

## *Fred Bondi*



**V**ery few people — if any — have had as much of an impact on the Norwalk sports scene as **Fred Bondi** has for the past three decades.

Before that, however, Bondi was a part of the athletic arena in the city of Stamford, where he was born and raised. He played soccer in high school, and after graduation played semi-pro football with the Stamford Rattlers in the Tri-State League. In addition, Bondi played softball for 15 years with several teams in both the Stamford Rec League and Shoreline League, making his mark as a pitcher and a .400 hitter. An avid bowler, he also earned a 189 average.

Impressive credentials, to say the least. But it was “off” the field where Fred Bondi would make his biggest contributions in sports. He began coaching in the Stamford Pop Warner Football League before moving to Norwalk in 1968.

Stamford’s loss, however, would become Norwalk’s gain. Bondi continued coaching football in the local Pop Warner League formed 10 years earlier by the Norwalk Athletic Association. But again he did his best work off the field.

Just two years later, Bondi was elected president of the Norwalk AA, a position he would hold for the next 11 years and during which time the NAA would grow to unprecedented heights.

Almost immediately he oversaw the expansion of the Pop Warner Football program, which at the time had only one team, the Norwalk Ramblers in the Midget Division. Under Bondi, the NAA added four Norwalk junior midget teams, and later a fifth team as well as cheerleaders for all six teams in the program.

Also during Bondi’s reign as president, the local organization started the Norwalk Junior Babe Ruth West Baseball League (which eventually merged with the Jr. BR East on the other side of town to form one league as it is known today and is still run by the NAA). That would also be the beginning of a long and prosperous relationship Bondi would have with Babe Ruth Baseball.

He also led the way for the formation of a new boys basketball league in town for ages 13–15, as well as girls basketball and girls softball leagues.

In fact, under Bondi the Norwalk Athletic Association became the largest youth organization in the city, and one of the biggest in the state, with over 1,500 boys and girls playing sports.

And as busy as Bondi was as an administrator, he somehow still found the time to coach. He spent six years coaching baseball in the West Norwalk Community League where he won a pair of championships. He later coached girls softball, winning two division titles and another league crown.

He was also the manager of the first Babe Ruth Girls 13–15 year old all–star softball team, which won the state championship and the following year captured the state and regional titles (there was no World Series at the time).

If that’s not enough, Bondi and his wife, Dorothy, are commissioners of the NAA Girls Basketball League, which they started together six years ago and has now grown to 18 teams of eight to 14 year old girls.

But Fred Bondi’s impact on sports hasn’t been restricted to just Norwalk. He is currently the state commissioner of Babe Ruth Baseball for ages 13–18 and is responsible for eight districts throughout Connecticut. It was through his efforts the city of Norwalk was able to host several district and state tournaments in recent years. Prior to being elected state commissioner, Bondi was appointed a district commissioner for this area in 1975, and he is also a past president of the Fairfield County Pop Warner Football Association.

The main focus of his work, however, has always centered around sports in Norwalk, and he was able to contribute to that effort even more so as a former chairman of the Norwalk Recreation and Parks Commission.

Of course, taking charge has always come naturally for Fred Bondi. Even in high school he was president of the band. He has also been a past president of the Norwalk Lions Club, as well as a member of the Norwalk Seaport Association, the Sons of Italy, the Norwalk Old Timers Athletic Association, and is still a lifetime board member with the Norwalk Athletic Association.

He’s also been active in local politics as a member of the Norwalk Common Council for seven years, serving on several committees including recreation and parks. And last year he was the Norwalk Democratic Party’s mayoral candidate.

His tireless efforts in sports and elsewhere haven’t gone unnoticed. He was recognized by the Connecticut Sports Writers Alliance, which presented him and his wife its annual “Good Guy” Award. He’s also been a recipient of the Norwalk Athletic Association Founders Award, the Norwalk Seaport Association Pearl Award, and has been honored as the Italian–American Man of the Year.