

John 'Jr.' Bieling



John 'Junior' Bieling has lived in Westport his entire life, but when it came to playing sports he might as well have been a Norwalker.

Truth is Bieling excelled in athletics in both neighboring towns. He was one of the top high school athletes around in the late 1940s at Staples High. Known to friends, teammates, and even opponents as simply 'Junior,' the talented Bieling was an All-Conference baseball player all three seasons he was at Staples from 1947-'49, playing two years in left field and one at third base. He was also an All-Conference guard on the basketball team in 1948 and '49.

During his high school years, Bieling also played basketball for the Westport YMCA Juniors in 1946 and '47, and for the Leprechauns in Westport in 1948 and '49. With the latter, he was the only non-college player selected for the

Gold Medal All-Star team.

During the summers from 1948 to '51, Bieling played third base and shortstop with the Arrow Restaurant fastpitch softball team in Westport, a team that also featured John Buschbaum, Lou Nistico, and Ed Anastasia.

It was also in 1951 that Bieling began his association with the city of Norwalk. He played fastpitch softball that year with the Laurels and basketball with the O'Brien Emeralds. He also played basketball in Norwalk with the Wee Tavern in 1949-'50, and with the city champion Strawberry Hill in 1951 under coach Al Palumbo. One of his teammates with the Hill back then was Tom Kelly.

Bieling would spend the next two years in Korea, winning another championship after the war with his 3rd Division Infantry baseball team. Returning home, Bieling reached the pinnacle of his athletic career when he played three seasons with the well-renowned Raybestos Cardinals men's fastpitch softball team out of Stratford. In fact, Bieling hit the game winning home run in the 1954 state championship game, a feat he still calls the biggest highlight of his sparkling athletic career.

Bieling would play with several other local teams in both Norwalk and Westport in the '50s and early '60s. He played basketball with the Westport 'Y' Seniors from 1954-'60, with the Southport Firemen in 1955, and was player/coach of the Yankee Clippers of Norwalk in 1957. Bieling calls that team, which included Wilky Gilmore, Davy Spears, Jerry Driscoll, Emil Garofalo, Mike Wachob, and Johnny Carpenter "one of the best, if not the best team I ever coached and played with."

He finished his brilliant softball career playing outfield with three Norwalk teams: Castro Convertible in 1957 and Pote Builders in 1958-'59 with fellow honoree Lou Mola, and with the Norwalk Eagles from 1961-'63.

When his playing days were over, Bieling turned to coaching softball. He led Masters to a fourth place finish in the nation, while his Metallized team won the Norwalk League championship and state sectional crown. He also coached JR's Hot Dog Stand.

Married to the former Carol Digisi, Bieling worked 20 years at the Arrow Restaurant and for the last 21 years has been the owner and operator of the popular JR's Hot Dog Stand in Westport. He is also a lifetime member of the Norwalk American Legion.