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

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D ick Tully felt he deserved a starting position as a sopho-
more, but he didn’t blame his coaches. He didn’t sit on the
bench. He never complained during prac-
tice. 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.

Tully was the top hitter as a junior and helped to power his
team to 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 1979.

“I had Dick for only one sea-
son, but I must say Dick was the best all-around,” Fontana said at
that 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 wasn’t just a game; it was a passion.

“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 hitting, playing stockung ball, football in
the winter, or shooting (basket-
ball) 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 play-
ing against the older kids. That
toed.”

Tully has never been too far
distant from competition. It was true in the early 60’s, 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 bas-
ketball 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
knees. I’ve been lucky, and I enjoy it.”

Tully has always welcomed
competition, and he’s always rel-
ished the role of underdog. A 5’
foot-6 power hitter that weighs in
under 150 pounds? Unlikely, but
that was Tully.

“He hit everything and every-
body.” Fontana told The Observer when Tully was inducted into
Southington’s baseball hall of
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
defenders like the other guys. Some
wouldn’t believe it. “He had such good hand-
n prettiness in 1961, Tully has remained active
and involved in local sports. He

managed his own playing career
with the Southington American Legion baseball coach
from 1982-1987. He coached youth baseball, basketball, and
football for more than two decades. He win a state title as a
coach for Mattatuck 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 versa-
tility, 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 cre-
dentials 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, Aug. 9, Tully will be inducted into the
Southington Sports Hall of Fame at the Turt Club in Plantsville.