Hurricane Irene

Irene Mach stormed past opponents and raised the bar for Southington softball

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In the opening round of the 1977 state tournament, Irene Mach dazzled the Stamford defense as she stranded the base path nearly 20 feet from third base. A line drive back to the mound gave them a chance for a double play, but Mach dragged herself to home plate on all fours. The umpire signaled the score, and Mach blacked out from the pain.

Irene Mach celebrates Southington's first softball state title in 1977.

FILE PHOTO

Irene Mach was one of the top athletes, "with her storied career and continued dedication to local sports, Mach was an easy choice as a backup catcher for the Aggies, an assistant coach for the Aggies, and earned a scholarship to Texas A&M. She was pushed into the lineup as a freshman to serve as a backup catcher for the Aggies, but Mach suffered yet another injury to her knee. This one was the final straw.

"They were going to allow me to come back one more year even if I couldn't play, and then they would assess me from there," she said. "With knee surgery after knee surgery after knee surgery, I had enough. You can't play competitively like that, and I didn't want to be there if I couldn't play ball." Even though her playing days were over, Mach continued to give back to the sport. She volunteered as an unpaid assistant coach for the Lady Knights for a number of years. She joined the coaching staff at the University of Hartford in the mid 1980s and was named as the head coach of their softball program. Val DePaolo credited Mach as an early influence when she was inducted into the Southington Sports Hall of Fame in 2010. Julie Bolduc said that she felt guilty for being inducted ahead of her childhood heroes Kelly Hart, who will be inducted beside Mach this fall, and credits the pitcher for a big part of her success.

"My mother used to take me to the field to watch her games when I was younger," said Hart. "To be part of that and be one of those who have come through this town, it's quite an honor." To be part of that and be one of those who have come through this town, it's quite an honor. "I got a lot out of the sport, but I hope that I gave back a lot to the sport and the town. I mean, the whole town rallied around us when we won," she said. "My dad used to leave work to come to my games. He used to pace back and forth, and my mother used to be yelling in the stands. It was all the parents, really, and their support meant a lot."