

Hall of Fame

Simply perfect

Bolduc dominated on the mound

By JOHN GORALSKI
SPORTS WRITER

Joe Piazza still remembers walking off the softball field in 1983 after the Lady Knights' first tournament win. A two-out single up the middle cost Julie Bolduc a perfect game in the last inning of the game. Southington won easily, 3-0, but the former Lady Knight coach thought his all-star senior may have missed her chance at perfection.

"We all thought she should have had it," he said. "My assistant coach at the time, Dan Dembinsky, told me not to worry. She was saving it for the finals. I swear to God that he said that to me."

Three games later, that's what she did. Bolduc allowed just four hits in the next two games and struck out 13 in the championship game to beat East Haven, 4-0.

Athlete

Southington earned its first undefeated season, and Bolduc earned her first perfect game. Almost three decades have passed since that day, but Bolduc still credits her team, their work ethic, and their chemistry.

"I don't think any of us realized that we were doing anything special until the last pitch and the last out of the state championship," she said. "We just loved what we were doing."

On paper, Bolduc wasn't the fastest pitcher in Southington's storied past. She wasn't the first one to earn a scholarship, and she wasn't the last. But Piazza called Bolduc the hardest working of all his pitchers, and she set a standard for consistency that few have approached.

Bolduc came a long way from her humble beginnings.

"When she started pitching in eighth grade or ninth grade, she threw the ball relatively hard, but she would walk 25 or 26 batters in a game," said Piazza. "I give all the credit in the world to the people who were her coaches at St.

Julie's Gem										
1983 Class LL Championship Game										
Southington 4, East Haven 0										
Friday, June 10, 1983										
At Falcon Field, Meriden										
EAST HAVEN					SOUTHINGTON					
Player	ab	r	h	bi	Player	ab	r	h	bi	
Possell, cf	3	0	0	0	Kopcza, ss	4	1	2	1	
Lembo, 3b	3	0	0	0	Ringrose, rf	4	0	0	0	
Finer, ss	3	0	0	0	Shanley, 2b	3	1	1	1	
DeGrand, 1b	2	0	0	0	Foley, 3b	3	1	2	0	
DePoto, rf	2	0	0	0	Pelrin, pr	0	0	0	0	
St.Pierre, c	2	0	0	0	Geddes, 1b	3	0	1	0	
Quido, lf	2	0	0	0	Utke, c	3	0	1	0	
D'Angelo, dh	2	0	0	0	Mayo, dh	3	0	1	0	
Durant, p	0	0	0	0	Bolduc, p	0	0	0	0	
Danielson, 2b	2	0	0	0	Lebel, cf	3	1	1	0	
Totals	21	0	0	0	Ledoux, lf	0	0	0	0	
					Dorsey, lf	2	0	0	0	
					Holian, lf	1	0	0	0	
					Totals	29	4	9	2	

LOB—EH, 0. SHS, 7. 2B—Shanley. SB—Lebel.

East Haven (14-5)	000	000	0	—	0	0	3
Southington (23-0)	003	100	x	—	4	9	0
EAST HAVEN	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	
Durant, L	6.0	9	4	3	1	0	
SOUTHINGTON	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	
Bolduc, W	7	0	0	0	0	13	

Thomas because they let her pitch. They didn't do the thing that most people would do. They didn't tell her to slow it down to just get it over the plate."

Bolduc kept throwing hard. With few opportunities at the youth level in the late 1970s, she would travel to Meriden to watch games and study pitchers. She would scrutinize Southington pitchers like Irene Mach. Then she'd go home to try to repeat it.

"I was terrible, and I was wild," Bolduc said with a laugh. "As a sophomore I think I was still walking 7, 8, or 9 each game on JV, but I was still getting strikeouts. I was always throwing hard, but I didn't know what I was doing. As many as I would strike out, I would walk or hit. That didn't matter. I just kept plugging away because I loved what I was doing."

Finally Bolduc got her big

chance, and she never turned back. Piazza begged Brenda Reilly, a basketball coach at Central CT State University and a former professional pitcher, to look at his young gun. Reilly relented, and Bolduc pitched to a private audience. The rest was history.

"At that point, Coach Piazza realized that Brenda saw something in me," Bolduc explained. "We went back up three or four times, and then he took over my training. He and I worked out every day that summer. We went running, and then he would catch for me. Without those two people, forget about it. That was my turnaround right there."

Piazza gives Bolduc all the credit. She would throw 200-300 pitches per day. Piazza said that, even after throwing 70 or 75 pitches in a game, she would stay after the game to throw some more. She would use her father for target practice, her coach, or her teammates. If nobody was available, she'd use a sheet of plywood.

"She never got tired. Never," said Piazza. "She was an amazing kid. She worked out over the summer. She ran. She had other kids that would go and catch for her."

When she finally got her chance as a junior, Bolduc seized the opportunity. She developed a pin-point precision, painted the bottom of the strike zone, and kept runners off the bases.

"I didn't want anybody to get to first base. I didn't want anybody to even touch the ball," she said. "If somebody hit the ball to the outfield, and we caught it, I was mad. I wanted to strike that kid out. I wanted a weak foul ball. I was always very driven to push myself, and I thought it was my responsibility to get every batter."

For the most part, she did.



FILE PHOTO

Julie Bolduc celebrates after winning back-to-back Class LL championships (1983, 1984) for the Lady Knights.

Bolduc led the Knights to a 22-1 record as a junior with 16 shutouts and a 0.241 ERA. As a senior, she went 23-0 with just one earned run and a second state championship. For her career, Bolduc went 45-1 with a mind-blowing 0.145 ERA. Bolduc struck out more batters (344) than innings pitched (337) with five no-hitters, nine games with just one hit and 13 more with just two hits. Then, she threw the perfect game.

"As good a pitcher as she was, she was probably one of the nicest kids that you would ever meet," said Piazza. "It never went to her head. She went from a kid that didn't know much about the game to a senior leader on the field. She came from basically nothing to a star in four years, and it wasn't because she was a great athlete. We've had a lot of kids that became great softball players just because they were athletic. That wasn't the case with Julie. She just out-worked everybody."

At the time, Bolduc led the Knights into the national record books, including a record for lowest ERA in a season (0.043) that stood for more than 20 years. Bolduc's 1983 team is still ranked in four categories in the 2010 National High School Sports Record Book. They're ranked second for fewest runs allowed (4), fewest earned runs (1), and lowest ERA (0.04). They're ranked fifth in consecutive innings without an earned run (129.7).

"The work and time that this team put in was unbelievable," said Bolduc. "We made a lot of sacrifices. We practiced, and it paid off. But I don't think that anybody cared. It was just fun."

After graduation, Bolduc

never strayed too far from the game. She went on to pitch in two college world series at Adelphi University where she was the first pitcher in NCAA history to throw a perfect game in the college world series.

She worked as a coach and a consultant at the college level. She gave up a promising career in social work to start her own company in 1999, Pro Pitch, inc., and she's been conducting lessons ever since. She travels to New York and Connecticut from her home in Massachusetts, making the 1.5 hour trip to Southington to coach up-and-coming pitchers at a local batting cage.

"I never imagined I'd be doing it this long," she said. "My mother keeps telling me that I really need to get a job so I can have retirement, pension, and all those things. I keep telling her that it's not happening."

On Wednesday, Nov. 10, Bolduc will be honored by the Southington Sports Hall of Fame as a member of its inaugural class in an ceremony at the Aqua Turf. For tickets, contact Jim Verderame, (860) 628-7335.

Bolduc said that she feels a little guilty being inducted before her predecessor Irene Mach because Mach paved the way as the first Lady Knight softball player to receive a scholarship to college.

"That kind of opened my eyes. Wow," said Bolduc. "I just want everybody to know that it wasn't just me. I would be nothing without Coach Piazza and Brenda Reilly—and my teammates."

To comment on this story or to contact sports writer John Goralski, email him at jgoralski@southingtonobserver.com.



Southington Sports Hall of Fame



Inside the Numbers

- Played softball, volleyball, and basketball
 - Softball co-captain (1983)
 - All-State softball (1982, 1983)
 - All-Conference softball (1982, 1983)
- Two-time Class LL State Champion (1982, 1983)
- Earned scholarship to Adelphi University (1984-87)
- Pitched first perfect game in NCAA history at the college world series (1984).

YEAR	Pitching Statistics								
	IP	H	R	ER	BB	K	W	L	ERA
1982	174	56	15	6	35	158	22	1	0.241
1983	163	46	4	1	16	186	23	0	0.043
Career	337	102	19	7	51	344	45	1	0.145