

2013 Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame



John M. Dodig

Often we hear that a certain trait “runs in the family”. When you hear the last name of “Dodig”, anyone familiar with Saugerties immediately associates that with a passion for sports. This year the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame is proud to induct two members of the Dodig family, with John M. Dodig along with his late father John Sr. headlining the 2013 induction class.

John M. Dodig was born April 7, 1962, to parents John and Dorothy. The oldest to brothers Jeff and Jay, and sister Jill, John came into this world with a large extended family, with father John’s 3 brothers (Steve, Mike, Bob) and sister Rose, along with many cousins. John recalls “The words ‘family’ and ‘Dodigs’ are synonymous to me. Family meant everything to my Dad and Mom. In our younger years, weekends were spent traveling across Upstate NY attending snowmobile races with my parents, brothers and sister and my Uncle Mike, Steve and Bob and their children. Spring and summer nights were spent at the ball field. We are so very fortunate to have nine first cousins, eight of whom lived in Saugerties while I was growing up. The Dodig cousins were, and remain, extremely close to me. The unique bond we share is very special and was instilled in us by our fathers.”

Sports involvement with John began at a young age, with Little League baseball and Bidy League basketball, where his father and uncles were also closely involved as coaches and overall volunteers. “My uncles played a very important role in my life. It was reassuring to know that if anything ever happened to my Dad any one of my uncles would step in and fill Dad’s shoes, as Dad would for any of his brothers. My uncles would attend each and every one of my games from Little League through High School basketball and baseball. I also loved attending and supporting my cousins at their games. As close as we were and are, we were always very competitive with each other. No one wanted to lose whether it was stick ball, tennis, swimming, bowling, or any other sport. I had a special relationship with my Uncle Mike. He was much younger than his brothers, and would often get right in the middle of our family sporting events. He would often serve as the designated quarterback in a game of tackle football or designated pitcher in a game of baseball. It was obvious to me as a teenager, that my Uncle Mike was a superb athlete when he was growing up based on the skills he still had when playing with us.”

Not surprisingly, John directs a lot of his admiration & success with sports to his father John. “He was a kind, caring, compassionate gentle giant who would give a stranger the shirt off of his back. He instilled

in me a work ethic whether it was taking on a summer job during high school, or hitting 200 balls at Cantine Field each summer day under his watchful eye. Sports were my Dad's passion. He was so proud of the accomplishments of his children on the field. He knew that by playing sports we would develop the



John takes a hack during 1980 Sawyer DCSL contest.

type of discipline, drive and confidence we would need as life skills moving forward. No matter how tired my Dad was, he never, ever said 'no' when asked to drive us to the field or practice with us. Dad also instilled a sense of sportsmanship and fairness. Never, ever, did any of the countless teams Dad coached in baseball, basketball or softball run up the score on an opponent. Dad would get very upset when he would observe this type of unsportsmanlike conduct occur in games he was watching and would often find a way to communicate it to the offending coach."

Moving through the levels of baseball from Little League, Babe Ruth, and American Legion, as well as the Bidley league basketball, John Dodig continued to excel on the diamond and hardwood court, advancing through junior high and high school. As a freshman he played football and basketball, as well as junior varsity baseball, where it was clear baseball was where he excelled – winning the outstanding contribution award his initial year on the Sawyer JV squad. He followed that up as a member of the varsity basketball team from his sophomore, junior, and senior years, serving as team co-captain as a senior, as the team's top scorer and was recognized as a member of the "All Dutchess County Scholastic League" team.

Spending a second season at the JV level as a sophomore, John joined the SHS varsity baseball team for his junior and senior years. As a solid left-hand hitting catcher, in 1980 he led the Sawyers to their best season since the sectional championship team of 1976, losing only to Lincoln-Yonkers in post-season play. In doing so, he was named to the all-DCSL team, along with teammates Rob Freer (pitcher) and Billy Schaffer (shortstop). "Baseball was my passion but I also enjoyed basketball. At the time Saugerties was a small school in the DCSL, playing basketball powerhouses such as Poughkeepsie,



'J.D.' followed by Varsity Baseball Coach Tony Vizzie after Saugerties win.

Newburgh, Kingston and others. We were a scrappy group of kids that held their own. Playing varsity baseball for me was the highlight of my high school sports career. I found Coach Tony Vizzie to be a great coach and fantastic leader. He had a burning passion for the game and knew how to get the most out of his players. He certainly knew how to push me. Coach Vizzie was much like my Dad when it came to sports. Hard work, discipline and dedication were major training traits of Coach Vizzie and my Dad. My interaction with Coach on the field brings back some of my best memories whether it be praise after getting a game winning hit or anger after doing something dumb. A father figure on the ball field for sure."

During his high school years, John continued to be a standout for the Saugerties American Legion team, where again it became more of a family affair, with his uncle Mike Dodig as the Legion team manager. "My days playing American Legion baseball were truly memorable. Those years were made even more special by getting an opportunity to play for my Uncle Mike who coached our team. I have never played for anyone with such a competitive fire. Perhaps it was his expectations of me which caused me to play the best baseball of my career, batting over .500 my last season. I never wanted to disappoint my Uncle and his drive to win was contagious and caused me to work even harder. Our epic games against arch rival Kingston were as hard fought as any games I can remember playing. One game even included a bench clearing brawl."

Graduating from Saugerties High School in 1980, John Dodig expanded on his athletic career in the college ranks, beginning with Division 1 Jacksonville University as a freshman. Returning closer to home, his sophomore year was spent playing for Ulster County Community College, before transferring back to Division 1 Fairleigh Dickinson for his Junior and Senior years, and earning his bachelor's of arts degree at FDU.



John (right) with brother Jeff, mom Dorothy, and dad John after Dutchmen game.

During the summers, John continued to play baseball locally as a key member of the Saugerties Dutchmen adult baseball team in the Hudson Valley Rookie League, beginning in 1980. “During my senior year in High School, the Saugerties Dutchmen were formed. Playing with players several years older than me, who themselves were star athletes in High School and who I looked up to, was the highlight of my sports career in Saugerties. When the Dutchmen were formed, they were extremely popular. We would draw hundreds and sometimes thousands of fans when the team was in its infancy. The team was sponsored by Greg Helsmoortel, who I respect

deeply and who was one of the kindest, most generous men I have ever met. Greg spared no expense providing for his players – two sets of uniforms, warm- up uniforms, bags, food before and after games, parties, annual banquets, away tournaments and such. I will never forget in the early years of the team how young boys and girls would line up two deep outside the dugout seeking autographs. Playing under coach Dennis Sheehan was a blast. His ability to handle the enormous amount of talent on the team was masterful. During my tenure on the Dutchmen, we won multiple championships beating Kingston on almost every occasion. The playoff and championship games were pressure packed and provided lifelong memories. The competitive fire amongst this group certainly brought out the best in me”.

Here again the Dodig family ties interweave with the highly successful Saugerties sports scene, as John was joined on the Dutchmen by younger brother Jeff, who was in the process of carving his own legacy in the Dodig family. “My proudest moment as a Dutchman was watching the development of my brother Jeff. He made the team while only a sophomore in High School, playing with guys who were much older than he was, some by as many as 10 years. He stepped right in and consistently hit line drive after line drive, impressing all of us. To have my brother batting 2nd or 3rd in our lineup made me incredibly proud. Until my brother joined the Dutchmen I did not think I would ever play with another hitter that hit the ball consistently as Tommy Whitaker. Watching both Jeff and Whit play was memorable. It did not take long for the baseball community to recognize Jeff’s talent for hitting a baseball. My Dad, uncles and cousins were so proud of Jeff as he went away to star in college accompanied by cousins Michael and Randy. I also enjoyed watching my sister Jill play softball and volleyball as well as Jay whenever I could. They were both great athletes. Unfortunately, they were several years younger than me, so I was away at school during most of their high school/college days.” In addition cousins Mike and Randy Dodig joined John & Jeff in the Dutchmen lineup. “I was also very fortunate to play a few years with my cousins Michael and Randy on the team. Having them on the team was very special to me.”

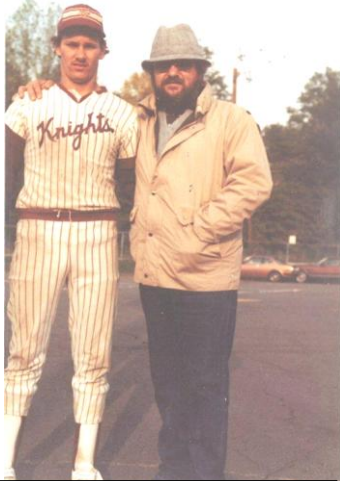


l-r; Jeff Dodig, Mike Dodig, J.D., and Randy Dodig with Saugerties sports legend Bobby Dixon.

After graduating from Fairleigh Dickinson, John Dodig considered his horizons beyond athletics, eventually leading him to law school in Fort Lauderdale. “When it became obvious that professional baseball was not an option after college baseball, I thought perhaps coaching would be my calling. I did not apply timely to any law schools after graduating, so I applied to a summer conditional program at Nova Law School in Ft Lauderdale. It was a 6 week summer program in which you had to obtain good grades in two upper level law school classes to gain admission to the Freshman Class in the Fall. After arriving and going to the first class I wanted to quit and go home. My parents convinced me to buckle down and for 6 weeks I studied harder than I ever did. My only non- studying activity was leaving the library for an hour each day to throw a bucket of baseballs so that I could keep my arm in shape for my return to the Dutchmen. I snuck by with the grades and went off to Law School after the baseball season ended that summer. In law school, I was lucky enough to meet my wife Lorrie. She is my best friend. After law school I worked for my wife’s dad Jack Matty, who taught me everything I needed to know to be a trial lawyer. My father in law believed in the same qualities my Dad believed in and my upbringing

merged well with the discipline my father in law brought to the practice of law and taught me to do the same.”

As is often the case, the traits for success on the athletic field translate well to those in the corporate or business world, as John Dodig molded himself into a highly successful trial lawyer. “Representing individuals seriously injured or killed as a result of negligence often against large corporations across the country has become my passion. Standing up for the little guy to provide them with a voice and an opportunity to obtain justice gives me great pleasure. Speaking before a jury in a civil case on behalf of an individual or family who has lost everything because of an injury or death requires the same degree of passion, drive and determination required to win on the ball field.



J.D. after Fairleigh Dickinson game with dad (and fellow 2013 Inductee) John Sr.

There are many parallels. I now have my own law firm in Philadelphia, Pa.”

From there, John and his wife Lorrie married in 1987, building a family and home centered around their four children, John, Jacqueline, Caroline and Juliana, living in southern New Jersey.



l-r; wife Lorrie, daughter Jackie, son John, J.D., daughter Caroline, and in front daughter Juliana.

In the typical Dodig family tradition, sports remained a huge focus in their lives. John has spent over 25 years coaching youth sports, from Little League and travel teams, boys & girls basketball teams, and as a volunteer basketball official for several youth programs. He also is a member of the Cinnaminson NJ Baseball Board, Riverton Country Club Board of Trustees, Philadelphia Trial Lawyers Association (serving as its president in 2006), and the Pennsylvania Trial Lawyers Association Board of Governors. “My greatest love and joy after my marriage was coaching my children and watching them play

sports. I took great pride in the fact that my son John (who is a spitting image of my dad) caught like me. I coached John from Little League through American Legion.. My fondest memories with my son John were seeing him excel with multiple tournament championships and tournament MVP’s. I coached my daughter Jackie’s softball team including her travel softball teams. She was an outstanding pitcher and was very gifted athletically. My daughter Caroline was also an excellent pitcher and played up until high school. I will always cherish my time on the softball field with Caroline. Daughter Juliana is also playing travel softball and like her sister, she also pitches. Something tells me I will be pitching batting practice for another 6 years. Coaching my children and spending the time with them and bringing a piece of Saugerties to New Jersey would not be possible without the love and support of my wife who is the glue to our family and grew up with the same Dodig family values. I am truly blessed.”

In recalling his days growing up a Dodig in Saugerties, his fondest memories are not surprisingly family-oriented. While John was at college, brother Jeff continued his rise in his older one’s big shoes to fill, becoming a stand-out baseball player in his own right. Jeff’s success did not go unnoticed by those outside of Saugerties either, leading to the Atlanta Braves drafting Jeff in 1987. “I will never forget the phone call received from Mom and Dad telling me Jeff was drafted by the Braves. We were all so proud then”. That joy in the Dodig family of professional successes continues to the next generation, as his cousin Michael’s son also named Mike joined John’s brother Jeff in being drafted and playing in the Braves organization in 2012.

Looking back at his love of Saugerties as a community, John proudly remembers it as “Sports town USA to me. As far as I am concerned no better town in America to grow up in...a real sense of community, where everyone genuinely got along and cared for each other.”

In recognition of the imprint the Dodig family name has made on the Saugerties sports community, we are extremely proud to add John M. Dodig to the 2013 Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame “family” as well. Congratulations to John and his family for receiving this great honor and in recognition for his contribution of many great moments to Saugerties sports history.