

Bud Smith



Charles "Bud" Smith says he isn't quite sure exactly how he obtained his nickname as a kid. But there's no doubt how he earned the name "Coach" as an adult.

Smith was a longtime baseball coach at several different age levels in Norwalk during the 1970s and '80s, and won championships at every stop.

A Norwalk native who grew up in the Spring Hill section of town, Smith's love of baseball began before Little League came to Norwalk. But that didn't stop him and his friends from forming a team in 1945 called the Aces, who played in the Intermediate League at Dunbar Field, now the Ben Whone Little League field behind the Broad

River Fire Station.

Smith, 12 years-old at the time, played outfield and second base for the Aces in '45 and '46 before joining the Hilltop Athletic Club baseball team and playing outfield for them in 1947 and '48.

Then in 1950, and again in '51, Smith played outfield for the Norwalk High School baseball team coached by Ike Kern. In the summer of '51, Smith played for the Norwalk American Legion team coached by Jack White.

It would be almost two decades later when Smith began his coaching career in baseball. He spent seven seasons, from 1970-76, coaching in the Cranbury League where his teams won four championships. In fact, his very first team was a bunch of nine-year-olds, including his son Michael and current Norwalk High baseball coach Angelo Bruno, both of whom went on to play minor league baseball.

And Smith's seven-year-old bat girl that year was Lynn Luczkowski, a future standout softball pitcher who's now a member of the Connecticut Hall of Fame.

In 1977, Smith moved up to the Norwalk Senior Babe Ruth League as an assistant coach with The Hour team under manager and current Norwalk Old Timers President Tom Corbo. Smith spent three years with The Hour and helped guide the team to back to back championships in 1978 and '79. He was also an assistant coach with the all-star team.

Then in 1981, when Jack Weisheit took over a floundering American Legion baseball program, one of the first things he did was recruit Smith as an assistant coach. Smith would spend the next three seasons helping Weisheit, and the Norwalk team not only returned to its winning ways under the new coaching regime, but in 1982 captured the Zone IV championship.

Smith lists that experience with the Legion team as one of his three greatest enjoyments in coaching, along with his first team of nine year-olds, and The Hour "beating a great Katz team managed by Doug Bussing in the Senior Babe Ruth League finals."

Baseball, however, wasn't the only sport Smith was involved in. He played CYO Basketball for St. Mary's in 1948 and '49, and at Norwalk High he also played soccer for Hall of Fame coach Tom Scarso in 1950 and '51, helping the Green and White make the state tournament.

In addition, during his four years in the U.S. Navy, Smith played softball and basketball for the Naval Supply Center while stationed in Pearl Harbor in 1952 and '53, helping the softball team win the intramural league championship.

Upon returning home, Smith played baseball in the City League for the Hilltops in 1955 and '56, and after that played softball for the Norwalk Fire Department. He also coached basketball during the 1980s in the Norwalk Athletic Association's Junior Basketball League, and with the St. Phillip's in the Parochial League.

Smith enjoyed a 31-year career with the Norwalk Fire Department, retiring as Deputy Chief. He is still a volunteer with the St. Vincent de Paul Society, enjoys playing golf, and for the last six years has been a member of the American Legion Sports Committee.

The 71-year-old Smith and his wife, the former Mary Padula, still reside in Norwalk and have four children and nine grandchildren.