

Ray Barry



Whether the sport is basketball or softball, the name **Ray Barry** has been synonymous with success in the city of Norwalk for more than a quarter of a century.

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 over 800 wins in two sports over 28 years, most of them at Norwalk High School.

Born in Bridgeport and raised in Stratford, Barry attended Stratford High School, where he played baseball and basketball between 1958-'61 before graduating from St. Bonaventure University.

Barry began his legendary coaching career in town as a young basketball assistant at Central Catholic High School before taking over as head coach and athletic director in 1973 at the age of 30. He led the upstart Cavaliers to a 10-10 regular season mark that first year and back to the state tournament after a one-year absence. Central lost in the first round to finish 10-11, which would be the only losing record Barry ever had in his 21 years coaching basketball.

After going 12-10 his second season, Barry led the Cavaliers to an 18-5 record in 1975 and a trip to the Class 5 state semi-finals. He would go 12-8 the following season, giving him a four-year record of 52-34 and making the state tourney all four seasons.

That's when Norwalk High came calling and asked Barry to rebuild a once-proud program that finished 0-20 the previous season. All Barry did that initial 1976-'77 season was lead the Bears to an 11-8 mark and a trip to the state tournament.

Norwalk would go 13-8 the following season, but in the 1978-'79 season, with Barry's stamp firmly on the program by his third season, the Bears went 22-5 and lost in 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 following season and won the second FCIAC title in school history. It was also the first of a record eight league titles by Barry in boys basketball.

They won 25-1 in 1980-'81 and won a second consecutive FCIAC crown, and posted a 24-3 mark in 1981-'82. Although the Norwalkers lost in the FCIAC finals, they would reel off six straight wins to capture the Class LL state championship, the school's second state title in basketball and first since 1966 and the days of Calvin Murphy.

Norwalk would win 22-21 and 23 games the next three seasons and win two more FCIAC titles, and another in 1987 when the Bears went 19-5. But after Barry posted an eighth 20-win season in 1987-'88 by going 22-4 he decided to step down as coach. But he would return in 1994 and in 1995 led NHS to an 18-6 record and another FCIAC title.

Then in 1995-'96, his greatest season ever, Barry guided the Bears 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 before Barry retired a second time after the 1998 season.

He left with a record of 397-121 (345-87 at NHS), seven Western Division titles, eight FCIAC championships, and two state championships while going to the state finals six times.

Barry has also coached the Norwalk High girls softball team for the past 24 years, taking over in the spring of 1977 and leading the Lady Bears to a 12-5 record. The following season, his team went 20-3, won the FCIAC championship, and advanced all the way to the state finals.

That would be the first of a record four straight FCIAC titles by NHS, which also won 20 games in 1979 and 22 in '80. Under Barry, the Bears would win 20 or more games five more times and added FCIAC titles in 1984, '86, '88, '89, '91, and '94.

Barry's 1980 team went 22-0 while his 1991 club finished 25-1, and both Norwalk teams captured the Class LL state championship. The Bears went to the state final three other times, losing by one run twice and by two runs the other time.

Even this past spring, Barry took a young and untested NHS team, and what was supposed to be a rebuilding year saw the Bears go 16-7 and upset two higher-seeded teams in the FCIAC finals, where they lost to Stamford 3-2 in extra innings. The Bears also gave their coach his 400th career victory early in the season.

Barry will bring a 412-125 record into his 25th season this spring, which includes a record 10 FCIAC champions, 10 more Western Division titles, and a pair of state championships.

Barry has also been very consistent, recording a .767 winning percentage in his 21 years coaching boys basketball, and a .766 mark in 24 seasons coaching girls softball. His overall record in the two sports is 809-246.

Even during his hiatus from boys basketball, Barry coached the Norwalk High girls basketball team, leading the Lady Bears to — what else — a championship. He took over a team that went 5-13 the previous season and in his first season, 1991-'92, guided NHS to an 18-6 record, including an 11-1 FCIAC mark and the Western Division title. Then in 1992-'93 the Bears under Barry went 11-2 in the conference and 16-6 overall. His two-year record to 34-12 gives him a combined record of 843-258 in three sports and a .766 winning percentage in 1,101 games.

Barry also found the time to coach the Norwalk Mariners softball team, made up of mostly former and current players, during the summers from 1982-'96. Not surprisingly, he also turned them into a perennial power and qualified for two national tournaments.

A social studies teacher at the high school, Barry and his wife Kathie still reside in Stratford and have three children and one grandchild.

And while Norwalk's winningest coach calls his 18 FCIAC titles, four state championships, and two national tournament appearances with the Mariners all career highlights, he says his greatest athletic feat was "just working with kids, having fun for over 30 years, and actually calling it a job."