

Mike Santa Lucia



Of all the thousands of athletes and coaches who have been involved in sports in the city of Norwalk over the years, perhaps no one has combined to play or coach more games than **Mike Santa Lucia**.

In a remarkable career that spans parts of five different decades, the 56-year-old Santa Lucia has participated in approximately 2,500 official contests, some 1,200 as an athlete and another 1,300 as a coach.

Many of those have come at Brien McMahon High School, where Santa Lucia was a standout three-sport athlete and later a coach in several sports. In fact, he was one of the Senators' first outstanding athletes when the new high school in town opened in the early 1960s, and 40 years later he still coaches at his alma mater.

The Norwalk native played football for the Senators three years and as a senior quarterback/defensive back in the fall of 1963 he was a captain and all-conference selection. In fact, he still holds several school passing records at BMHS, including going 11-for-11 in one game as a junior.

Santa Lucia also played three years of basketball, and pitched and played outfield for the baseball team where he was again named captain as a senior. He capped off his high school career by being named McMahon's 1964 "Career Athlete."

He went on to Southern Connecticut State University where he was quarterback on the freshmen football team. But he transferred after only one season to Graceland College in Iowa, where he was a three-year starter and all-conference defensive back in 1968.

Santa Lucia also set two school records that season with three interceptions in one game and seven for the season, including one he returned for a touchdown. He also played quarterback, and returned punts and kickoffs (one for another TD). Among his teammates at Graceland were fellow Norwalkers Lou Cimminello, Phil Tegano, and Dennis Fabian.

Santa Lucia was also a three-year starting outfielder on the Graceland baseball team, and ran both indoor and outdoor. During the 1968 indoor season, he finished second in the conference in the 400, and ran on the winning 4 x 400 spring medley relay team.

He continued playing baseball during the summers, including 1966 when he was the only white player on an all-Black team called the Hawks, an experience Santa Lucia calls one of the most memorable of his career. Another that season was pitching a one-hitter against a team from Ansonia to win 1-0.

Then from 1967-'69, Santa Lucia played baseball in the Norwalk Senior City League where he was a founder, coach, and player with the Broad River Generals, winning the league batting title in 1968 with a .500 average.

Santa Lucia actually launched his coaching career in 1966 when he was named the first basketball coach ever at Norwalk Community College. He coached only four games, however, before leaving to go to Graceland.

But it was the start of a long and successful coaching career, including 32 years and counting in football. The first 17 of those years were at McMahon, where he was freshmen coach from 1970-'73 before being promoted to the varsity as offensive coordinator from 1974-'86. Then for the last 15 seasons, Santa Lucia has been on the sidelines at Norwalk High, as offensive coordinator from 1987-'90, then as head coach from 1991-'94, and again as an assistant from 1995 to the present. He was named the 1999 FCIAC Assistant Coach of the Year.

Santa Lucia has coached several other sports the last 32 years. In the early '70s, he coached freshman and junior varsity basketball at BMHS, and was also the Senators' head indoor track coach from 1974-'77 and outdoor coach from 1975-'77 after five seasons as an assistant.

In addition, he coached freshman baseball at BMHS from 1978-'82, was assistant golf coach at McMahon from 1983-'87 and head golf coach at Norwalk High from 1988-'93, and an assistant softball coach at McMahon from 1996-'99. He's also coached wrestling at both high schools, serving as an assistant at NHS from 1994-'97 and the last three seasons at McMahon as an assistant under his son Joe Santa Lucia.

Even while coaching, Santa Lucia continued playing himself until the early '80s. From 1970-'83, he was a receiver and defensive back in the Inter-City Touch Football League, helping the Darien Sportsmen win consecutive championships and set the longest winning streak in league history. He also played for the Rowayton Bears and Silvermine Nuggets, while in softball he played with Chatham Oaks.

Now a guidance counselor at Norwalk High, Santa Lucia and his wife Colleen have three children and four grandchildren, and he says "watching all three of my children compete in athletics for McMahon" was another one of his most memorable experiences in sports.

But when asked to list his greatest achievement in sports, even with all the games he's played and coached, Santa Lucia says it was "helping players realize and reach their potential in athletics."