

Dennis Christopher



Dennis Christopher continues a family tradition tonight. The former three-sport athlete at Norwalk High School and longtime softball coach becomes the fifth member of his family to be honored by the Norwalk Old Timers, joining his father Dom Christopher, uncles Rinky and Quint Christopher, and cousin Pat Spinola, the organization's current president.

But Dennis Christopher certainly carved his own niche on the family tree when it came to sports. Born and raised in Norwalk, he played Little League, Pony League and Babe Ruth baseball, reaching all-star status at every level. He also played middle school and city league baseball and basketball as well as youth football in the County League.

It was in high school, however, and particularly in baseball, where Christopher really began to make a name for himself. He lettered in baseball at Norwalk High and as a senior in 1961 was co-captain and the starting catcher of the NHS team that won the County Conference championship.

Ten years later, in 1971, Christopher was one of the nine players selected to The Hour's 100-year anniversary All-Century baseball team, joining pitcher and fellow 2006 Norwalk Old Timers honoree Terry Blitz.

Christopher also lettered in football and basketball at Norwalk High, but baseball was always his true passion. He also played for the local American Legion team as well as in the Norwalk City League and Stamford Twilight League, winning various batting titles and team player awards.

He was offered a baseball scholarship to the University of Connecticut, but opted instead to sign a professional baseball contract with the San Francisco Giants in 1962. Christopher played at Class A Salem, Va., in 1963 and was promoted to Double A Decatur, Ill., in 1964. While in spring training, he spent time with future Hall of Famers Willie Mays, Juan Marichal, Willie McCovey and Orlando Cepeda.

Christopher's pro career was interrupted by the military draft, although he still played semi-pro ball while based in Washington D.C. He also played fast-pitch softball and football, winning the Base championship in both sports, before a stint in Vietnam from 1966-67.

He completed his military service in 1968 and returned to Norwalk to play slow-pitch softball with several local teams, including Risolo Players, the Norwalk Aces and Singewald Buick. He also played Major Industrial Softball with his company team at Pitney Bowes, helping them win three straight state titles from 1977-79, and placing seventh at the 1977 national tournament in Norfolk, Va.

Christopher officially retired from playing in 1980, but quickly made the transition to coaching, starting with the West Rocks Middle School football team. But again he gravitated to his favorite sport and coached the Laurels baseball team in the Norwalk City League and Stamford Twilight League. During his travels, he coached American Legion baseball in West Covina, Calif., as well as Little League in Washington D.C. and Montgomery, Ala.

Closer to home, Christopher coached Little League and Babe Ruth baseball in Newtown, winning local, district and state titles, and also coached slow-pitch Industrial Softball in Stamford.

In 1990, however, Christopher began focusing on girls fast-pitch softball and coached at all levels from T-ball to college. He coached at Newtown High School, while some of his greatest success came with a Connecticut Premier fast-pitch team that won eight state championships, three regional titles, and four top-seven national finishes in ASA, AFA and PONY divisions.

Christopher retired from coaching in 2000, but returned as a softball consultant in 2004 and helped a U-12 Newtown Babe Ruth team win a state title and finish second in the New England Regionals. And this year, Christopher came out of "retirement" to join the staff at Pomperaug High School in Southbury as an assistant varsity softball coach.

But what Christopher is most proud of is the fact that as many as 23 of his former players went on to lead their respective high school and college teams as captains and/or all-conference, all-state and all-regional players, including one who was named a Division I All-American. He's equally proud to have seen many of them, after their softball days, become successful teachers, engineers, doctors, researchers, and even coaches.

Christopher's own daughter, Erica, was a two-sport all-state athlete in softball and field hockey at Newtown High School. She went on to become a four-year starter and two-time All-New England Region selection at St. Anselm College in New Hampshire.

The 63-year-old Christopher, now retired after a 37-year career at Pitney Bowes, and his wife, the former Anna Valenzisi, reside in Newtown and have five children and four grandchildren.