When it comes to Southington sports, Carl Pavano is a league of his own. Sure, others have made it to the big leagues, but nobody's played at that level so long. And nobody's had to deal with the hoopla and the politics and the injuries that needed to be addressed. The politics and the injuries complicated in professional baseball. It was unfortunate because I was paid a lot of money to go out there and pitch. It wasn't a forgiving place."

In his return to the major leagues, Pavano hopes to keep it in the family. He's back on top in 2010. But it's on the mound that he shines. It's pretty exciting for me. It's pretty exciting for the kids. Everything's coming together again.

Pavano hopes to keep going, and should be offered a new contract once the World Series is over. "We see what happens," he said. "I plan on pitching for at least three more years if I can get that out of my body. And if it translates into success like I've had over the last two years, and I'll take it from there.

With his long career, his ability to overcome adversity, and his return from the mound, Pavano was an excellent choice for the inaugural Southington Sports Hall of Fame. "I don't think you really expect them to win an award specially for itself. It's pretty exciting.

It seems like a lifetime since he stepped to the mound at Southington High School in 1992, but Pavano recalls that a turning point in his baseball career. He broke out as a junior on a team that finished sixth in the Class LL state championship.

He entered his senior season as a pre-season all-state pitcher with an 18-6 record, 139 strikeouts, and a 6.09 ERA. Those numbers earned him a big contract with the Yankees. Nobody could have known that this was the start of his darkest days in the major leagues.

"The dream of the family turned into a nightmare," his father said. "I emailed him once and asked, 'Carl, how's it going?' He emailed back and said, 'They haven't broken me, and they won't.' They didn't want to listen that he had some problems. They didn't want to know.

When the game was over, and I was able to take all three starts, I was another situation where we had great chemistry and great players. Things started clicking, and we got out of it. We weren't the best team.

Pavano smiled at reporters and kind of showed the younger starters. He came in and took the ball. He's one of those war- riors for us. He just went out there and kind of showed the way," said Fontana. "It's pretty exciting for the kids. Everything's coming together again.

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It seems like a lifetime since he stepped to the mound at Southington High School in 1992, but Pavano recalls that a turning point in his baseball career. He broke out as a junior on a team that finished sixth in the Class LL state championship. Pavano struck out 139 batters with just three walks. On the way to a pitching record of 186-199, he had 12-1 on the mound with a 0.61 ERA. He set a school record for complete games (13) and strikeouts that still stands for the high school program.

"He had a good curve and a good fastball, but his key was that he could take all of his pitches and place them," said former Blue Knight coach John Fontana. "If you talked to his catchers, they'd tell you that whenever they put their glove, the ball would hit it."

Fontana recalls the championship game. Pavano told him that he couldn't get his curve to break, so Fontana told him to keep the ball low and force ground outs.

"When the game was over, the umpire behind the plate, Lou Filipelli, walked up to me through everybody and the hoopla and he told me that he had to tell me something. 'I have never in my life seen a high school pitcher throw an entire game and keep the ball at the knees of the entire game,'" said Fontana. "It was phenomenal."

Of course, Pavano was just as deadly on the field. He was selected by the New York media. "That was frustrating because a lot of it was bull..." Pavano had the skills needed to be addressed. "I have to get a hit here, you can't go out to pitch. He told me that we'd finish the game now and his hand had a base hit to right field. We won, 1-0," said Fontana.

Pavano's breakout season in the pros. The following year, he finished sixth in the Cy Young voting with an 18-6 record, 139 strikeouts, and a 6.09 ERA. Those numbers earned him a big contract with the Yankees. Nobody could have known that this was the start of his darkest days in the major leagues.

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