

Donald Gustafson



Being born on Friday the 13th certainly didn't hamper the athletic exploits of Donald Gustafson, one of the best three-sport athletes in the city of Norwalk during the 1930s.

The Norwalk native, who attended Roosevelt Elementary School and Center Junior High, excelled in football, basketball, and baseball at Norwalk High. "Gus" played quarterback for coach Ike Kern's NHS football teams in 1935, '36, and '37, teaming up Mickey Connelly, Harp Ireland, Rudy Costa, and Neil Lenihan. He was also a high-scoring guard/forward on Kern's basketball teams for three seasons, leading the club in scoring his last two seasons while playing alongside Bob Burns, Danny Kaplan, and Bill Ripley.

And in the spring, he was a standout catcher for Kern and the Norwalk High baseball team for three straight seasons. Among his teammates were Billy Dudas, Vic D'Amato, and Connelly.

Gustafson also played baseball with the Norwalk American Legion from 1936-'38, playing for coach Russell "Buck" Day and with teammates such as Jack Cronin and Tommy Scarso, a pair of future Norwalk High coaches.

One of the more memorable moments in Gustafson's storied career was the time he hit a baseball on the bandstand, some 350 feet away in center field, at Meadow Memorial Park in New Canaan. Another highlight was the day he threw out five players trying to steal to help his Legion team beat Stratford 9-1.

Gustafson also played with other sports teams in the city. In 1937, he played guard for coach Joe Andrews and the American Legion basketball team, where his teammates included Jack Sutton, John Buschbaum, Sammy Valoff, and Karl Bassone.

Then in 1938, he caught for the White Eagles baseball team and that fall played quarterback for the Spring Hill Tigers and halfback for the Blair Academy football team. In the winter of 1939, he was a guard on the Pastime basketball team, where his coach was Len Fanning and his teammates included the Buschbaum brothers.

By the early '40s, Gustafson had turned to the sport of softball and he caught and pitched for his artillery army team in 1942. He served a total of 34 months overseas, continuing his athletic career all along.

Even after his playing days were over, though, Gustafson stayed close to local sports by getting involved with the Norwalk Babe Ruth League while his sons were playing.

Gustafson and his wife, the former Jean Ann Lowndes, have five children, along with 10 grandchildren. A former butcher and meat manager with several local supermarkets, Gustafson still works part-time delivering for the Zinc Group in the morning.