

Felix Rodriguez



Whether it was on a baseball diamond or a softball field, **Felix Rodriguez** was regarded as one of the best in the city of Norwalk in both sports.

That was first confirmed in 1971, Rodriguez's senior year at Brien McMahon High School, when the Senators' starting centerfielder was one of the nine players selected to The Norwalk Hour's first-ever All-City Baseball Team.

Then 10 years later, in 1981, Rodriguez, or "F-Rod" as he was more affectionately known, was named one of "The 10 Best Softball Players" in the city of Norwalk by a panel of local softball officials. That full-page Norwalk Hour article, incidentally, is prominently displayed on the wall at Partners Café.

Both of those distinguished honors represented just two of the highlights in a sports journey that began at Ryan Field on Water Street in the South Norwalk neighborhood Rodriguez grew up in. His love of baseball continued in the American Little League and Norwalk Babe Ruth programs, with all roads eventually leading

to Brien McMahon.

Even as a freshman, Rodriguez stood out with his bat, his glove, and his exceptional speed. In fact, it wasn't long before head coach Frank Morgan moved the ninth grader up to the junior varsity team and eventually the varsity. One of Rodriguez's early memories was coming up as a pinch-hitter against Rippowam and belting a shot over the head of future major leaguer Bobby Valentine.

Rodriguez played as sophomore, but not as a junior, in order to work after school. As a senior, however, several players on the team talked him into coming back out for the team and head coach Tom Chrzanowski was certainly glad he did. All Rodriguez did that spring of 1971 was hit a team-leading .393 and help lead McMahon to the FCIAC championship game.

"I just remember him back then as a senior that he was fast, he was a good athlete, and his love for the game," Chrzanowski recalled. "He loved baseball and he was dedicated."

After winning the West I title on the final day of the regular season, the Senators posted a 7-3 upset win over West II champ Rippowam (which was 14-2) to claim the overall West Division crown. McMahon then lost a 2-1 heartbreaker to Darien in the FCIAC final.

Rodriguez was at his best in the biggest games, going 5-for-7 in the post-season, including one state tournament game. He finished runner-up in the city batting race that season and tied for the city lead in hits with 22, including five doubles, a triple, and a home run. Utilizing his speed, he led the team with 16 runs scored and 13 stolen bases.

"He was lightning quick," said Ron Dominici, a 2012 Norwalk Old Timers honoree and the starting shortstop on that '71 McMahon team who also earned All-City honors. "Felix was such a natural talent. He was a phenomenal outfielder, a great defensive player, and he had a great arm. Probably one of the best outfielders I ever played with."

When the high school season was over, Rodriguez played American Legion ball in the summer, helping the Norwalk Post 12 team win the zone championship. He impressed the Philadelphia Phillies enough to be invited to a tryout camp in Hartford.

Rodriguez also played for teams in the Stamford Twilight League and Bridgeport City League, winning the batting title in the latter with a .390 average.

He eventually made the transition to slow pitch softball, playing with some of the powerhouse Singewald Buick teams, which later became the Aces. He was also picked up by Lawrence's Tigers to play in a few selected tournaments and batted .650 in one weekend tourney.

"Felix was a line-to-line hitter," Dominici, who was also selected as one of the city's '10 Best Softball Players' in 1981, said. "He could hit for power, especially in softball."

Rodriguez continued playing softball until 2004 when he retired at the age of 52.