

2012 Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame



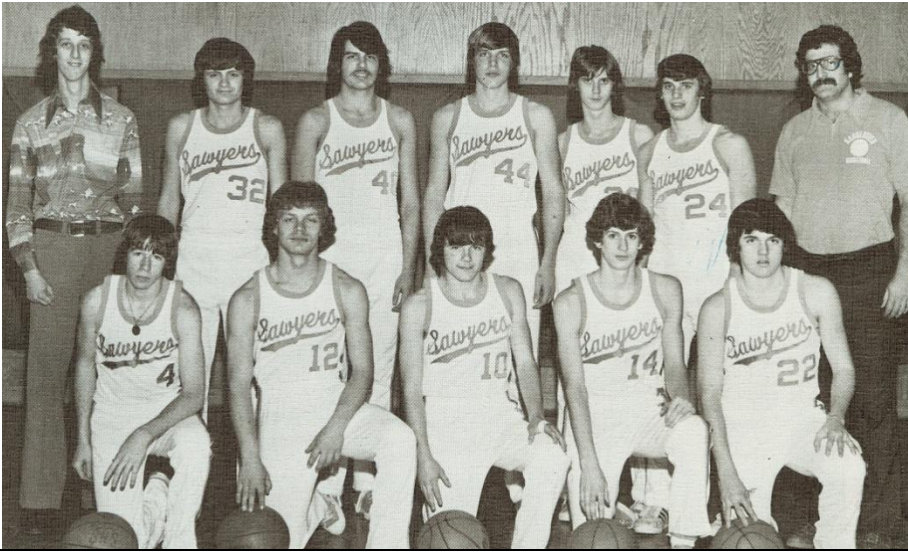
Jay Harris

“He leaves it all on the field,” “He gives 110 percent” There is not a higher compliment given by a coach, opponent, or teammate. These are the words you will hear when this year’s Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame Inductee Jay Harris is talked about. The sweatiest jersey, dirtiest blood stained uniform, whatever it took to win, those were the mantras Jay played by. Whether it was a steal leading to a fast break basket or the leadoff bunt single and subsequent stolen base igniting a 3 run rally, Jay was always right in the middle of it. Said fellow Hall of Famer Iggy Maines, “Jay was a winner and a leader by example, he was the guy you wanted batting leadoff on your team.” We honor Jay Harris as an individual who gave all he had, all the time and in recognition of his sports achievements and for what he has “given to the game”, it is with great pride that the Saugerties community welcomes Jay Harris to the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame.

Jay was born October 22, 1958, the son of Rosemarie and the late Jim Harris. Jay grew up in Barclay Heights along with his younger sister Kathy (Slover), where he honed his sports skills on the pavements and sandlots of the neighborhood. It wasn’t long before coaches and fans alike began to take notice of the Louis Avenue boy blessed with jet-like speed and a powerful arm. Jay could often be seen in his backyard pitching to his dad Jim, his biggest supporter and mentor. “My Dad meant the world to me,” said Jay. “He always had time to play catch with me, I’d bounce a few in the dirt, hit him in the knee a few times, but he never gave up catching for me.” Jay talked a lot of sports with his Dad and found out that his Dad was a great athlete at Chatham High School where he played baseball, basketball and football and actually played football against Saugerties sports legend Jack Keeley. Jim Harris passed away at an early age, and has been missed not only by his family, but by all of those fortunate enough to have known him, he was a true gentleman.

Jay began his organized sports career like many others in Saugerties playing basketball in the SAA Bidy League Program. Said Jay, “I would lob the ball into Rory Scally, who was the biggest player in the league, and I’d get a lot of assists and Rory would get a lot of points. We also won a lot of games!” Jay’s quickness, ball handling skills, and tenacious defense made him a two time Bidy League All-Star giving indication of good things to come from the young point guard. From there, Jay continued to develop his skills taking his talents to the hardwoods of SHS where he captained and starred as a guard for the freshman, JV and Varsity basketball teams competing in the tough DCSL League. Although the Saugerties Varsity hoop teams of 1975

and 1976 didn't achieve the success they hoped for, Jay's impact as a leader and his "all out" style of play set a standard for the younger players and in 1977, much as a result of Jay's example, the Sawyer hoop team had one of its most successful seasons in many years, lacking in size and speed but compensating with heart, hustle, and the grittiness of their former captain.



1975-76 Sawyer Basketball Team; Jay Harris #10 with fellow Saugerties Sports Hall of Famers Tim Cole #24 and Steve Schaffer #14.

In the fall during his high school years, Jay also participated in Cross Country at Saugerties High School. Although admittedly not the strongest long distance runner, Jay used Cross Country not only for its competitive value, but also as a means to stay in tip top shape. Jay is quick to mention his appreciation to Coach Ron Buzon for his positive demeanor and the way he always treated everyone with respect. Jay credits Coach Buzon with helping him formulate his athletic approach both on and off the field and for always being supportive to him as well as all athletes at Saugerties High School.

Jay's early baseball career began in the Saugerties Little League pitching and playing shortstop for the Phillies. Jay quickly became a dominant player in the league and was rewarded by being selected a two time All Star. Although a slick fielding shortstop, Jay is best remembered as one of the first pitchers in the local little league circuit to throw a curveball. Jay was a wonder on the mound, baffling players not only in the local league but also in All Star competition with the pitch which was seldom seen used at the Little League level and certainly never seen used as effectively as when Jay threw it. Jay batted leadoff, pitched and played shortstop for the highly successful 1971 All Star team that won the district championship, a feat rarely accomplished back then. Jay Harris, although small in stature, showed that size doesn't matter and at an early age began to treat baseball fans to his exciting "at the speed of light" style causing much anticipation of what was yet to come of the young athlete.

Jay Harris' sports career nearly took a tragic turn in 1971 when Jay's bright future became dimmed as the result of an injury he received in a sledding accident. Losing one of his kidneys as a result of the accident, Jay was faced with the reality of having to curtail his sports activity due to risks associated with doing damage to his other kidney. If there was ever a testament to Jay's love and dedication to sports, one only has to look back to this incident when told by doctors that he couldn't play football or soccer, Jay, not being one to complain, took this "minor" setback in stride and with the help of his ever present kidney pad, which he was required to wear at all times during sports participation, Jay continued on with his illustrious career.

Jay furthered his youth baseball development in the Saugerties Babe Ruth League when he was selected as a top draft pick by the Cody's Cowboys playing under the watchful eye of fellow Hall of Famer, the late Bob Moser. "I can still hear Mr. Moser saying", "what are you going to do if the ball is hit to you", quipped Jay. Jay played 3 years of Babe Ruth Baseball, highlighted by the 14/15 SBRL all star team's 1974 trip to Vestal, NY for the New York State Babe Ruth Championships. Jay was an integral part of that successful District Championship team which also included fellow Hall of Famers Tim Cole, Steve Schaffer, Karl Lezette and Iggy Maines.



Jay Harris (r) and Tom Whitaker (l), celebrate 1980 Dutchmen Championship

As a side note, Jay sentimentally admits that baseball was the sporting love of his life but confides that his baseball career was however stifled a bit when fellow Hall of Famer Dennis Sheehan would not allow him to play in the neighborhood baseball league when he was young. “Dennis would only call me when he needed a sub (in other words, he couldn’t get anyone else)” said Jay with a chuckle.

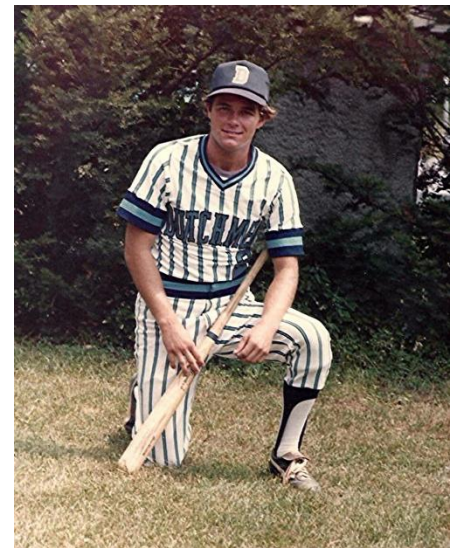
After his participation in the youth baseball leagues, Jay then took his talents to the high school playing fields. playing Freshman Baseball, 2 years at the JV level and 2 years of Varsity baseball. Jay, as one of three captains, was a driving force behind one of the most successful SHS baseball teams in history. Leading off and playing shortstop he helped lead the team to an 18-6 regular season record. This team was a well balanced team combining the pitching of Hall of Famer Tim Cole and John

Mauro and an outstanding infield defense anchored by Jay at shortstop. The 1976 team went as far as it could go, winning both the Section 1 and Section 9 Regional Championships, as there wasn’t a state championship at the time. Jay’s high school athletic career culminated with his selection as a Freeman All Star Honorable Mention that year, as well as his selection as the first recipient of the prestigious Michael Bond Award given to the SHS senior athlete who best exemplified leadership, sportsmanship, and athletic ability. No one was more deserving than Jay.

Outside of high school baseball, Jay Harris was also a member of the 1976 Saugerties American Legion baseball team coached by Hall of Famers Boo Schaffer and Earl Benjamin. The ’76 Saugerties Legion team came within two outs of securing a trip to Cooperstown for the New York State Championship losing a heartbreaker in the 7th inning to East Chester, Long Island. Again at the nucleus of this team’s success was the dependable and hard nosed play of short stop and leadoff man Jay Harris.

After high school graduation in 1976, Jay Harris then moved on to play two years of baseball at Ulster County Community College where he hit .394 and was named All Region. After his two years at Ulster, Jay thought his collegiate playing career was over, but thanks to UCCC coach Ralph Savarese’s tireless work to find Jay a baseball scholarship, Savarese was able to secure Jay a roster spot at Spring Hill College in Alabama, a gesture Jay has never forgotten. Jay played 2 years at Spring Hill, an NAIA school, and playing an intense 50 game schedule and receiving daily instruction from Coach Stan Galle, he was able to improve all aspects of his game. In 1979 he averaged .316, with 27 runs, 11 SB and an OBP of .509. This earned him first team All Southern States Conference. Jay’s college career was highlighted by his leadoff homerun (his first collegiate 4 bagger) against archrival and nationally ranked South Alabama and going 7 for 7 in a doubleheader against William Carey College. After using up his 4 years of eligibility, Coach Galle asked him to join his coaching staff. “Although it was a good experience, it was very hard to sit on the bench and not pick up a bat”, said Jay.

Jay received his B.S. degree in Business Administration from Spring Hill and upon graduation he returned home and learned of the formation of a new local team, the Saugerties Dutchmen. Jay immediately volunteered his services and played for 3 seasons securing his normal spot as the leadoff man and shortstop for the 1980 Dutchmen Championship Team. In one doubleheader against Wappingers, Jay was 5 for 5 with 3 walks,



Jay Harris; 1980 Dutchmen media photo

6 runs scored, and 3 stolen bases. Anyone familiar with that season would recall big “Sparky” Greco yelling, “Go Jay, Go Jay, Go Jay, Go!” prodding Jay to steal another base. Jay recalls with great affection that 1980 team, the stir it caused around town, the big crowds, and the loyal fans. “It was just incredible, I’ll never forget it” said Jay. Jay retired from the Dutchmen after the 1983 season. He played 64 games, hit .342, scored 64 runs, with 64 hits, 10 double, 4 triples, 1 homerun, 30 stolen bases and a solid finish to a stellar baseball career.



Jay at Spring Hill College, Alabama-1979

Jay’s recreational sports spanned many years of playing in all the local SAA Leagues including softball, full court basketball and half court basketball. In addition, Jay also officiated in the SAA Basketball Leagues and coached in many different leagues including AYSO soccer well as all levels of the Saugerties Little League and Saugerties Bidy League where he teamed up with close friend and Hall of Famer Steve Schaffer.

After that final season, Jay married the love his life, Mary Jo (Schovel) Harris on May 18, 1983 and moved to Bernardsville, New Jersey later moving to his current home in Washington, NJ. Jay and Mary Jo were blessed with two daughters, Becky, 22 and

Maribeth who is 20. Jay was fortunate enough to coach his daughters at an early age in soccer and T-ball. Athletes themselves, Becky ran track and holds the Warren Hills High School record in the 3200 Meter Run and Maribeth was an All Conference soccer player making Grandma’s Harris and Schovel very proud.

Those that know Jay will always remember him as the diminutive athlete with the giant sized heart, a fine gentleman and fierce competitor, and a role model for young athletes. Webster’s Dictionary defines “catalyst” as a person whose talk, enthusiasm or energy causes others to be more friendly, enthusiastic or energetic. Anyone who has ever been around Jay or has played organized sports with him defines catalyst as Jay Harris. “I hated to lose” said Jay “I’d do anything to win” and win he did. Never one to seek out praise, awards, or headlines, Jay holds family, friends and the relationships associated with his years of sports as his most coveted awards. There is one headline and one award left that Jay will be unable to avoid, that being the most coveted, most sought after and most prestigious award in all of Saugerties’ storied sports history, membership in the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame. On the great line-up card that is the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame, pencil in the name of Jay Harris, batting leadoff and playing shortstop. Congratulations Jay, you have been chosen as one of the newest and most deserving members of the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame. Go Jay go!



l-r; Jay’s wife Mary Jo, daughters Maribeth and Becky, and Jay