

## Dan Letizia



It wasn't very difficult to locate Danny Letizia back when he was playing baseball all over Norwalk. He could usually be found at second base, which is where the hard-hitting, sure-gloved defensive standout made his home.

The Norwalk native grew up in the Broad River section of town and played for a number of local teams in the late 1940s, all through the '50s, and early 1960s. But the one constant on whatever team Letizia played for was his position in the infield.

With Little League baseball in Norwalk still a few years away, Letizia began his career as an 11-year-old with the Broad River Community Boys Club in 1948, playing for his brother Lou Letizia. He would play there, and in the Broad River summer playground league, for seven years through 1954.

Also during that time, from 1950-52, Letizia played for Center Junior High School, and then for Norwalk High School in 1953 and '54. It was in the summer of 1954 that a 16-year-old Letizia enjoyed perhaps his best day on a baseball diamond, belting six triples in a doubleheader while playing for Broad River in a City League game at the NHS field.

Letizia would join the U.S. Air Force a few years later, but that didn't derail his baseball playing. Instead, in the summer of 1956 he assumed his familiar post at second base for the baseball team at the Francis E. Warren

Air Force Base in Wyoming. Then in 1957, he played for the baseball team while stationed at the Wheelus Air Base in Tripoli, Libya.

The following year, Letizia was transferred to USAF Headquarters in Washington, D.C., once again manning second base for the baseball team there.

Upon returning to Norwalk, Letizia played the 1961 season for the Hilltop Athletic Club, which was coached by Romas Bossone and competed in both the City League and the Stamford Twilight League.

The following year, Letizia made a seamless transition from baseball to softball – while keeping his second baseman's mitt – as he embarked on a 14-year career with the Bermudas and Chatham Oaks, a perennial powerhouse which ruled city softball for years.

But baseball and softball weren't the only sports Letizia shined in. While at Norwalk High School, he played soccer for three seasons under Hall of Fame coach Tom Scarso and as a starting forward he helped the Green and White win its first County Conference championship in 1955.

"I was more proud of that than anything I did in baseball because I had such great admiration for Tommy Scarso as a coach," Letizia recently pointed out. "I never played soccer before. One day I was walking by the field and saw the soccer team practicing and thought this looks like fun. So I went out for the team.

"I was built low to the ground," he added with a chuckle. "That's what helped me become a good player."

Letizia also made his mark in the highly regarded Inter-City Touch Football League during the 1960s and '70s as a linebacker for the Georgetown team and a coach with Cranbury and the Silvermine Nuggets, who he led to an unbeaten season and the championship in 1971.

"Danny didn't have any speed and our league required a lot of speed," Frank Fay, one of the league's founders and its only commissioner from 1962-96, recalled. "But he had good hands. That's what made him such a great second baseman.

"He was also a good strategist when he coached," Fay, a 1998 Old Timers honoree who coached and quarterbacked the Rowayton Bears to six straight titles in the '60s, added. "He had a good mind for strategy. I'll never forget the day he shut me out 6-0 on a rainy day. It was one of the few times we were ever shut out. We had won six years in a row and we might've gone back to the championship game if not for that loss.

"All the players in the league had a lot of regard for Danny. He was a lovable guy."

Letizia also coached baseball in the Norwalk City League and Stamford Twilight League in the 1960s after he stopped playing, managing the Laurel AC for one year and Sterling Furniture for two seasons. He also coached in the Norwalk Senior Babe Ruth League in the 1980s, including five seasons with The Hour, who he guided to a league championship.

And in addition to his achievements as a player and coach, Letizia became one of the most respected umpires in the area from 1973 to the mid-1980s while working high school games in the spring and collegiate league contests in the summer. He also volunteered his time to umpire one game a week in the National Little League in Broad River.

When he wasn't playing, coaching or umpiring, Letizia owned and operated Uncle Joe's Restaurant in Broad River, and later Phoenix Limousine Service, Inc. He had also previously worked for the U.S. State Department of Foreign Services in Washington and Geneva Security.

Letizia and his wife, the former Gert Potenzianna, reside in Norwalk and have two sons, both former soccer players like their dad, and three grandchildren.