

Jeff Rousseau



Perhaps it is only fitting that Jeff Rousseau be one of the first two former Central Catholic High School athletes to be honored by the Norwalk Old Timers.

After all, Rousseau was one of the best all-around athletes to ever play for the Cavaliers.

In fact, in 1966 he was the recipient of the "Best Senior Athlete" award at CCHS, capping off a brilliant scholastic career that saw him excel in football, basketball and baseball all three years.

He began to make his mark in local sports circles long before that, however. Born in Norwalk, Rousseau played in the Norwalk National Little League from 1957-60 as a pitcher and shortstop for Kiwanis and made the all-star team as a 12-year-old in 1960. His fondest memory, however, was hitting his first career home run off a blazing fastball thrown by fellow 2006 Norwalk Old Timer honoree Terry Blitz.

Rousseau went on to play in the Norwalk Babe Ruth League the next three years, again as a pitcher and shortstop, and helped lead 7-Up to the playoffs each year while making the all-star team in 1962 and '63.

After attending Nathan Hale Junior High, Rousseau entered Central Catholic, where as a senior in 1965-66 he helped the Cavaliers to probably their greatest year of sports in the school's three-decade history.

In the fall of '65, Rousseau was captain and the starting quarterback for Central's football team that went 7-1-1 under legendary coach Gerry McDougall and received the CIAC Award of Merit for Class S. Rousseau was named the

team MVP that season and received the "Best Offensive Player" trophy in Central Catholic's Thanksgiving Day game against St. Mary's of Greenwich.

That winter, Rousseau was a starting guard on the Cavaliers' 17-5 basketball team that captured the Thruway League championship and won 12 straight games after a 5-4 start. The Cavaliers, coached by Lou Orlando and led by Joey Pantoja, also had the distinction of being the first CCHS team to make the state tournament and were ranked No. 4 in Class C.

Rousseau was awarded another trophy for "Hustle and Defense" by Orlando, who recently recalled how Jeff "gave everything he had in every game he played." Rousseau's backcourt mate that season was John Peters, the other half of the Central Catholic duo being honored by the Norwalk Old Timers tonight.

Then in the spring, Rousseau was a pitcher and infielder on the Central baseball team that also won the Thruway League crown under coach Loren Beresnyak.

Following his graduation, Rousseau attended Villanova University, where he made it to the final cut as a walk-on for the 1966 freshmen basketball team. But he did continue playing – and winning championships – in his three sports. He was captain and quarterback of the Villanova intramural league football champions in 1968 and '69, and an all-star guard and shortstop for his DPM Fraternity basketball and softball league champs.

Rousseau didn't slow down after college, either, enjoying a stellar "second career" in slow-pitch softball and touch football. In softball, he broke in as an all-star infielder with a young start-up Norwalk Saints team that beat perennial powerhouse Chatham Oaks for the 1970 city championship.

The following year Rousseau was recruited by the Norwalk Aces (who later became Singewald Buick) and he played for them from 1971-73, winning team MVP honors in '71. Among his teammates was Milt Peckham, another 2006 Norwalk Old Timers honoree. Rousseau went on to play for A&M Pump in 1974 and '75, batting over .500 each year as an all-star outfielder while helping the team win the Shoreline League title.

Rousseau's best years in softball, however, were spent with VIP Limousine, a Major Division team he played for from 1976-81. The team won the state championship in 1978, while finishing runner-up three times and third on two other occasions. The 1976 team that finished second in the state was also fifth in the New England Region as Rousseau led the club in batting (.471), hits, runs, RBIs and doubles. He also made the all-tournament team that season at the East Coast 'Majors' Invitational in Providence, where he batted .714 and drove in nine runs while leading VIP to the title.

VIP won the Norwalk Independent League championship three straight seasons from 1976-78 and Rousseau was an all-star outfielder all three years. In 1978, the team went 57-9, won the state title and finished fourth in New England. They also won six major tournaments that season.

Then in 1980, VIP won the USSSA Open Field National Invitation in Poughkeepsie with Rousseau making another all-tournament team with a batting average of .692. In his six seasons with VIP, Rousseau had a batting average of .430.

From 1982-85, he played softball with his company team at Perkin Elmer, leading them to the city and state championships in 1982 with a .589 batting average. The team also qualified for the National Industrial League Tournament all four years Rousseau played, and he made the NIL all-star team in 1983 when he hit .550 as Perkin Elmer finished fourth in the country at Salt Lake City.

Rousseau also played 16 seasons, from 1974-89, in the Inter-City Touch Football League where he was the quarterback for some great Darien Sportsmen teams. Rousseau was named Rookie of the Year in '74, and won the league's Top Passer Award five out of six years between 1980-85. He also helped lead the Sportsmen to six league championships, including three in a row from 1974-76. Darien's record during Rousseau's 16-year career was 146-43-2, including 15-1 in semifinals.

The versatile Rousseau also took up running in the mid eighties, and from 1986-2001 he ran 30,000 miles, including 186 sanctioned road races and 10 marathons (NYC four times). He also finished second in the 40-49 age group in the Norwalk Summer Series in 1996 and '97.

Then following hip replacement surgery in 2002, Rousseau began swimming and has logged 250 miles his first three years.

Rousseau, who will be 58 next month, still works at Perkin Elmer and he and his wife, the former Annie Dayton, are proud grandparents who reside in Wilton.