

Bobby Ryan



During the mid 1940s, it was usually pretty easy to locate **Bobby Ryan** whenever you had to. You would just check all the local baseball fields and chances were you'd find him.

That's because Ryan practically sent all his free time playing baseball. In fact, in 1945 and again in '46, he played for three different teams. Of course, that's not even counting the three other sports he played that same year.

Born in Norwalk and a lifelong resident of the city, Ryan grew up in East Norwalk and attended Fitch Elementary School, Roger Ludlowe Jr. High, and Norwalk High School. He began his organized baseball career during the 1943 and '44 seasons as an infielder with the 7-Up team, where his teammates included Slo Middleton, Bob Albertson, Johnny Allgood, and Otto Bucholz.

But he really came into his own as a baseball player over the next three seasons while playing second base for Norwalk High School under coach Mike Wilson. As a junior in 1946, Ryan led the Green & White in runs scored and stolen bases while hitting

.306. The consummate leadoff batter, Ryan reached base nine consecutive times that season, hitting a sizzling .667 during the streak. During another seven-game stretch, he got on base leading off in six of those games. He also hit one of the longest home runs of the season by an NHS player.

Ryan would follow that season up with another big year as a senior, the highlight of which was hitting a clutch bases-loaded single to beat Danbury 4-3 in Norwalk's final game. Ryan's game-winning hit also christened the new high school field, which was dedicated that day.

Norwalk High was only one of the three teams Ryan played with in his sophomore and junior years. In the summer of '45 and '46, he played third base for both the Hi-Landers and the Lone Stars in the Norwalk Senior Recreation League where teammates included Al Palumbo, Fred DeFinis, and Buddy Ricci.

Then in the summer following his senior year, Ryan played second base with the Pastimes, a team he would be a part of for the next three years. Coached by Bill Meehan, Ryan's teammates included Jack Cronin, Tommy Scarso, and Norm Sculley.

It was also during this time, in 1948, that Ryan earned a baseball tryout with the New York Giants. He spent a month at Carl Hubbell's baseball school in Sanford, FL, and of the 200 players invited to the school, Ryan was one of the 40 surviving candidates, and only one of five infielders. According to a column by then-Norwalk Hour Sports Editor Williard Williams, Ryan appeared to be "headed for one of the New York Giant farm teams when he developed a sore arm," and "he returned home for treatments."

While his dream of playing professional baseball was on hold, Ryan did play with the Pastimes again in 1949. Then from 1950-'52, he was in the U.S. Army and part of the 43rd Division Occupation Force, which had been mobilized with the 963rd Field Artillery Battalion of the National Guard based in Norwalk. As a Master Sgt., Ryan spent a year of active duty in Germany, where he played baseball with his Division team and competed against Air Force and Army teams all over Germany. One of Ryan's highlights there was getting a hit off Curt Simmons, a pitcher for the Philadelphia Phillies.

But while baseball might have been Ryan's best sport, he displayed his athletic prowess in several other areas. He also played football at Norwalk High for coach Ike Kern as a halfback on a team that included fellow 1999 Norwalk Old Timers honoree Bobby Santo and tonight's guest speaker, Bobby Callahan.

He was also an excellent pole vaulter on the NHS track team for coach Joe Andrews, once clearing a height of 10-feet, 6-inches, a pretty good benchmark in those days. Ryan excelled in basketball as well, leading his Ludlowe Jr. High varsity team in scoring one year, and playing intramurals at Norwalk High. He also played with Yankee Metal in the Foremen's League in 1948 with Phil Matregrano and Santo Bonomo, and later coached the St. Mary's team in the Church League in 1953-'54.

The 70-year-old Ryan retired in 1992 after 21 years as a sales representative for the Keebler Company, and before that 16 years with the Sunshine Biscuit Company. He and his wife, the former Josephine 'Jo' Mariani, have five children and are expecting their eleventh grandchild next month.