

## Joe Libertore



Joe Libertore never met a sport he didn't like ... or wasn't very successful at.

The product of an athletic family, Libertore, whose father was a three-sport athlete at New Canaan High School and mother a cheerleader at the same school, began playing organized sports as a 10-year-old in the Norwalk International Little League. He played three years there, and as an 11 and 12 year-old he also played in the Norwalk YMCA Bidy Basketball League. Both years he made the league all-star team which won back to back New England regional championships.

Libertore played tackle football in the Norwalk Recreation Junior High School League for the Ponus Ridge Green Devils, who were coached by the late Sam Testa. In the fall of 1964, Libertore was captain and the starting quarterback and safety as he helped lead the Green Devils to the city championship.

It was also during this time Libertore played Babe Ruth baseball from ages 13-15 and made that all-star team his last two seasons, and as a 16-year-old made the Colt League all-star team.

Not only was the versatile Libertore able to display his all-around athletic abilities in the local youth sports leagues, but he was also an accomplished bowler. In fact, he once won a tournament against pro bowler Billy Goliembieski, while the previous year he won a qualifier

for the right to face two-time PBA champion and Hall of Famer Ray Bluth, who he lost to in a one-game roll-off.

Libertore's athletic career continued at Brien McMahon High School, where he was the starting shortstop and the only sophomore in the lineup for coach Frank Morgan and the Senators' 1966 state championship team, which is still the only high school baseball team from the city of Norwalk to win a state title. One of his teammates was his older brother, Paul, who was a senior and the starting catcher.

Back then, only the top 16 teams in the state were selected to play in the state tournament, and Joe Libertore, like his brother a three-year starter, helped McMahon return to the state finals his junior year, losing 2-1 to West Haven. Then as a senior co-captain, he led the Senators to the 1968 FCIAC championship game, where they lost to Stamford Catholic.

Libertore was also captain of the BMHS football team as a senior and was the Senators' starting quarterback and safety his final two seasons. Like his father, Libertore was a three-letter athlete who also played varsity basketball for McMahon and Hall of Fame coach Ralph King. All three of Libertore's former high school coaches – Morgan, King and Leroy Vaughn – are also Norwalk Old Timers honorees.

Libertore culminated his high school career by being selected the Brien McMahon Athlete of the Year in 1968. He also served as president of the McMahon Varsity Club and the Kiwanis Key Club.

Following his graduation, Libertore went to the University of New Haven where he played for another legendary coach, Frank 'Porky' Vieira, with the Chargers' baseball team. As a freshman, Libertore was the backup third baseman on the UNH baseball team that played in the first College World Series in Phoenix, Arizona.

While in college, he also played and was captain of his intramural football, basketball and softball teams, winning a combined five championships between the three sports. During his senior year, Libertore also began officiating basketball games in his intramural league and soon became a member of the International Association of Approved Basketball Officials (IAABO) #10.

That would turn out to be the start of new career for Libertore, who transferred to IAABO #9 in Fairfield County following his graduation, and last winter completed his 34<sup>th</sup> year as a basketball official. He has officiated a number of FCIAC and SWC finals, as well as the Connecticut state tournament for the last 25 years, including two state championship games. He has also been an executive member of IAABO for 22 years, and has served as a board member, vice president and president for two terms.

Libertore also became an avid softball player with several local teams, including Alberta Fuel, the Laurel AC, Uncle Joe's, Lawrence's Tigers and the Norwalk Aces. Playing shortstop, second base and pitching, Libertore helped his teams win four city championships as well as the Norwalk Independent League.

He's still involved with the Aces and their fund-raising efforts for various Norwalk community causes, while his son, Kevin Libertore, now plays with the team. Years earlier, the elder Libertore coached his son's teams in the Westport Little League for two years and Westport Babe Ruth League for three seasons. Kevin then played baseball at Staples High School and as a junior he was the starting third baseman on the Wreckers' 2001 state championship team, 35 years after his father won a state title in baseball with McMahon.

Libertore's daughter, Kelly, also played sports at Staples, while his wife, the former Marilyn Petronella, a Norwalk High School graduate, is currently the principal of the Columbus Magnet School in Norwalk.

Joe Libertore is still very much involved in the local sports scene as a co-owner of Crown Trophy in Norwalk.