

Earl Stabell



What do Yankees manager Joe Torre, Hall of Fame pitcher Phil Niekro, former Mets second baseman Ron Hunt, and Earl Stabell all have in common?

They all played together on the same minor league team in Midland, TX, in the late '50s. Throw in former Baltimore Oriole catcher Elrod Hendricks and current Yankees pitching coach Tony Cloninger among the players on that team.

But out of that collection of great baseball talent, **Earl Stabell** is the only one in the group to be honored by the Norwalk Old Timers.

The Norwalk native was a standout athlete while growing up in South Norwalk, not only in baseball but in basketball and, years later, in softball.

Stabell played three years of varsity baseball at Norwalk High School from 1954-'56 where he was a starting pitcher on a team that included Al Thomson, Jack Redway, Jim Romanello, Ralph DiMeglio, and the late Willie Stevens.

Before and during his high school career, Stabell spent summers playing for a number of leagues and tournaments. Among the teams he played for were Hat Corporation of America under coach James Bellantoni, the Knights of Columbus in the Stamford Twilight League, and the Norwalk American Legion team under Jack "Wizzard" White.

He also pitched for the Bridgeport Highlanders and had the distinction of hurling the first perfect game in the history of the Bridgeport Senior City League.

Stabell would eventually hook up with a team in upstate Windsor Locks, which was the Milwaukee Braves's affiliate in the old Connecticut Semi Professional League. Stabell was scouted by the Phillies, Dodgers, White Sox, and Yankees, but signed by the Braves by Honey Russell, their New England head scout.

He was assigned to Milwaukee's minor league team in Midland, TX, where his roommate was none other than Niekro, the former Braves and Yankees pitcher who won over 300 Major League games.

In fact, one of the highlights of Stabell's athletic career was when he and Niekro teamed up to shut out the Braves's 'B' team in an intra-squad game in spring training. Two of the players on that 'B' team were Lee May and Frank Torre.

Another highlight was when Stabell beat pitcher Don Schwall of the Boston Red Sox minor league team in the Texas League, 2-1. Later that same season, Schwall was called up by the parent Red Sox team and was named the American League Rookie of the Year.

Stabell, meanwhile, got off to a 7-0 start that season and was nominated to the league all-star team. Shoulder problems eventually ended his career prematurely, but not before he compiled an impressive career ERA of 2.50.

While Stabell shined on the diamond, he also excelled on the hardwood. He played center for the Ben Franklin Jr. High School team, which won the city championship under coach Merritt Lewis. He also played varsity basketball at NHS for coaches Bill Murphy, Jack Cronin, and Ike Kern, and with teammates Dave Spears, Wayne Wilson, Connie Carpenter, and Jim Romanello. Stabell's teams also qualified for the state tournament while he earned All-Conference honors.

Stabell also played basketball in several recreational leagues in Norwalk, Stamford, and Bridgeport, as well as in the Greater New Haven Semi Pro Basketball League with Frank "Porky" Viera. He also played on Viera's All-Star team with former Houston Rockets guard John Egan of Hartford and local collegiate standout Alvin Clinkscales of the University of Bridgeport.

Among the local teams Stabell played for were the Wee Tavern under coach Tony "Babe" Capuano, The Sportsmen Club, Burndy Corporation, under Sam Longo, and the Laurel Athletic Club. While playing with the Sportsmen Club, Stabell was the leading scorer on a team that won several intercity championships. He also once outscored former New York Knick player Worthy Patterson 44-40 in a Stamford Jewish Center League shootout.

But Stabell left his mark in several other cities as well. He was the leading scorer and MVP for Ossie's Restaurant of Danbury when they won the Danbury War Memorial Tournament. He also led the North End Boys Club of Bridgeport to the city championship, leading the team in scoring and winning MVP honors with them as well.

Championship teams just seemed to follow Earl Stabell around. After his baseball career was behind him, he began playing slow pitch softball in the 1960s with the Ferris Hill Club, who he pitched to several City League championships. He also pitched on some of the great Chatham Oaks teams that won city and state titles.

It was also as a member of Chatham Oaks that Stabell was named to all-tournament teams and selected MVP in Port Chester, Meriden, New Haven, and Danbury. One year he even pitched an amazing 64 games, compiling a record of 44-20 while batting .700. He also played for the Laurels in Norwalk and Ossie's Restaurant of Danbury, earning MVP and All-Tournament honors in a Newburgh, NY tournament. Even after his athletic days were over, Stabell managed to stay close to all three sports he excelled in as a member of the Baseball Umpires Association, the Softball Umpires Association, and the Basketball Officials Association.

Now 61 and an avid fisherman and hunter, Stabell is a member of the Stamford Fish and Game Association. He has been employed by the City of Norwalk Engineering Division for the past 36 years, and has resided in Danbury for 29 years with his wife, the former Evelyn Marchese of Norwalk.