

2012 Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame



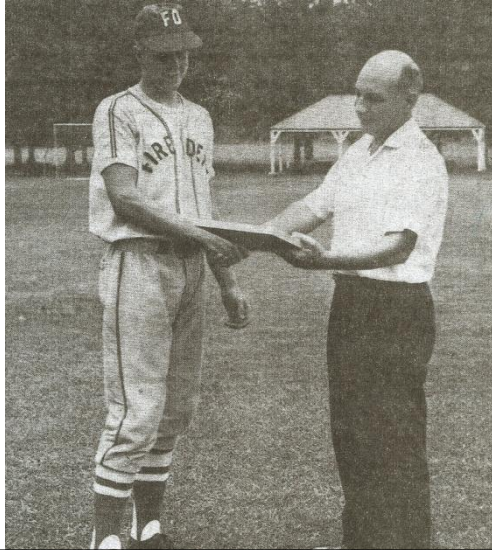
Bill Eckhoff

When assessing the level of greatness of an athlete, one would have to sit back and recollect that athlete's memorable performances, his achievements as they related to the success of his teams, as well as the recognition the athlete received by those he competed with and against. When talking to those who were intimately involved in Saugerties High School athletics in the early '60s, memories are still vivid of the teams and the top performers of that era and when asked, "who were the best athletes of that time?" local sports historians keenly rifle off a list of those considered worthy of mention. One name that is unanimously mentioned by old time sports enthusiasts as one of the best two sport athletes of that era is Bill Eckhoff. Bill Eckhoff's athletic accomplishments, as you will see, put him deservedly along side those who have written Saugerties Sports history and the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame Club and the Saugerties community congratulate and are proud to welcome Bill Eckhoff as a 2012 inductee into the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame.

Born 11/21/43, William "Bill" Eckhoff was the youngest of three children born to Theodore "Ted" and Elizabeth "Betty" Eckhoff. Bill's beloved mom Betty died in 1973 just four years after the passing of Bill's dad Ted. Ted Eckhoff was a great athlete in his own right playing basketball at Saugerties High School, graduating in 1930, and then going on to attend Northeastern University where he also starred on the basketball court. Ted's basketball career was unfortunately cut short due to the fact that the country had entered into the Great Depression and Ted, like many other students at that time, had to quit school and find work. Although Ted Eckhoff was not able to complete his college at Northeastern, the Boston experience wasn't totally unproductive as it was there that he met and married Bill's mom Betty (the former Elizabeth Langton) who at that time worked as a bookkeeper for Filene's. Eventually returning to Saugerties, Ted and Betty Eckhoff made their home on Market Street in the Village of Saugerties and raised three children. Bill, the youngest, was preceded by two sisters, Elizabeth "Liz" (McCarthy) the eldest who currently resides in Miami Florida, and Mary (Henion), who sadly passed away in 2001.

Bill Eckhoff began his sports participation at an early age receiving instruction and guidance from his dad Ted. Ted Eckhoff, being an accomplished athlete himself, was the perfect mentor and as Bill recalls, "My

dad very wisely never over coached me. He was always supportive early on in Bidy Basketball as my coach and later as I participated in high school sports. He attended every game giving me support but never putting any pressure on me". Bill's early sports involvement included Saugerties Little League and Saugerties Bidy Basketball (1951-1956), CYO Basketball (1952-1956), and Saugerties Babe Ruth (1957-1959). In those early years Bill Eckhoff's interest in basketball and baseball grew and under his dad's tutelage Bill's skills and knowledge of how to be a team player and leader developed in a fashion which destined Bill to become a standout in both sports.



1959; Bill receiving Louisville Bat Co. "High Batting Average" award from SBRL Pres. Bill Jacobs

As a Saugerties Little League participant Bill played with the Phillies and quickly established himself as a solid pitcher and dependable third baseman being named to All Star teams in both 1955 & 1956. In 1957 Bill moved up to the Saugerties Babe Ruth and quickly began to make his mark as one of the premier youth pitchers in the Hudson Valley. Playing locally with the Saugerties Fire Department in the Saugerties Babe Ruth League, Bill was a standout both on the mound and at the plate. Batting .416 in 1959, Eckhoff won the batting title for the SBRL, however this achievement was only one of many garnered by the hard throwing, hard hitting 15 year old that year. In the District 9 Babe Ruth League tournament Bill began getting attention from those outside of Saugerties. In a game versus Rondout, the big righty pitched Saugerties to a 1-0 one hit win with 11 strikeouts, followed by a 22 strikeout, 3 hit, 9 inning no decision versus Hudson. At the conclusion of the tournament Kingston Freeman Sports Editor Charlie Tiano highlighted Bill's performance referring to him as the tournament's "top hurler".

As talented as Bill Eckhoff was in baseball, he was equally as talented on the hardwood. In both 1955 and 1956, the Saugerties Bidy Basketball All Star team earned the title "NY State Bidy League Champions". Also in 1956, the Saugerties CYO Basketball team was given equal recognition by being crowned "Upstate NY Junior CYO Champions". Playing on these 2 successful Saugerties youth teams with Bill was a crop of young Saugerties basketball players which may have represented the best collection of talent in Saugerties Bidy/CYO Basketball history. As this group of players developed and transitioned into the high school circuit, the Saugerties community could hardly wait to see the fruits that these feeder programs would bear. At 5'10" and already an accomplished rebounder and scorer, the young Bill Eckhoff was at the nucleus of the plan that Varsity Basketball Coach Bud Smith eagerly awaited to execute and time would tell if this group of players could equal their early success at a more competitive level in the elite Dutchess County Scholastic League (DCSL).

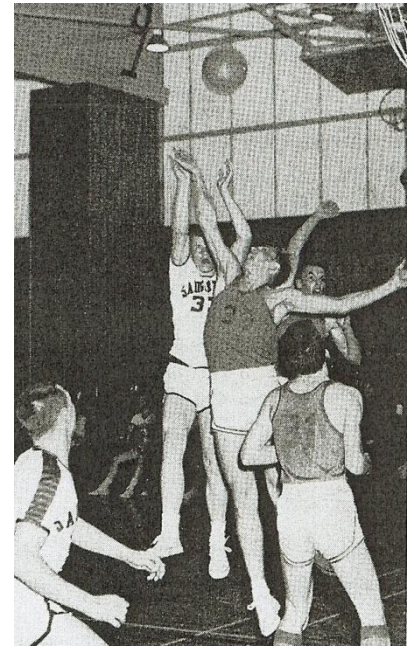
As a high school sophomore, Bill Eckhoff played varsity sports in both basketball and baseball. Blessed with height, strength, and athleticism Bill had the raw tools that both varsity baseball coach Bill Straub and varsity basketball coach Bud Smith did not hesitate to put to an early test. After watching the young but capable Eckhoff man handle his way through junior high and JV sports, both Straub and Smith pounced on the opportunity to get the 6'1" 185 pounder varsity tested as quickly as possible in his sophomore year. Over the next 3 seasons, Bill Eckhoff and teammates prepared with one goal in mind....to bring DCSL championships to Saugerties High School, and "bling" to the Sawyer trophy case.

In 1961, Bill Eckhoff along with fellow upperclassmen and Saugerties Sports Hall of Famers, Al Hrdlicka, Bill Schirmer, and John Nolan, treated Saugerties sports fans to one of the most exciting basketball seasons in Saugerties High School hoop history. Eckhoff recalls, "In my junior year, Saugerties had arguably one of the greatest athletes Saugerties had ever produced, in Barry Wolven" Barry played the game of basketball (and baseball) at a level higher than I had ever seen and therefore I always tried to emulate him. Growing up

we played a lot of backyard basketball behind Bill Voerg's house, much of it in the snow. I can remember listening to West Virginia basketball games on Barry's car radio... we all idolized Jerry West. Losing Barry to graduation was a tough hole to fill"

Not even the loss of the graduating Barry Wolven could keep Bill Eckhoff and his 1961 team from meeting their ambitious goal of winning the DCSL title. With Bill Eckhoff and Bill Schirmer ripping down rebounds with ferocity (over 600 rebounds split evenly between them) the '61 Sawyers went on a tear winning 14 games in a row. With scorers Bill Eckhoff (13.9 ppg), Al Hrdlicka (14.8 ppg) and John Nolan (14.5 ppg) the '61 Sawyers not only captured the heart of the Mid Hudson Valley sporting community but also captured the DCSL basketball championship besting perennial basketball powerhouses Roosevelt, Arlington, Wappingers, and Beacon. After winning the 1961 DCSL title, Saugerties was beaten by league rival Roosevelt 56-46 in the Section One Class B finals ending its dream season with a stellar 17-3 record. At the conclusion of the '61 season, Bill Eckhoff was rewarded for his remarkable season by being named to the 1st team DCSL All Star team along with teammate Al Hrdlicka (DCSL MVP), while John Nolan was awarded 2nd team honors. During that timeframe, DCSL All Stars competed in a post season game along with all stars from the old UCAL and DUSO leagues. In 1961, Saugerties representatives Bill Eckhoff, Al Hrdlicka and John Nolan, played along side future NBA professional Wes Bialosuknia (Roosevelt), future NY Yankee Mike Ferraro (Kingston), and UCCC basketball great "Jumping" Joe Uhl (Kingston)

among others in this prestigious game. Kingston Daily Freeman Sports Editor Ed Palladino said of Bill Eckhoff, "Eckhoff was the most improved player in the league. He was the top rebounder for the Sawyers and he almost always managed to score in double figures. He's a rugged lad who played his best when the going was the toughest". Similarly, Saugerties sports writer Ben Rinaldi heralded Bill Eckhoff's leadership qualities by saying, "To say that Eckhoff held his own this season would be an understatement. He was co-captain and a leader and played the role to the hilt". The late Coach Bud Smith referred to the 1961 Sawyer Basketball Team as the "finest club that he has coached in all his years at SHS", and those who witnessed the 1961 season would tend to agree.



1961; Bill sinks jump shot

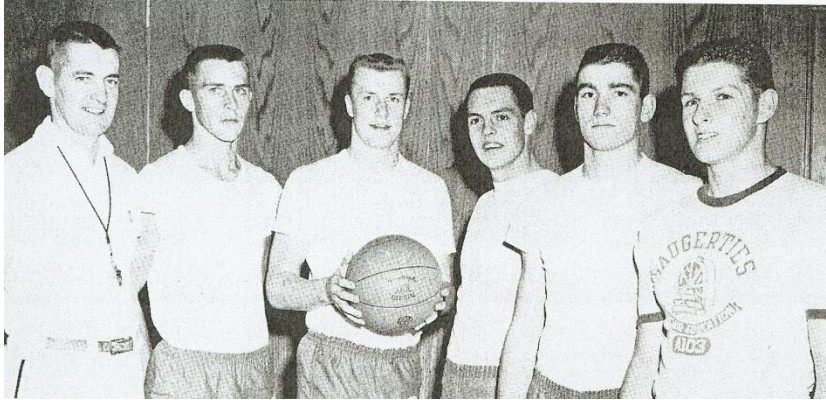


1961 SHS DCSL Championship Team; Bill Eckhoff #33 with fellow Hall of Famers Bill Schirmer #31, Al Hrdlicka #15, John Nolan #24, Bob Francello #25, and Coach Bud Smith (2nd row far right)

Playing varsity baseball as a sophomore through his senior year, Bill Eckhoff developed into a solid pitcher and third baseman and was the hard hitting cleanup up man in Bill Straub's batting order. In Bill's junior year in 1960, the smooth swinging left hander led the Sawyer's in hitting with a .435 BA, joining other Saugerties hitting greats and Hall of Famers, Joe Martin, Sal Misasi, Don Whitaker, and George Neher, as SHS batting champs whose names appeared on a plaque in the Sawyer trophy case. In 1960, the Sawyers had a mediocre 9-9 record, however with three freshmen in the starting lineup Saugerties looked forward to the future with high hopes. After an exciting 1961 varsity basketball

season, Sawyer Varsity Baseball Coach Bill Straub anxiously awaited spring with high expectations of continued success on the baseball diamond. Knowing he had the return of pitchers Bill Eckhoff and John Nolan, along with the talents of younger players such as Hall of Famers Rich Marelli and Mike Dodig, "Straubie" was chomping at the bit to make a run at the DCSL title. With still a relatively young team, the

1961 Sawyers battled hard however ended the season with an 11-6 season finishing third in the DCSL. Bill Eckhoff along with fellow senior John Nolan carried the brunt of the work load both on the mound and at the plate with Eckhoff again leading the team in hitting with a .425 BA with Nolan close behind at .416. The combination of Eckhoff and Nolan was as good a “one-two” pitching rotation as Saugerties High School has ever seen, although Bill candidly admits, “I didn’t have the velocity of John Nolan, but then again, few did. I did have pretty good curve ball though which was a big part of my pitching success”.

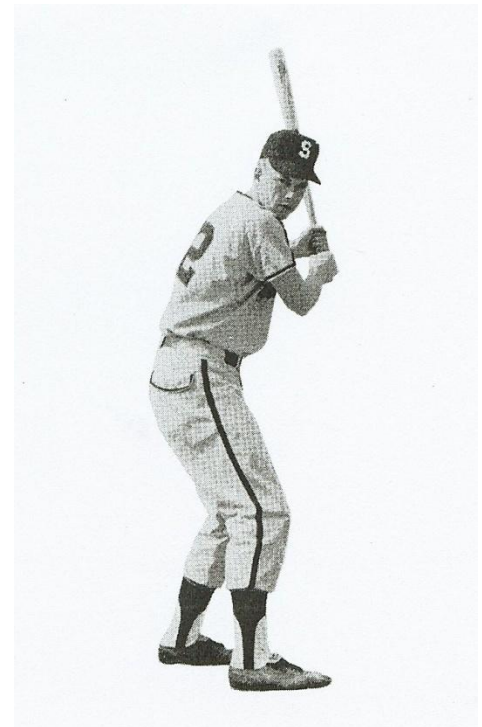


1961; l-r Coach Bud Smith, with his “starting 5”. Bill Schirmer, Bill Eckhoff, John Nolan, Al Hrdlicka and Jerry Dungey.

After graduating from Saugerties High School in 1961 and looking forward to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, Bill packed his bags and headed off to college with dreams of continuing his competitive athletics in both baseball and basketball. Bill’s school of choice was the University of Vermont where as a freshmen, although not recruited, Bill impressed the Division I school in tryouts and walked on to the freshmen basketball

team. Bill felt confident that he had the skills to play both baseball and basketball at Vermont, however due to a strenuous course work load, Bill opted to keep his college sports limited to basketball, bypassing the opportunity to continue his participation in 2 sports. Unfortunately in his third semester at Vermont Bill suffered a torn left ACL bringing to an end his hopes of continuing his college sports career. “The injury”, Bill recalls, “was one of those life altering experiences. After the injury, I began to realize that most all my friendships had been established through sports. It was time to broaden out, so I left school and joined the Air Force, and boy that was certainly another turning point in my life”.

Bill Eckhoff entered the United States Air Force in 1963, serving in Italy and Greece and receiving Honorable Discharge in 1967 with an E-5 rank. Upon return from Europe, the ambitious 24 year old enrolled into Marist College where in 1969 he received his B.A. in Psychology followed by a Masters of Education in Psychology in 1970 from Springfield College. While at Marist, Bill had full intentions of moving on to a career in computer programming hoping to gain employment at IBM where his father worked as a manager for many years, however while involved in a work study program through Marist at Hudson River State Psychiatric Hospital, Bill said “the whole experience changed my thinking”. After Marist, Bill attained his masters at Springfield and was promptly hired back at Hudson River State. After 2 years at Hudson River State, Bill was invited by a psychiatrist friend to work at a new psychiatric center in Elmira NY heading up their outpatient services in Stueben County. It was there Bill Eckhoff made his career and worked until his retirement in 2001.



1961 SHS Varsity Baseball Bill Eckhoff

By Bill’s side for the last 30 years is his loving wife Sandy. Bill and Sandy Eckhoff now reside in Bath NY where Bill has been very active in the community. Bill’s extracurricular activities have included the Bath Rotary Club (27 years), Finger Lakes Regional Health Systems Board (Southern Tier Chairman), Finger

Lakes Region Family Planning Board, Office For the Aging Board, Bath Central School System Board of Education, Family Service Society Board of Directors, the Elks Club, as well as American Legion and VFW membership. In addition, Bill has also been active as a coach for both Little League Baseball and Cinderella League Softball for many years participating when his children were young and more recently with his grandchildren. Bill boasts with pride of his 3 children, son Dana, and daughters Jamie and Kristin and their 6 beautiful grandchildren who Bill and Sandy have enjoyed watching grow and who mean the world to both of them. Bill prides himself on the close bond which his family has and similar to his athletic approach, puts those near and dear to him first.

Outside of high school and college athletics, Bill Eckhoff's sports participation became limited due to his college knee injury. Although playing basketball was out of the question, Bill found his niche while serving in the U.S. Air Force playing on an All Star travel softball team which traveled and competed throughout Europe. From 1964 through 1978, finding it hard to stay away from the basketball court, Bill tried an alternative way to stay close to the hoop circuit becoming a licensed basketball official (IAABO) and establishing his own IAABO chapter on his Air Force Base in Brindisi, Italy. "In 1964 I inquired how I could attain my IAABO referee certification and found that I could start my own chapter right on the air Force base, which I did. So my license started there where I began by donating my time refereeing games involving kids living on the base who played Italian teams from around the Brindisi area. Once back in the states I began refereeing boys and girls high school games and did so while going to college at both Marist and Springfield and then later after moving to Bath." More recently, Bill has taken to the golf course to try his hand at that. Suffice it to say that it didn't take long for him to become proficient at that game either as evident by the single digit handicap Bill achieved when playing more regularly. Bill although admits, "Golf isn't going real well now, so maybe I should start refereeing again".



Left: Bill's grandchildren l-r; McKayla, Merrick and Arianna D'Ingianni

Right: Bill and Sandy with grandchildren l-r; Nicole, Ashleigh, and Isabella Merry



As would be expected, Bill Eckhoff has many memorable sports moments. The 22 strikeout pitching performance in Babe Ruth All Stars, the 1961 DCSL basketball championship and 1st team DCSL All Star recognition, the SHS varsity batting titles in his junior and senior years are all standout memories for Bill, however we would be remiss to measure Bill Eckhoff's greatness solely on his accomplishments. Bill Eckhoff was an athlete who excelled in the most humble of fashions putting his family, his school, and his teammates first. Memories of his parent's support and guidance, getting hit with John Nolan's fastball and a young Dickie Benjamin's "experimental curve ball" at baseball practice, watching Barry Wolven hit a buzzer shot to beat Arlington, and simply putting on the Sawyer uniform are what Bill Eckhoff remembers best. Bill Eckhoff, although a huge presence on the court and on the field, achieved his greatness not only through his performance, but also by his example and unassuming nature, attributes which are at the core of leadership and any successful team.



Bill and Sandy Eckhoff

Bill credits his dad Ted along with coaching greats Bud Smith and Bill Straub as being the most inspirational people in his sports life. With mentors like Ted Eckhoff, Bill Straub, and Bud Smith, Bill Eckhoff couldn't go wrong. Bill is also quick to credit his best friend and fellow Hall of Famer Lou Spada, as having a huge impact on his life and for being the eternal optimist and a "got your back" type of friend and teammate. Looked up to by his teammates as "the captain", Bill Eckhoff assumed the leadership role with honor and class. Fellow Sports Hall of Famer Bill Schirmer recalls, "I was a class behind Bill, but I remember him not only as a leader and tough competitor but also probably one of the nicest guys I ever called teammate". We're sure Mr. Schirmer's sentiments are echoed by all those who Bill Eckhoff played with and against as well as those who had the privilege to see him compete. It is with great pride that the Saugerties sports community is able to bestow the title of "Saugerties Sports Hall of Famer" to a gentleman who illustrates that nice guys do finish first. Congratulations Bill Eckhoff, your family, your friends, and your community are proud of your achievements. Welcome home!

