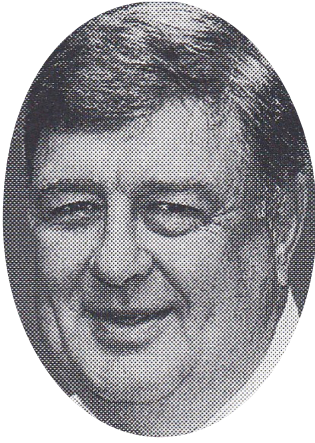


Jack Casagrande



The name **Jack Casagrande** has been synonymous with sports in this city and in particular with athletics at Brien McMahon for over three decades.

The man more affectionately known for years on Highland Avenue as simply "Big Jack," left his biggest mark in this city as the head coach of the McMahon football and wrestling teams, both of which he built into FCIAC and state powerhouses.

Casagrande was a part of the BMHS football program for 27 seasons, the first 14, from 1960 to 1973, as an assistant coach under Frank Morgan and Leroy Vaughn. Then in 1974, Casagrande was named only the third head coach of the Senators. All he did over the next 13 seasons was compile an impressive record of 78-45-5 while leading McMahon to its first two FCIAC championships in 1978 and 1985. He was also named Coach of the Year in 1984 by the *Bridgeport Post-Telegram* newspaper, as well as the District Coach of the Year the same season by the *New York Daily News*.

He stepped down as head coach following the 1986 season, but has remained a big fan of the team and still attends most of the Senators' games, home and away. In addition, the team gives out an annual award named after him to the outstanding lineman, the position Casagrande coached for so many years.

Then this season, the BMHS program paid the former coach perhaps the biggest honor by naming its field at the high school the "Jack Casagrande Field."

But while he may have been known more for his coaching achievements in football at McMahon, Casagrande was even more successful in the sport of wrestling. He coached the Senators for 22 seasons, from 1966 to 1987, accumulating a record of 211-105-4 while winning four FCIAC championships and two state titles in 1977 and 1979. He was honored as Coach of the Year by the Connecticut High School Coaches Association in 1970 and again in '73, and was chairman of the CIAC Wrestling Committee from 1977-'80.

Casagrande actually began his coaching career in this city at Norwalk High as the basketball coach in 1959. But after only one season, he moved cross town as one of the original teachers at the new high school in town, Brien McMahon. Casagrande was the Senators' first head coach in basketball from 1960-'64, and he also started the track and field program there, coaching from 1960 to 1974.

He retired from the Norwalk school system in 1994 after 34 years as a physical education teacher at McMahon. But even in retirement Casagrande remains a big part of the Norwalk sports scene as director of the Norwalk Recreation Adult Touch Football League, a position he's held since 1966.

Athletics has been a big part of Jack Casagrande almost his entire life. Born in Derby and raised in Seymour, he graduated in 1955 from West Haven High School where he was an Honorable Mention All-State tackle for the 1954 state champs. He was also a standout pitcher in baseball and a member of the basketball team.

He went on to play baseball at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend where he was a former teammate of Hall of Famer Carl Yastrzemski. In fact, Casagrande calls pitching in the College World Series in Omaha, Nebraska in 1957, his greatest feat in sports.

A past president of the Connecticut High School Coaches Association, Casagrande was inducted into the CHSCA Hall of Fame in 1990. An avid fisherman and hunter, he was also president of the Norwalk Fish and Game Association.

Jack and his wife of 36 years, the former Barbara Christian, have three children, Kim, Kathy, and Jay, a former champion bodybuilder who played football and wrestled for his father at McMahon. The Casagrandes also have five grandchildren.