Craig might take the pitching coach's position with the Tigers' World Series rivals, the San Diego Padres, but that would still keep him close to home and family.

Someone might wonder whether Craig is glad he's not coming back to the Tigers considering some of his book's candid comments on various De-

troit pitchers.

In the book, for instance, Craig describes Jack Morris as one of the best pitchers in baseball, yet Morris at times "behaves like a little boy who's had his candy stolen." Juan Berenguer at one point in the season "has some unfounded suspicions that the club is having him tailed." Reliever Aurelio Lopez had a "bruised ego" when he lost the No. 1 fireman's job to Willie Hernandez.

Craig denied that his candor would have led to friction next year.

"There's nothing really bad in there, just honest opinion," Craig said. "There's nothing controversial. I don't think it will have an effect. I think they'll enjoy it."

If he had returned Craig said he would have guarded against the Tigers' pitchers falling prey to the second-year jinx that seems to have haunted champions in recent years.

"If I'm here next year they won't be complacent," Craig said. "They're going to come out there and work. The toughest part of winning is to repeat. Especially this winter, they've got to keep themselves in good condition."

KEEPING A diary is nothing new for Craig. He has always kept a cassette-tape diary on his pitchers for his and the manager's benefit, he said.

Before this season started, however, he decided to turn a personal record into a public account.

"I felt all the time we were a good ballclub, that we were going to win it all."

"I like to go back and go over the things that happened in a game. So I thought, 'Why not make a book about it?' People might like more insight into the pitching staff. Even with the year we had, we had our ups and downs."

Throughout the season, Craig would record his thoughts after each ballgame on a cassette player. Plagenhoef, who covers the Tigers for eight newspapers in the Booth Newspapers chain, then would transcribe and edit Craig's comments.

"In a general sense, we wanted to show there was some reality to this fairy-tale season," Plagenhoef said. "That there were human relationships and human feelings involved."

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— Roger Craig
on his book "Inside Pitch"

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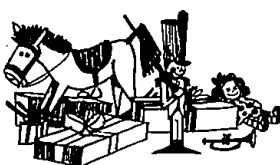
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