

Hall of Fame

The comeback kid

Carl Pavano was back on top in 2010

By JOHN GORALSKI
SPORTS WRITER

Before the second game of this year's American League Division Series, Carl Pavano smiled at reporters as they peppered him with questions about the Yankees.

"Would you change anything?" they asked.

"There are no do-overs. You learn from your mistakes and you move on," he said in a video re-broadcast on MLB.com. "You know, I really don't look back on it as a bad thing. I'm in a good position now. That's all that really matters."

The follow up brought an even bigger smile. "Your name still stirs up a lot of emotions among Yankees fans," the reporter said. "I'm sure you knew that before you were introduced to the crowd last year. What kind of emotions do you feel when you get to pitch against the Yankees? Are there any sort of revenge feelings on your mind?"

Pavano shook his head. "Not at all," he said. "I'm a professional, and I've been doing this a while."

Athlete

When it comes to Southington sports, Carl Pavano is in a league of his own. Sure, others have made it to the big leagues. Sure, others have won in a championship game, but nobody's played at that level so long. And nobody's had to deal with as much criticism and second guessing.

Pavano doesn't seem to care. It all comes with the territory. As for his critics, he'll probably outlast them.

"A lot of guys have gone through that stuff and are sitting at home. I'm still standing," he said to *The Observer*. "I had a career year this year, and I'm looking forward to the rest of my career. I'm moving forward, and I put myself in a good position to attract another contract."

It seems like a lifetime since he stepped to the mound at Southington High School in 1992, but Pavano calls that a turning point in his baseball career. He broke out as a junior in 1993 with an 8-2 record. Pavano struck out 97 batters with just three earned runs. He carried that momentum into the summer where Pavano marshaled the local American Legion baseball to their first state title.

"It was such a long time ago, but that's really where a lot of it started," he said. "I was successful in Little League as far as that goes, but when I went to Babe Ruth I sort of plateaued. I wasn't dominant. I was a strike thrower, and I could get through games, but it



COURTESY OF THE MINNESOTA TWINS

Southington native Carl Pavano is still pitching at the major league level with a career year with the Minnesota Twins in 2010.

wasn't until my junior year when my body and my mind and all that started catching up. It started to translate into success on the bigger field, and that was kind of my breakout."

That championship launched Pavano into the spotlight. He entered his senior season as a pre-season all-American and carried the Knights to a Class LL state title. Pavano struck out 186 batters in just 91 innings. He went 12-1 on the mound with a 0.61 ERA. He set a school record for complete games (13) and strikeouts that still stands for the high school program.

"He had a good curve and a good fastball, but his key was that he could take all of his pitches and place them," said former SHS baseball coach John Fontana. "If you talked to his catchers, they'd tell you that wherever they put their glove, the ball would hit it."

Fontana recalls the championship game. Pavano told him that he couldn't get his curve to break, so Fontana told him to keep the ball low and force ground outs.

"When the game was over, the umpire behind the

plate, Lou Filippelli, walked up to me through everybody and the hoopla and he told me that he had to tell me something. 'I have never in my life seen a high school pitcher throw an entire game and keep the ball at the knees the entire game,'" said Fontana. "It was phenomenal."

Of course, Pavano was just as deadly from the other side of the plate. He averaged .429 as a Blue Knight hitter with 27 RBI, two home runs, four doubles, and just six strikeouts. On the way to the state championship, Pavano had the game-winning run in an extra-inning pitchers duel against Norwalk.

"He went up to the plate, and I jokingly told him not to forget that he's batting. If you don't get a hit here, you can't go out to pitch. He told me that we'd finish the game now and hits a base hit to right field. We won, 1-0," said Fontana. "Pavano could hit. He shocked a lot of people. They'd hear all about him and all about his pitching, but he could hit."

He can still hit. Pavano collected 13 hits for the Florida Marlins in 2004 and

went 3-for-6 (.500) in inter-league play this past season, but it's on the mound that he does the most damage.

In 2003 he helped lead the Marlins past the New York Yankees in Game 4 of the World Series, holding the Yankees to one run in eight innings in a game that the Marlins would win in extra innings and would win the series in six games.

"That's what you play for, and you don't understand the experience until you go through it," Pavano said. "That was really cool. It was another situation where we had great chemistry and great players. Things started clicking at the right time, and we rode it out. We weren't the best team in our division, but we played the best when it counted."

That was Pavano's breakout season in the pros. The following year, he finished sixth in the Cy Young voting with an 18-6 record, 139 strikeouts, and a 3.00 ERA. Those numbers earned him a big contract with the Yankees. Nobody could have known that this was the start of his darkest days in the major leagues.

"The dream of the family turned into a nightmare," his father said. "I emailed him once and asked, 'Carl, how are you doing?' He emailed back and said, 'They haven't broken me, and they won't.' They didn't want to listen that he had some problems. They didn't want to know."

Pavano compiled a 4-2 record in 10 starts with the Yankees, but suffered a right shoulder injury and landed on the disabled list. Pavano made just 26 starts with the Yankees as he battled with a series of injuries over the next four years. He didn't pitch at all in the 2006 season and suffered two broken ribs in an automobile accident that delayed his return to the Yankees. In 2007, he underwent Tommy John surgery for his elbow and made just seven starts the following season.

Pavano was booed by fans on the field and was scrutinized by the New York's media.

"That was frustrating because a lot of it was bull...," said Pavano. "I had injuries that needed to be addressed. The politics and the injuries culminated in problems. It was unfortunate because I was paid a lot of money to go out there and pitch, and I didn't do that. It isn't a forgiving place."

In 2009, Pavano made his return to the major leagues as a pitcher for the Cleveland Indians. Later that season, he was traded to the Twins, and Pavano was the perfect fit. Like him, they have survived the bad times. In 1998, the Twins were

*Southington Sports
Hall of Fame*



Inside the Numbers

- Member of the Southington American Legion state championship team (1993).
- Member of Southington High School Class LL championship team (1994).
- Member of the Florida Marlins World Series championship team (2003).

SOUTHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

- Set school record for complete games in a single season (13 in 1994)
- Set school record for single-season strikeouts (106 in 1994)
- Preseason All American (1994)
- All state (1993, 1994)
- All conference (1993, 1994)
- Team Captain (1994)
- Most Valuable Player (1994)
- Played in the Senior All-Star game (1994)
- Pitched two no-hitters

HITTING STATISTICS

- Career Batting Average of .429
- 1994—62 AB, 27 RBI, 6 K, 27 H, 2 homeruns, 2 doubles

PITCHING STATISTICS

- 1993—(8-2 record) 72 innings, 12 BB, 97 K, 27 H, 13 R, 3 ER.
- 1993—(12-1 record) 91 innings, 11 BB, 186 K, 32 H, 25 R, 8 ER, 0.61 ERA.

MAJOR LEAGUES

- Drafted by Boston Red Sox in 1994.
- Has played with 5 major league teams since 1998 (Marlins, Expos, Twins, Yankees, Indians)
- National League All-Star (2004)

MLB PITCHING STATISTICS

Year	Team	G	CG	W	L	IP	ERA	BB	SO
1998	MON	24	0	6	9	134.2	4.21	43	83
1999	MON	19	1	6	8	104.0	5.63	35	70
2000	MON	15	0	8	4	97.0	3.06	34	64
2001	MON	8	0	1	6	42.2	6.33	16	36
2002		37	0	6	10	136.0	5.16	45	92
2003	FLA	33	2	12	13	201.0	4.30	49	133
2004	FLA	31	2	18	8	222.1	3.00	49	139
2005	NYN	17	1	4	6	100.0	4.77	18	56
2006	NYN	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2007	NYN	2	0	1	0	11.1	4.76	2	4
2008	NYN	7	0	4	2	34.1	5.77	10	15
2009		33	1	14	12	199.1	5.10	39	147
2010	MIN	32	7	17	11	221.0	3.75	37	117
CAREER		258	14	97	89	1503.2	4.34	377	956

almost a victim of league contraction. Now, they're building a new stadium and they looking to the future with a solid core of young pitchers.

Minnesota. Twins manager Ron Gardenhire welcomed Pavano for his experience. "We needed a veteran. We had a couple of younger starters. He came in and kind of showed the way," he said in a post-season interview this year. "He took the ball. He's one of those warriors for us. He just went out there, and he doesn't like to miss a start. He doesn't like to be backed up. He's kind of like Jack Morris. He wants the ball every five days."

Pavano helped lead the Twins to back-to-back post-season appearances. Healthy again, Pavano has made 65 starts since leaving the Yankees. In 2010, he went 17-11 with a career-high seven complete games and a 3.75 ERA.

"We're proud of him. He's been through a lot. He's

had a lot of ups and downs, and he keeps overcoming them," said his father. "Now that he's had that reconstructive surgery on his elbow, he's gotten stronger. Everything's coming together again."

Pavano hopes to keep going, and should be offered a new contract once the World Series is over. "We'll see what happens," he said. "I plan on pitching for at least three more years if I can get that out of my body. I'm hoping that it translates into success like I've had over the last two years, and I'll take it from there."

With his long career, his ability to overcome adversity, and his dominance on the mound, Pavano was an easy choice for the inaugural class of the Southington Sports Hall of Fame. "I don't think you really expect things like this," he said. "It's nice to be viewed from your peers as a candidate for one, and to win an award is special for itself. It's pretty exciting."