

Hall of Fame

National powerhouse

1983 softball team set the standard for the future

By JOHN GORALSKI
SPORTS WRITER

The Lady Knights were already used to winning at the start of the 1983 softball season. Southington was already well-established as a Connecticut powerhouse with four state titles since 1978.

The Southington sports community was already used to success on the softball field, but nobody was ready for what was about to unfold.

Team



SUBMITTED

The 1983 Lady Knights were the first undefeated Southington High School team as they set a national record for ERA that stood for two decades. Front, from left, Sherri Pelrin, Chris Shanley, Meg Utke, Julie Bolduc, Liz Ringrose, and Kathy Foley. Back, Head Coach Joe Piazza, Jane Ledoux, Rachel Mayo, Shari Geddes, Noreen Dorsey, Paige Kopcza, Donna Lebel, Linda Holian, Coach Dan Dembinski. Missing: Coach Jim Lindsay, Coach Irene Mach, Manager Eileen Kelley.

“We knew that we had a solid team coming back, so we certainly expected to be good,” said former Lady Knight coach Joe Piazza. “But you can’t foresee errors, walks, or any of that. You don’t know how other teams are going to bunt and how you’re going to handle those bunts. This team just really gelled to play fabulous defense along with Julie Bolduc’s tremendous pitching. It was special.”

The Knights were about to catapult themselves into the national spotlight, and 1983 proved to be a turning point in an already storied franchise. They would go undefeated for the first time in the school’s history, but that wasn’t all. The girls would out-score teams, 176-4, in the regular season. They would collect 20 shutouts, two no hitters, and a perfect game. They would race through the playoffs with four consecutive shutouts that culminated in the team’s third straight state championship and a national record that would

stand for more than two decades.

“Up to that point, I thought it was my best all-around team,” said Piazza. “They really dominated as far as making a name in the press for not giving up runs. We only gave up four runs all year, and only one of them was an earned run. When we figured out the ERA, it was miniscule.”

The team averaged 0.04 earned runs per game, which was the lowest in the nation until it was broken in 2004 by another Lady Knight team. The 1983 team set a new standard for the Southington program, and it started with pitcher Julie Bolduc.

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Bolduc and Meg Utke established themselves in 1982 as one of the best batteries in the state. Bolduc went 22-1 with 16 shutouts, three no-hitters, and a 0.241 ERA. Behind the plate, Utke proved to be one of the top catchers in the state, but their numbers would skyrocket in 1983.

Bolduc pitched all but one inning and struck out 186 batters with just three walks and 46 hits in 23 games. The team surrendered four runs all season, but Bolduc and Utke were only responsible for one.

“Meg was a vacuum behind the plate because about 90 percent of Julie’s pitches were drop-offs,” said Piazza. “They were at the knees or below. She only came up when she wanted to come up, so they pounded the ball into the ground and we fielded it.”

Defense was the key. After surrendering two unearned runs on six errors in a sloppy 12-inning game against Hamden in late April, Southington flipped

the switch. The Knights surrendered just one run in the next 17 games with 14 shutouts in a row to end year.

“The team, especially defensively, was fabulous. Julie was not a strikeout pitcher. Overall, the team dominated because it didn’t give up any runs if you take away that one game with the six errors,” said Piazza. “You’re putting subs in sometimes, but even the kids I put in as subs did a great job.”

At the plate, Southington was just as formidable, posting a .336 team batting average with 221 hits, 130 RBI, and 10 players hitting over .300. Paige Kopcza (.494, 16 RBI) led the team in at bats (77) and hits (38). Chris Shanley (.394) led the team in extra-base hits (6) and RBI (25), but Utke (.373, 12 RBI), Rachel Mayo (.368, 12 RBI), Liz Ringrose (.333, 13 RBI), Kathy Foley (.319, 19 RBI), Noreen Dorsey (.313), and Shari Geddes (.284, 14 RBI) were enough to overpower any

1983 Lady Knight softball team (Overall record: 23-0)

Date	Opponent	Site	Score
Wed., April 13	Windsor	Away	4-0
Thu., April 14	Mercy	Away	15-1
Mon., April 18	Platt	Home	4-0
Wed., April 20	Maloney	Home	7-0
Sat., April 23	Hamden	Away	3-2
Mon., April 25	Bristol Central	Away	6-0
Wed., April 27	Bristol Eastern	Home	21-0
Thu., April 28	New Britain	Home	2-1
Sat., April 30	Newington	Home	11-0
Mon., May 2	NW Catholic	Home	12-0
Tue., May 3	Mercy	Away	9-0
Thu., May 5	Platt	Away	5-0
Fri., May 6	Maloney	Home	12-0
Mon., May 9	Windsor	Home	11-0
Wed., May 11	Bristol Central	Home	11-0
Fri., May 13	Bristol Eastern	Away	14-0
Thu., May 19	Naugatuck	Home	11-0
Mon., May 23	Holy Cross	Away	1-0
Wed., May 25	Cheshire	Home	1-0
Round	Opponent	Score	
First Round	Norwich Free Academy	3-0	
Quarterfinals	Mercy	7-0	
Semifinals	Manchester	2-0	
Championship Game	East Haven	4-0	

opposing pitcher.

Bolduc, Utke, Ringrose, Kopcza, and Foley were each named to the all-state roster.

“There weren’t a lot of great hitters, but there were a lot of good hitters,” said Piazza. “If you wanted to put the whole team in perspective, we had a veteran team with a couple of seniors that hadn’t played a lot prior to that season.”

The Knights saved the best for last. After powering past NFA (3-0) and Mercy (7-0) in the opening rounds, Bolduc earned a no-hitter with a 2-0 win over Manchester in the semifinals and finished with a perfect game in the championship game against East Haven (4-0).

“It was the perfect fin-

ish,” said Piazza. “That was the only thing in Julie’s career that she had never accomplished—the perfect game.”

No program has dominated the town’s sports landscape more than softball. With 14 state championships in 17 appearances, the Lady Knights have proven that they can compete at the state level. In 1983, they proved they could lead the country.

On Wednesday, Nov. 10, the team will finally be honored in an induction ceremony at the Aqua Turf Club in Plantsville.

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

Batting Statistics								
NAME	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	AVG
Lee	3	5	2	0	0	0	0	.667
Riedinger	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	.500
Kopcza, ss	77	30	38	2	0	1	16	.494
Peirin	7	3	3	0	0	0	1	.429
Shanley, 2b	71	21	28	5	0	1	25	.394
Utke, c	67	10	25	2	0	1	12	.373
Mayo, dh	38	10	14	4	2	0	9	.368
Ringrose, rf	69	27	23	2	1	1	13	.333
Foley, 3b	69	13	22	3	0	0	19	.319
Dorsey, dh	48	9	15	2	0	0	4	.313
Geddes, 1b	74	13	21	1	1	0	14	.284
Ledoux, lf	24	5	6	0	0	0	4	.250
Donahue	4	2	1	0	0	0	1	.250
Holian, lf	32	7	7	1	0	0	4	.219
Lebel, cf	69	20	15	0	0	0	8	.217
Fernandes	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	.000
Recor	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	.000
Totals	657	177	221	22	4	4	130	.336

Pitching Statistics									
NAME	IP	H	R	ER	BB	K	W	L	ERA
Bolduc	163	46	4	1	16	186	23	0	0.04
Dorsey	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0.00
Team	164	46	4	1	16	187	23	0	0.04