

John Eagen



John Eagen has left an indelible mark on the Norwalk sports scene for nearly half a century. And he's still not done.

In the mid-1970s, he was one of the best players in the state in not one, but two sports, starring in both basketball and baseball for Central Catholic High School.

And for more than four decades, he's been a top-level slow-pitch softball player for some of the best teams in the state.

Sports has been a part of Johnny Eagen's life since he began playing in the Norwalk YMCA Biddy Basketball League for Yankee Metal, coached by his father Bill Eagen, and then for St. Phillip's School in the Norwalk Parochial Basketball League.

Following his graduation from St. Phillip's in 1971, Eagen entered Central Catholic, where his older brothers Bill and Tim were both former athletes. It didn't take very long for the youngest Eagen to also make a name for himself. He played JV basketball for the Cavaliers as a freshman under a young coach named Ray Barry before head coach Lou Orlando brought Eagen up to the varsity for the last few games.

Orlando left Central Catholic after that season to become coach at the new Westhill High School and Barry replaced him as head coach of the Cavaliers. Consequently, the first three years of Barry's legendary coaching career would coincide with Eagen's last three seasons.

Eagen started all three years and as a junior led the 1973-74 Cavaliers in scoring with 16.8 points a game. A deadly lefty-shooting forward from the outside, the 6-foot-1 Eagen shot 53 percent from the field while earning first-team All-City and second-team All-Western Connecticut Conference honors.

He was even better as a senior in '74-75, shooting a blistering 58 percent while leading the city of Norwalk with 22.7 points a game. His 23.7 average in the WCC was second behind only future Duke University All-American and NBA center Mike Gminski of Masuk. Eagen scored a career-high 40 points against Bethel, the second most in CCHS history.

He helped lead Central Catholic to an 18-5 record — the best in program history — and a trip to the Class S state semifinals at the New Haven Coliseum. The Cavaliers lost to eventual state champion St. Thomas Aquinas, a team led by Rod Foster, another future All-American at UCLA and NBA player. Eagen scored 20 points in his final game to finish with 1,084 career points, becoming the first 1,000-point scorer at Central Catholic.

He capped off his scholastic career by being named all-state, a unanimous All-WCC first-team pick, and to *The Hour's* All-City team a second year in a row.

Eagen brought that same level of excellence he displayed on the hardwood to the baseball diamond playing for coach Lorin Beresnyak, a 2014 Norwalk Old Timers honoree. Eagen went 20-5 as a pitcher during his three-year varsity career and led the Cavaliers to back to back state championship games.

As a junior in 1974, the southpaw hurler was 8-2 with a 2.13 ERA and recorded a city-leading 71 strikeouts in 64 innings with four games of 11 or more. He also threw two shutouts, including one against Immaculate to clinch a share of the WCC title.

In the Class S state tournament, he pitched the eighth-seeded Norwalkers to a 5-2 win over top-ranked and previously unbeaten Cromwell in the quarterfinals. He also started the state final, which the Cavaliers lost to No. 2 Griswold 8-4, but Eagen allowed only three earned runs as the CCHS defense committed seven errors. He went 2-for-2 with two RBIs and a run scored in that game.

Central Catholic finished 15-7 while Eagen was named All-WCC and MVP of *The Hour's* 1974 All-City baseball team.

Then as a senior in 1975, Eagen went 10-1 with his only loss coming in a rematch against Griswold in the state final. He led the Cavaliers to a school record 19 wins against only three losses, while capturing the WCC championship outright. In addition to his 10 wins, Eagen led the city in strikeouts with 70, in innings pitched with 70-1/3 innings, and in ERA with 2.43. He also pitched three more shutouts and had seven games in which he allowed four hits or less.

An outfielder when he wasn't pitching, Eagen was also a pretty good hitter, batting .270 with 20 hits, 15 RBIs and 14 runs scored. He was named Central's team MVP while repeating as All-WCC and All-City.