

## Dan Santarella



Possessing lightning-quick speed, an abundance of natural athletic ability, and a competitive spirit, Danny Santarella could have probably excelled at any sport he wanted to.

He ultimately picked football and track by the time he arrived at Norwalk High School and not surprisingly he was among the best in both.

Santarella played three years of varsity football at NHS from 1956-58, and as a senior led the Green and White in scoring, utilizing his speed to outrance many an opposing defender to the end zone.

But it was in track and field where Santarella really made a name for himself a half a century ago. He won consecutive County Conference championships in the 100-yard dash his junior and senior years, recording a time of 10 seconds flat on several occasions during his high school career.

Santarella also finished third in the state in the 100 as a junior, while as a senior he helped lead Norwalk to the 1959 County Conference championship.

Besides the 100, Santarella competed in the 220-yard dash, recording a personal best of 21.9 seconds in a dual meet against rival Stamford. He also ran on the NHS relay team and competed in the broad jump, regularly doing all four events finishing first on the team in points.

Because track season was in the spring, Santarella could not play high school baseball, another sport he excelled in. But he did play for the Norwalk American Legion baseball team during the summer, and all he did was capture the team batting title.

Growing up in the Strawberry Hill section of town, the Norwalk native played a lot of baseball. In fact, he had the distinction of playing center field in both the National Little League for Rotary and then the American LL for the Knights of Columbus when the two local leagues were first formed in the early 1950s.

Santarella went on to play in the Norwalk PONY League and then the Babe Ruth League, where he won a championship with Style Footwear in 1956. He made the all-star team in both Little Leagues as well as in the PONY and Babe Ruth leagues.

In addition, Santarella played baseball at Nathan Hale Junior High School from 1954-56, and when he was done with American Legion baseball, he played in the Norwalk City League with Strawberry Hill, K of C, and the Laurel Athletic Club.

Basketball was another sport Santarella played during his younger days, including his three years at Nathan Hale and then three more seasons (1956-68) with the St. Thomas CYO team, which won the championship in 1958.

With his baseball days behind him, Santarella switched to softball during the 1960s, playing for Risilo Paving, Singewald Buick and T's Aces. He also played basketball for the Aces in the Norwalk City League, and touch football for them in 1964 and '65 in the Inter-City Touch Football League.

As the '60s turned into the '70s, Santarella, a father of two, turned his attention to coaching, starting with the International Little League, where he guided the Lions to the 1977 championship.

Right around that same time, he coached in the Norwalk Jewish Center Biddy Basketball League and in the Norwalk Athletic Association Jr. Girls Softball League, winning the 1979 crown. He then moved up to coach the Pandas in the NAA Sr. Girls Softball League.

But the best part of his coaching years, Santarella says, were the many great friendships he made with other coaches such as 'Murph' Oman, Al Canevari, Mario Salomone, Bob Prescott, Lou Sciglimpaglia, Ralph DiMeglio, Terry Philcox, Sal Talercio, and several others.

It was also during the 1970s that Santarella became a basketball official and quickly rose to be one of the best in the area. He was a member of the Fairfield County Board of the International Association of Approved Basketball Officials (IAABO Board 9) for 25 years, officiating in the Norwalk AA Junior Basketball Association, the Norwalk City League, and high school games.

The highlight of his officiating career was working the FCIAC playoffs, and after a quarter of a century, Santarella hung up his whistle following the 1999 season. He also umpired in the Babe Ruth League from 1960-63, and Little League baseball from 1979-82.

Santarella was also a member of the Norwalk High School Fathers Club, a past president of the NHS Booster Club, and served on the Norwalk Athletic Association Executive Committee.

A lifelong Norwalk resident, Santarella worked for Pacific Plumbing in sales for 38 years before retiring. He and his wife, the former Patricia Herman, have four grandchildren.