

Hall of Fame

For the love of the game

Dick Tully is, was, and ever shall be a true sports competitor

By JOHN GORALSKI
SPORTS WRITER

Dick Tully felt he deserved a starting position as a sophomore, but he didn't blame his coaches. He didn't sulk on the bench. He never complained during practice. Instead, Tully set out to prove them wrong.

He fashioned a make-shift batting tee from an old car jack and practiced in his back yard. He batted in the summer, in the fall, and over the winter. When spring arrived, coaches welcomed him to the starting lineup.

Hall of Fame

Tully was the top hitter as a junior and helped to power his team into the promised land with the town's first state title in 1961. Tully was a major reason for that success.

The following season, Coach John Fontana inherited the team. He had Tully for just one year, but it made such an impression that Tully was the one person that the coach had to have when he named his baseball "dream team" in 1975.

"I had Dick for only one season, but I must say Dick was the best all-around," Fontana said at the time. "He could play anywhere including pitching. He hit .351 for me, and he possessed great knowledge of the game. He could fly on those base paths, too."

Fans enjoyed the show. They could read the joy on Tully's face as he rounded the bases. Baseball was a game, and Tully was having fun.

"I loved to play. I wanted to play. That's all we ever did," he said. "If we weren't practicing at the high school, we were home playing stocking ball, football in the winter, or shooting [basketball] in the garage. We used to take those old tomato baskets, hollow out the bottom, and hang it on the wall. We were always playing, and we were always playing against the older kids. That really helped."

Tully has never been too far from competition. It was true in the early 60s, and it's still true today. He's in his late 60s, but Tully still plays baseball every day on travel teams and in senior leagues. Up until just a few years ago, he was still competing in basketball town leagues, running the courts against players less than half his age.

"I enjoy it. It's something that I did all my life," he said. "Then, the older you get, you never know when it's going to end. I play seven days a week. I've been lucky. Some of the guys I play with have reconstructed knees or triple by-passes. I've been lucky, and I enjoy it."

Tully has always welcomed competition, and he's always relished the role of underdog. A 5-foot-6 power hitter that weighs in



1962 CHRONICLE YEARBOOK

Dick Tully hurls a strike during an outing on the Southington mound.

under 150 pounds? Unlikely, but that was Tully.

"He hit everything and everybody," Fontana told *The Observer* when Tully was inducted into Southington's baseball hall of fame in 1982. "Teams who didn't scout us would look at Dick's size and laugh. They would throw him a fast ball, and he'd drive it out of the park. They couldn't believe it."

He hit home runs at Palmer Field in Middletown that cleared the river at the back of the park. He'd blast hard singles past infielders and extra-base hits through the gaps. Tully went 32-for-85 (.376) to lead the 1961 championship team as a junior with 32 singles, 32 runs, five extra base hits and 24 RBI. When Southington struggled at the plate with a .106 batting average the following year, Tully still went .351. He stayed loose and kept hitting.

"He was excellent. Nothing got by him. Dick was a real competitor and he always did a great job," said Andy Meade, a teammate on the 1961 team. "He was a great team player. He was quite good, but he was no kind of braggart. He was just a good guy and an all-around athlete. He did his work on the field."

Tully's reputation earned him a spot on Bristol's American Legion baseball team since there was no local summer team, and Tully captured the team's MVP award in 1962 during the team's state title run.

It came as no surprise to Art Secondo, another Southington teammate and classmate.

Secondo said that Tully was a versatile athlete that could excel at almost anything, pointing to his success on the baseball field, the cross-country team, and the bas-

Southington Sports Hall of Fame

Inside the Numbers

Baseball

- Leading hitter for the Southington High School Class LL championship baseball team (1961).
- All Conference (1962).
- Team MVP (Bristol Legion, 1962).
- 1961—.376 batting average, 32 runs, 24 RBI.
- 1962—.351 batting average.
- Earned scholarship to Parsons College (Iowa).
- Inducted into the inaugural class of the SHS baseball hall of fame (1982).

Basketball

- Captain (1962).
- 3 Varsity letters (1960, 1961, 1962).
- Averaged 15 points per game.

Coaching

- Southington American Legion Baseball Coach (1982-1987).
- Coached youth sports for 20 years (football, basketball, Babe Ruth baseball)
- Matattuck Community College for 3 years with one state title.

ketball squad.

"If Dickie was taller, there's no doubt that he'd be in the majors," he said. "He had such good hand-eye coordination, and he was just a great hitter. Dickie was just a natural athlete. He had an uncanny jump shot in basketball, and pitchers knew him in baseball. I think he could have even played football if he was bigger."

As good as he was in the spotlight, Tully was always more concerned with playing the game than collecting statistics, and he was able to prove that during his basketball career. When two start-

ing players were suspended from the varsity team, coaches signaled Tully as a sophomore on the bench.

As a kid, Tully had proven himself as a scorer, collecting 50 points in a single youth basketball game. He scored 34 points in a freshman basketball game, but coaches needed a passer. They turned to Tully, and he embraced his new role.

"It never bothered me. I didn't need to score the most points or get the most rebounds. I just loved playing," he said. "I didn't have to score on that team

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Dick Tully,
Former SHS athlete

because we had guys like Rit Chopus, Ralph Salerno, and Gil Varjas. Tommy [Garry] was the rebounder, and I liked to play defense and set those guys up. It was very exciting."

Tully earned the respect and confidence of his teammates as he threw himself into the game with wild abandon. He quarterbacked the team for three varsity seasons. As a senior, coaches selected him as the team's captain because he was the perfect fit for Southington's coaching style.

"I want to be remembered as a team player, as someone who played hard, and enjoyed playing," he said. "Walt Lozowski believed in man-to-man defense. We didn't play in zones or sit back. We were active and it took a lot of teamwork. You'd pick. You'd switch. It was a lot of fun."

And it still is. Since graduating from Southington High School in 1962, Tully has remained active and involved in local sports. He balanced his own playing career with a brief stint as Southington's American Legion baseball coach from 1982-1987. He coached youth baseball, basketball, and football for more than two decades. He won a state title as a coach for Mattattuck Community College, and he currently umpires softball in the park and recreation league.

That's why members of the Southington Sports Hall of Fame selection committee picked Tully as a member of the Class of 2011. Few athletes have had the versatility, success, and longevity that Tully has enjoyed.

"It's a nice honor, really," he said. "I was actually kind of shocked because I really didn't think that I had some of the credentials like the other guys. Some played minor league baseball. Pavano, Dibble, and those other guys played professionally. I was a little surprised but really happy."

On Wednesday, Nov. 9, Tully will be inducted into the Southington Sports Hall of Fame at the Aqua Turf Club in Plantsville.