

## *Al Buchta*



The Brien McMahon High School baseball program has been blessed with a number of outstanding pitchers over the years, but the first one to put the Senators on the map was Al Buchta.

Before there was a Terry Blitz or an Alvin Faust or a Kevin Morton, all of whom went on to sign with major league organizations and play professionally, there was Buchta, the ace on McMahon's first baseball team in 1961.

But before he arrived on Highland Avenue, Buchta, who grew up in South Norwalk, honed his skills in local youth leagues, starting with the American Little League, where he pitched and played first base for the St. Ann's team from 1956-58.

He went on to play in the Norwalk Pony League and in 1960 threw a no-hitter against Eastchester, N. Y., in an all-star tournament. In another all-star game, Buchta pitched a nine-inning one-hitter against Bridgeport despite playing with a severely sprained and swollen left ankle.

Also from 1958-60, Buchta pitched for Ben Franklin Junior High School, where he played soccer and basketball as well.

In the fall of 1960, Buchta entered Brien McMahon High School, which had just opened the previous year. He pitched for the Senators and coach Frank Morgan for three seasons, from 1961-63, establishing several team records that stood until Blitz, a 2006 Old Timers honoree, came along a couple of years later.

Buchta, however, does have the distinction of pitching the first no-hitter in BMHS history during his senior year when he defeated Roger Ludlowe on April 17, 1963. That was the same season he set the FCIAC record for most strikeouts in a season with 137. A three-sport athlete, Buchta also played football and basketball during his three years at McMahon.

From 1962-64, Buchta also pitched for the Norwalk American Legion baseball team in the summer where two of his teammates were fellow 2007 Norwalk Old Timers honorees Steve Gulyas and Harvey Melzer.

Following his standout career at McMahon, Buchta went to New York University and became the ace of that pitching staff as well. One of his career highlights came against St. John's when he hurled a one-hitter and struck out 17 batters.

Also during his college years, Buchta pitched for the Porchester Stars in the summers from 1965-67 and set another single-season league strikeout record with 202. His talents on the mound caught the eye of several major league scouts and in June of 1967 Buchta was drafted in the 11th round by the St. Louis Cardinals with the 210th pick overall. That was the same year St. Louis won the World Series and the first of its back to back National League pennants.

Buchta spent those two years in the Cardinals' farm system, pitching in the for the Sarasota Cardinals in 1967 and for the St. Petersburg Cardinals in '68. His batterymate behind the plate during that time was future major league all-star catcher Ted Simmons.

Now residing in Alamo, Calif., with his wife Deborah, Buchta, who will turn 62 next month, has been an attorney for the past 28 years in Contra Costa County.

And although his own playing days are over, Al Buchta is still very much involved with his favorite sport through his four sons, all of whom play baseball and pitch: Nick, 21, with Sacramento State University; Zack, 19, at Cuesta College; Benn, 17, who's a senior in high school; and Mack, 14, with the local Pony League.