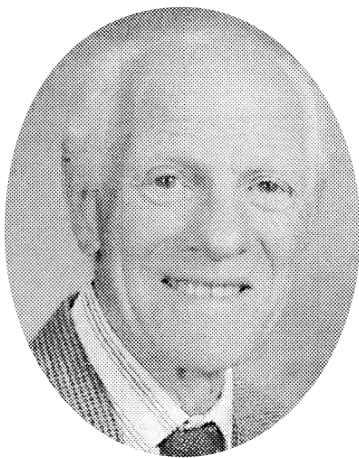


Rollie D'Avanzo



Whether it was as a player, coach, teacher, or administrator, **Rollie D'Avanzo** stamped his mark on athletics, and not just in Norwalk.

In fact, his well-traveled career encompassed many stops, including a couple of other towns nearby and as many as four different states.

But it all started in Norwalk for D'Avanzo, who was born here in 1927 and raised near the railroad tracks in the Cross Street area. He even began his athletic career as a running back with the Cross Street Tigers football team in 1938 while attending Center Elementary School and later Center Junior High. Playing for coach Merrit Lewis from 1938 to '42, some of D'Avanzo's more notable teammates included Rit O'Grady, Dewey Raymond, Frank Castagna, Joe Makovich, Alan Parkington, George Holomokoff, and his brother Vic D'Avanzo.

Also during this time, the versatile D'Avanzo played basketball and baseball for the Center Junior High teams, displaying his skills as a guard on the hard court and as a shortstop on the diamond.

In 1942, D'Avanzo entered Norwalk High School and he would spend the next three years playing football and baseball. He was a tailback for the Green and White's single-wing attack, and in the spring was back in his familiar shortstop position.

Among his coaches at NHS were Mike Wilson, Joe Andrews, and Bob Hunt, while his teammates in both sports included the Tarlov Brothers, the Callahans, the Santo Brothers, John D'Amato, Leo Johnson, Lenny Illegro, Tom Sisk, and Whitey Jenkins.

D'Avanzo graduated from Norwalk High School in 1945, although he wasn't around for the ceremonies. Instead, he had already joined the U.S. Marines and was shipped overseas, leaving his mom and sister to attend the graduation ceremony and receive his diploma.

But even away from home, D'Avanzo's athletic career continued in earnest. He even packed his own glove and baseball spikes he used in Norwalk in his seabag. In 1947 and '48, while at Pearl Harbor and later Camp Lejeune, D'Avanzo quarterbacked the football team and played shortstop for the baseball team, while in 1949 he was the starting QB on the Glen Burnie (MD) Tigers.

Also in 1947-'48, after 30 months out on the Pacific Islands, D'Avanzo was transferred to Hawaii and tried out and made the Honolulu Red Sox, a highly regarded baseball team that won the Military League championship while he was there.

Upon returning home, D'Avanzo never missed a beat, playing football for Arnold College before transferring to Gettysburg. He was recalled to service in 1950 and picked up his military athletic career again with the Camp Stoneman (CA) Travelers baseball and football teams from 1951-'53. He was also a player/manager with a baseball team called the Pittsburgh Diamonds in a league that featured several Double A and Triple A players, as well as major leaguers Vince DiMaggio and Bobby Brown.

D'Avanzo won both batting titles and stolen base crowns while in the service, as well as coach some championship teams. He still lists being voted MVP by his peers in the U.S. Marines and named Coach of the Year at Camp Stoneman as two of his greatest feats in sports, along with making the Honolulu Red Sox.

In addition, D'Avanzo also played baseball in town for the Spring Hill Tigers and the Aces. But he would soon make the transition to coaching. With a college degree in physical education, he taught at Darien High School where he was an assistant baseball and football coach under Hall of Famer Johnny Maher.

After a short teaching stint in Pleasanton, CA, in the early 1960s, D'Avanzo returned to the Nutmeg State and joined the Norwalk school system as a PE teacher at Silvermine School and later Nathan Hale Junior High. Then in 1970, he left Norwalk for a teaching position in Phoenix, AZ, and in 1972 relocated again to Salem, OR, where he taught until retiring in 1985.

While in Norwalk, D'Avanzo coached the Green Devils to the City Recreation Junior High League championship. He also coached the U.S. Women Marines basketball team while in the service, and the Salem American Legion baseball team after moving to Oregon.

It was during his coaching years that D'Avanzo changed his name and became known as "Rollie Davin." Part of the reason, he says, was to make it easier for the athletes he coached, and others, to correctly pronounce and spell his name.

Also during his years in Connecticut, D'Avanzo, or "Coach Davin," moved to Brookfield and while he was still teaching became the director of Parks and Recreation for the town of Brookfield. Another one of D'Avanzo's proudest achievements was organizing the first Little League and Babe Ruth baseball programs in town. He even wrote a coach's manual to be used by both leagues, and coached one of the Babe Ruth teams himself.

If that wasn't enough, D'Avanzo also found the time to officiate basketball as a member of the IABO, working with such well known local refs as Jack Cronin, Ed Bonello, Phil Matregrano, and Phil Ianazzo.

Even today, at the age of 74 and in retirement, the tireless D'Avanzo still volunteers as a hitting and infield coach for several local teams in Oregon.

D'Avanzo and his late wife, the former Jeanette L. Rakowski, had three children — Mike Brian, and Robin — and one granddaughter, Gabrielle, who D'Avanzo calls "a true competitor — a winner!"

Just like her grandfather.