

Hall of Fame

Southington hitman

Mauro's 1953 batting record still stands after nearly six decades

By JOHN GORALSKI
SPORTS WRITER

Mike Mauro was standing in the third base coaching box as a freshman when Coach Jay Fontana signaled him from the other side of the diamond. It was 1950. The seniors were anxious to start class night festivities, but Lewis High School had a runner in scoring position with two outs in extra innings.

Fontana signaled his freshman to grab a bat, and Mauro drove the ball between shortstop and third base to score the winning run.

Athlete

For Mauro, that hit would spark a storied scholastic career that would catapult him into the spotlight and secure a spot in town history with a record that has stood for more than almost six decades. Oh yeah, his second varsity hit broke a 14th inning tie against Glastonbury in the state championship game.

"He was the most unbelievable baseball player," said John Fontana, a former player and future coach at Southington High School. "He was a great hitter, and a great pitcher. He would even pitch back-to-back games all the time."

Mauro brushed off the compliment, saying that he was only doing what was needed. "The game was a little bit different than it is today," he said. "There were no specialty pitchers. If you started the game, you pitched until the game was over. Relievers were only used when it was a real necessity. If you were a pitcher, you started."

In the early 50s, Southington was at a turning point. The town had outgrown its small brick high school tucked away on



SUBMITTED

Mike Mauro throws a pitch during a freshman practice. Mauro was a top pitching prospect but became one of the top hitters in town history.

Academy Hill behind the First Congregational Church in the center of town. The first Southington High School was about to open its doors, and Mauro was about to put it on the map.

By his senior season Mauro had grown into a starter, roaming the outfield between pitching starts. He would post several no-hitters and a number of complete games on the mound, but that would all pale to his work at the plate. In 1953, Mauro hit a staggering .568 batting average. It's a record that still stands in the Southington record books.

"It's an amazing feat, especially when you think of all the outstanding hit-

ters we've had since then," the late Coach Fontana said to reporters when Mauro was one of three players chosen to represent the program in the first class of the Southington High Baseball Hall of Fame.

Mauro had come a long way from his meager beginnings, playing pickup games with a stuffed stocking on Liberty Street. There was no local Little League field. There were no organized teams. The first uniform he ever wore was the blue and gold of Lewis High.

"I remember my heart pounding when Jay Fontana gave me my tryout at Lincoln Lewis to see if I could make the team," said Mauro. "Then, when I finally got my uniform, it was a big relief. It was my first uniform, and I was playing for the high school. Things are much, much different than they were back then."

Mauro remembers the competitiveness of their make-shift neighborhood games. His older brothers taught him the game. His first bat was made of wood but would hardly be considered a bat. He used gloves fashioned out of pie tins and played under the watchful gaze of his mother, Jennie, as she chased away police in her apron



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with a broom whenever they were called to break up the game.

"It was still very competitive. You never wanted to lose. You always wanted to win," said Mauro. "All I did was eat and sleep baseball. We didn't have bats or balls or anything like that. The area we played in was two driveways side-by-side with two houses right next to it... We played two, three, or four games often—especially in the summer time."

Those Liberty Street games helped hone the skills that would turn the heads of pro scouts and stoke the competitive fires that would lead to Mauro's dominance in sports. He became a standout basketball player, scoring 13.4

points per game as a senior with two games over 23 points. After high school, he developed into a top bowler and bocce player, earning a championship in a United Nations bocce tournament in the 1980s.

But it was on the diamond that Mauro really shined. When scouts came to watch future Pittsburgh Pirates pitcher Joey Jay dominate the mound for Woodrow Wilson, Mauro grabbed their attention with two clean hits. Scouts liked what they saw, and it led to a short trip to Canada in the Pittsburgh minor leagues and another tryout the following year that nearly landed him on a professional roster.

"Mike was a natural athlete, and he's regarded as one of the best baseball hitters in town history," said former sports writer Art Secondo. "His average reflects that. He had the highest single-season average ever. If he picked up any kind of round ball—whether it was baseball, bocce, bowling—he was just good at it."

That's why Mauro was an easy selection for the first class of the Southington Sports Hall of Fame. On Wednesday, Nov. 10, he will be honored in an induction ceremony at the Aqua Turf in Plantsville.

To comment on this story, email John GoralSKI@southingtonobserver.com.

Southington Sports Hall of Fame



Inside the Numbers

- School record for batting average (1953)
- Two No-Hitters in 3 Years
- Inducted in the first class of the Southington Baseball Hall of Fame
- Averaged 13.4 ppg in basketball (Undefeated 1953)
- United Nations Bocce Champion (1983)