

Rocco Cundari



Back in the 1950s and early '60s when fast-pitch softball was at the height of its popularity, **Rocco Cundari** was known for his power — both at the plate and behind it.

Cundari was one of the best long ball hitters in Norwalk softball circles during his playing days as well as an exceptional catcher with a cannon for an arm.

He displayed those skills early in his career for local teams such as the Old Well and Terrace Restaurant. But the player who was known on the softball diamond as 'Rocky' enjoyed his most success with O'Brien's Press, teaming up with his brothers Charlie, Dominick, Jimmy, and Lou to win five city championships. That included three straight titles from 1956-'58 and two more in 1961 and '63.

In fact, during an eight-year span, from 1956-'63, O'Brien's Press finished first five times and runner-up the

other three years.

Rocky Cundari was a big part of that success. Batting third in the order, the lefty-hitting Cundari hit for both power and average, and as a catcher was one of the best at throwing out runners on the base paths or picking them off third.

A lifelong Norwalk resident, Cundari began playing baseball at Washington School with his brothers and other players from the neighborhood. Even then he showed his power-hitting ability with booming home runs over the fence.

But as fast-pitch softball started to become more popular, Cundari, like many others in that era, switched over to the new game in town. It was while working at Lessing Rudner at the age of 16 that Cundari met Joe Cusack, a premier pitcher at that time and a 1994 Old Timers honoree. The two of them quickly formed one of the best battery tandems around playing for those aforementioned Old Well and Terrace Restaurant teams.

One of Cundari's first big hits came while playing with Terrace Restaurant. In a July 1955 game in Stamford, Terrace trailed 4-2 in the eighth inning when Rocky belted a three-run homer off Eddie Bonds, considered one of the top pitchers at the time, to give his team a 5-4 win.

A year later, Cundari and Cusack both joined O'Brien's Press and the string of city titles began. Cundari's reputation as a clutch hitter also rose. In an August 1957 contest against Sons of Italy, after O'Brien's Press received the 1956 championship trophy in a pre-game ceremony, the score was tied 2-2 in the seventh inning when Rocky hit a bases-loaded three-run double to give O'Brien's a 5-2 win. He also picked off runners in the third and seventh innings.

A year later, Cundari threw out three runners and collected two hits as O'Brien's beat S-of-I again 7-5 to win its third straight city crown.

Then there was the 1966 all-star game in Stamford when Cundari, playing for the Norwalk all-stars, went 1-for-3 against Hall of Famer Rocky Marucci, regarded by many as the best softball pitcher to ever come out of Norwalk.

Cundari was also an avid bowler and he and his brothers formed the "Brothers Five" bowling team, which captured a city championship in the Wednesday Night League. He also bowled for O'Brien's Press, the South Norwalk Boat Club, Ferris Hill Club, and St. Matthew's Church in the Tuesday Night Holy Name League. Rocky was a longtime member of the Boat Club and Ferris Hill Club.

In addition, he and his son, Rocco Cundari III, won several father-son bowling tournaments. The elder Cundari also coached his son in the Norwalk American Little League in the early 1970s.

Meanwhile, Rocky's grandson, Rocco IV, was a standout pitcher at Brien McMahon and Southern Connecticut State University, who signed a professional contract with the Atlanta Braves organization. He was born in 1990 the day after his grandfather passed away at age 55.

Rocco Cundari, Jr. is the fourth member of his family to be honored by the Norwalk Old Timers, joining Dominick (1989), Charlie (1991), and Louie (2005).