

*Mike Errico Award
Ralph King | Ray Barry*



This year's co-recipients of the *Mike Errico Award* defined 'Coaching Royalty' in Norwalk during their days patrolling the sidelines in their respective sports.

Longtime coaches Ralph King of Brien McMahon and Ray Barry of Norwalk High both established such a high standard

of excellence with their programs that together they made the city of Norwalk a leader in athletics around Fairfield County and the state.

While both Hall of Fame coaches were previously honored by the Norwalk Old Timers Athletic Association with its *Sportsmen Award* for their successful coaching careers, the *Mike Errico Award* is presented to an individual, team, or organization for the positive impact, influence, and contribution it made to the local sports scene. Ray Barry and Ralph King certainly transcended that.

Whether it was the fall season when King was coaching soccer, or the winter months when they both coached boys basketball, or when the calendar turned to spring and Barry's softball teams ruled the FCIAC, the legacy these two legendary coaches left in each of their sport and in the town in which they coached put them in a very special class of their own.

Between them, they accumulated over 1,600 victories, won 35 FCIAC championships, eight state titles and, perhaps most important, touched the lives of hundreds of high school athletes.

King, one of McMahon's original teachers, started the soccer program in 1961 and the Senators promptly played in the first nine FCIAC championship games, all against Staples, with the Norwalkers winning four of them and sharing the title two other times. When he retired following the 1994 season, King had led the Senators to 11 FCIAC crowns, two state championships in 1965 and '74, and three more state runner-up finishes. In 34 seasons, King compiled a sparkling record of 317-151-45 for a .677 winning percentage and was third on the state's all-time list for victories. He was named *Connecticut High School Coach of the Year* in 1975, while in 1983 he received the highest honor when he was selected as the National High School Soccer *Coach of the Year*.

King also found success on the hardwood as the McMahon basketball coach from 1964-87, posting 23 consecutive winning seasons while compiling a 396-130 ledger for a glossy .753 winning percentage. He also won five FCIAC championships, a pair of state titles in 1977 and '83, and finished state runner-up one other time. Among the numerous coaching honors he received was the Connecticut High School *Coach of the Year* in 1985. But perhaps his biggest honor came in 1989 when he was inducted into the Connecticut High School Coaches Hall of Fame.

Barry is not only the winningest high school coach in the history of Norwalk, but boasts one of the best multi-sports records ever compiled in the state with close to 900 wins over 28 years, most of them at Norwalk High School. But he began his legendary coaching career as a young assistant

at Central Catholic High School before taking over as head coach in 1973. Over the next four seasons, Barry led the Cavaliers to a 52–34 record and made the state tournament every year. That included an 18–5 record in 1975 when CCHS advanced to the Class S state semifinals.

Norwalk High eventually came calling and asked Barry to rebuild a once-proud program that finished 0–20 the previous season. All he did his first season was lead the Bears to an 11–8 mark and a trip to the state tournament. By Barry’s third season in 1978–79, the Bears went 22–5 and made it to the FCIAC championship game.

That was the first of seven straight 20–win seasons by Norwalk High under Barry. The Bears went 23-3 the next season and Barry won the first of his record eight FCIAC titles. NHS repeated as champs in 1981 when they finished 25–1, losing in the state semis, then went 24-3 in 1981–82, but lost in the FCIAC finals. The Bears rebounded from that heartbreaking loss to reel off six straight wins and capture the Class LL state championship.

Norwalk would win three more FCIAC titles when Barry decided to step down as coach after the 1988 season. He would return in 1994, however, and in ‘95 led the Bears to an 18–6 record and another FCIAC title. Then in 1995–96, his greatest season ever, Barry guided Norwalk to a perfect 28–0 record, another FCIAC crown, and his second state championship. It was also the first of three straight trips by Norwalk to the state finals as the Bears went 22–5 and 23–5 the next two seasons before Barry retired a second time after the 1998 season. He left with a record of 397–121 (345–87 at NHS), eight FCIAC championships, and those two state titles while going to the LL finals six times.

And high school basketball in Norwalk was never better than during the 11 seasons King and Barry coached simultaneously and the two city rivals played before sellout crowds every time they met. That included the three times they played for

the FCIAC championship at the Wilton Fieldhouse and, of course, that memorable Saturday afternoon in March 1977 when two schools from the city of Norwalk met for the Class LL state championship at Central Connecticut State University.

Barry also coached the Norwalk High girls softball team for 27 years, taking over in the spring of 1977 and in just his second season led the Lady Bears to a 20–3 record and the first of a record four straight FCIAC titles. That was also the first of eight 20–win seasons under Barry, including his 1980 team, which went a perfect 22–0 and won the Class LL state championship.

Barry would add another state title in 1991 when the Bears went 25–1, while NHS would go to the Class LL final three other times during Barry’s reign, losing by one run twice and by two runs the other time. When he retired from coaching after the 2003 season, Barry had another 466 wins on his resume while guiding the Bears to 11 FCIAC titles—also a record—and those two state championships.

Even during his break from boys basketball, Barry coached the Norwalk High girls basketball team for two seasons and won another title. He took over a team that went 5–13 the previous season and in his first season, 1991–92, guided the Bears to an 18–6 record, including an 11–1 FCIAC mark and the Western Division title. Then in 1992–93 Norwalk went 11–2 in the conference and 16–6 overall. That gave him a two-year record of 34–12 and a total of 897 career wins with the three different programs he coached.

If you’re keeping score at home, Barry won a total of 19 FCIAC championships and King 16 while they each claimed four state titles. Fittingly, as a lasting testament to their coaching legacy, the gymnasium at Brien McMahon is named after Ralph King while the softball field at Norwalk High is named for Ray Barry.

And now having both their names engraved on this year’s Norwalk Old Timers *Mike Errico Award* adds yet another chapter to that legacy.