Tom Garry continues to set the bar for Southington pitchers

By JOHN GORALSKI
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There were no but-teeth talks when John Fontana made his coaching debut at Southington High School. There were no first game jitters when the Blue Knights took the field at the start of the 1962 baseball season. There were no errors, no mistakes, and no stressful decisions to be made.

That’s because Tom Garry was standing on the mound.

“It was against Cheshire, and Tom pitched a perfect game, no-hitter,” Fontana said with a smile. “It turned to my assistant and said, ‘What’s so hard about this game?’

Tom was just a really great baseball player, but it was because he worked hard to become what he was.

Garry graduated with 16 career ERA, a national record shutouts and a 0.31 career ERA, a national record. Garry pitched 11 career shutouts and a 0.31 career ERA, a national record. Garry pitched 11 complete games in 1962, and the numbers have yet to be eclipsed.

When the dust finally settled on his senior season, the Knights had returned to the state championship game. Garry allowed just one hit in the final, and Rockville needed a no-hitter of their own to eke a 1-0 win.

Garry graduated with 16 career shutouts and a 0.31 career ERA, a national record at the time, that still stands as the fifth best all-time in the 2010 National High School Sports Record Book.

“I only had him for one year, so it would be hard for me to tell you that he was the best pitcher out of the great ones that I had, but somebody would have to point out to me somebody that was better than him,” said Fontana. “He was just an incredible pitcher. He had big hands. He would grab the ball and almost lose it, but I’ll tell you. He could throw.

His brother, Dave, his sister Laurel, and her husband Fred Tomassetti sat around a kitchen table, pouring through scrapbooks, statistics, and stories about ‘Tommy.’ It was like they were looking at his career for the first time because nobody in the house was caught up in the excitement of the 1962 season. Garry was the second of six children, and he wasn’t one to hog the spotlight.

Nobody even made a big deal about it. It just wasn’t like that in our family,” said his sister. “He was just so calm. He didn’t get upset. He didn’t come home and brag that he got this or got that. That’s why I can’t tell you when we knew he was good. He was good, but he just took it in stride.”

For his family, Garry’s senior season was nothing out of the ordinary. He grew up in a neighborhood where baseball was truly a pastime. He played pick-up games with guys like Gil Varjas and Dick Tully—both future teammates and both members of the Southington High School baseball hall of fame.

“I remember telling me that Fontana told him it was a good thing that he was such a good pitcher because he couldn’t hit the ball,” said his brother Dave, “but he could hit.”

After school Garry earned a scholarship to American International College in Springfield. In his first college start, Garry struck out 16 Mass batters, but he left school early and never returned. He eventually settled down in San Antonio, Texas with his wife and family, but his life ended too soon.

He was home with his family on Christmas Day in 1992 when he passed away suddenly. Garry was only 47. Almost two decades have passed since that day, but his family still chokes up when they gather around the table. In a basement interview, his former coach just shook his head. “It was a tragedy,” he said.

It seems that, whether you were standing on the mound or just sitting in the back yard, Garry had a way of leaving an impression.

“I want people to remember him like I do—as a nice guy,” said his sister. “I wish they could get to see him or get to meet him... because they would love him.”

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On Wednesday, Nov. 10, Garry will be a member of the first class to enter the Southington Sports Hall of Fame. He will be honored in an induction ceremony at the Aqua Turf in Plantsville. For tickets, contact Jim Verderame, (860) 628-7335.

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