By JOHN GORALSKI
SPORTS WRITER

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 four consecutive shutouts that culminated in a perfect game. They 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 give 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.

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 the 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. Postseason batting average was 221 hits, 130 RBIs, and 10 players hitting over .300. Paige Kopczak (.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 opposing pitcher.

Bolduc, Utke, Ringrose, Kopczak, 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 finish,” 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 Gonicki, email him at jgonicki@ southingtonobserver.com.

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 Kopczak, Donna Lebel, Linda Hollian, Coach Dan Dembinski. Missing: Coach Jim Lindsay, Coach Irene Mach, Manager Eileen Kelley.