

Hall of Fame

Try to hit him if you can

Tom Garry continues to set the bar for Southington pitchers

By JOHN GORALSKI
SPORTS WRITER

There were no butterflies when John Fontana made his coaching debut at Southington High School. There were no first game jitters when the Blue Knights took the field at the start of the 1962 baseball season. There were no errors, no mistakes, and no stressful decisions to be made.

That's because Tom Garry was standing on the mound.

"It was against Cheshire, and Tom pitched a perfect game, no-hitter," Fontana said with a smile. "I turned to my assistant and said, 'What's so hard about this game?'"

Posthumous

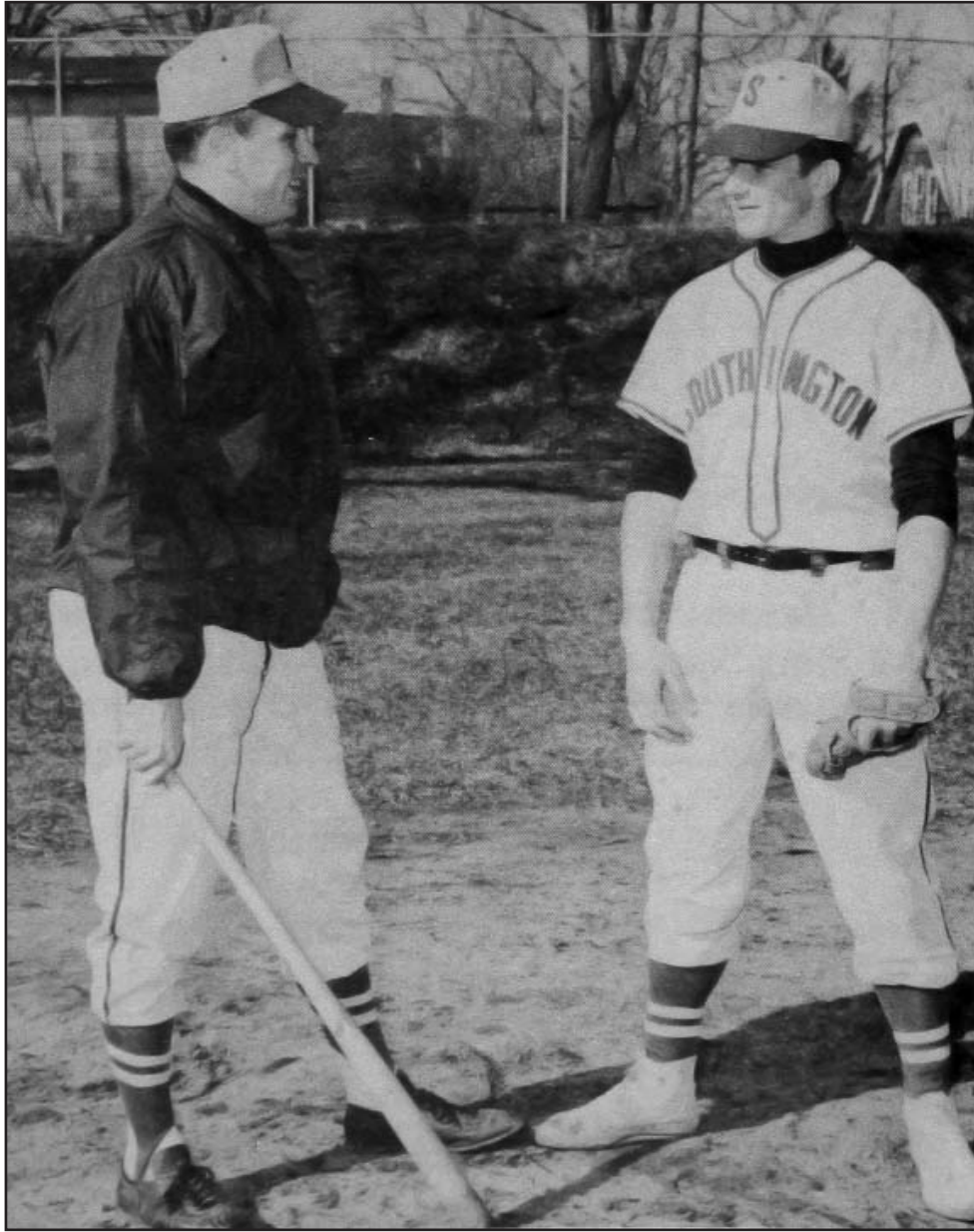
If you are trying to find somebody with something bad to say about the late Tom Garry, you might have to start your search out of town. Friends and family describe him as a throwback to a time when baseball was just a game or a way to meet girls. They describe his coolness as he shuffled to the mound with a baseball tucked into his giant paws like a mother bear protecting her cubs. Or they remember his calm saunter back to the dugout after another scoreless inning.

Nothing seemed to rattle Garry—on or off the mound. "The guy could have been in Hollywood," said his coach. "The girls just loved him."

Opponents, on the other hand, couldn't stand him. Garry was one of the most dominant high school players to ever play the game. He holds at least seven school records and is the only Southington pitcher still listed in the national high school record book. When he threw the no-hitter in the season opener, Garry was just warming up.

"He pitched like that all year. Nobody touched him," Fontana said. "He'd throw the fast ball. He had a curve too, but he could just hit spots. Nobody clocked him at the time, but I'll tell you. I coached Rob Dibble. I had Carl Pavano, and guys like that. I don't know if any of those guys was any faster than him. When he brought it, he brought it."

Garry earned his spot as co-captain and ace when he helped pitch the Knights to a state championship in 1961, but Garry wasn't finished. He pitched three no-hitters in his senior year—a record that still remains. He allowed



SUBMITTED

Tom Garry, right, gets some pointers from Coach John Fontana during his high school playing days.

Tom was just a really great baseball player, but it was because he worked hard to become what he was.

Gil Varjas,
Former SHS baseball player

just five earned runs in 143 innings (both current records). Garry pitched 11 complete games and struck out 156 batters in 1962, and those numbers have yet to be eclipsed.

When the dust finally settled on his senior season, the Knights had returned to the state championship game. Garry allowed just one hit in the final, and Rockville needed a no-hitter of their own to eke a 1-0 win.

Garry graduated with 16 career shutouts and a 0.31 career ERA, a national record at the time, that still stands

as the fifth best all-time in the 2010 National High School Sports Record Book.

"I only had him for one year, so it would be hard for me to tell you that he was the best pitcher out of the great ones that I had, but somebody would have to point out to me somebody that was better than him," said Fontana. "He was just an incredible pitcher. He had big hands. He would grab the ball and almost lose it, but I'll tell you. He could throw."

His brother, Dave, his sister Laurel, and her hus-

band Fred Tomassetti sat around a kitchen table, pouring through scrapbooks, statistics, and stories about 'Tommy.' It was like they were looking at his career for the first time because nobody in the house was caught up in the excitement of the 1962 season. Garry was the second of six children, and he wasn't one to hog the spotlight.

"Nobody even made a big deal about it. It just wasn't like that in our family," said his sister. "He was just so calm. He didn't get upset. He didn't come home and brag that he got this or got that. That's why I can't tell you when we knew he was good. He was good, but he just took it in stride."

For his family, Garry's senior season was nothing out of the ordinary. He grew up in a neighborhood where baseball was truly a pastime. He played pick-up games with guys like Gil Varjas and Dick Tully—both future teammates and both members of the Southington High School baseball hall of fame. Everyone was good, but Garry was always one of the best.

"Tom was just a really

Southington Sports
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Inside the Numbers

Tom Garry (1945-1992)

Holds seven SHS pitching records:

- 0.31—Career ERA (1960-1962)
 - 3—No-hitters, single season (1962)
 - 5—Earned runs, single season (1962)
 - 11—Complete games, single season (1962)
 - 25—Career victories (1960-1962)
 - 143—Innings pitched, single season (1962)
 - 156—Most strikeouts, single season (1962)
- Member of 1961 state championship team
 - Team Captain (1962)
 - Team MVP (1962)
 - All-league (1962)
 - Inducted into SHS baseball hall of fame (1982)

I want people to remember him like I do—as a nice guy. I wish they could get to see him or get to meet him... because they would love him.

Laurel Tomassetti,
Sister

great baseball player," said Varjas. "But it was because he worked hard to become what he was. Nobody helped us. It was one of those things. We just kept playing. We didn't even have coaches in those days. It was just us."

Garry would practice on the beaten base paths in his back yard. The neighborhood team would play double headers and grudge matches all day. Garry didn't make noise as a hitter in high school, but he was known just as much for his bat as his throwing arm in the neighborhood games.

"I remember him telling me that Fontana told him it was a good thing that he was such a good pitcher because he couldn't hit the ball," said his brother Dave, "but he could hit."

After school Garry earned a scholarship to American International College in Springfield. In his first college start, Garry struck out 16 UMass batters, but he left school early and never returned. He eventually settled down in San Antonio, Texas with his wife and family, but his life ended too soon.

He was home with his family on Christmas Day in 1992 when he passed away suddenly. Garry was only 47.

Almost two decades have passed since that day, but his family still chokes back tears when they gathered around the table. In a basement interview, his former coach just shook his head. "It was a tragedy," he said.

It seems that, whether he was standing on the mound or just sitting in the back yard, Garry had a way of leaving an impression.

"I want people to remember him like I do—as a nice guy," said his sister. "I wish they could get to see him or get to meet him to make their own opinion because they would love him."

On Wednesday, Nov. 10, Garry will be a member of the first class to enter the Southington Sports Hall of Fame. He will be honored in an induction ceremony at the Aqua Turf in Plantsville. For tickets, contact Jim Verderame, (860) 628-7335.

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