

# Tom Whitaker

## Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame Inductee 2009



**Tom 2009**

The Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame Club has selected Tom Whitaker as a 2009 inductee. After reading Tom's Saugerties sports experiences, you may readily see why he was elected to the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame. Tom is the first third generation inductee, joining his grandfather Herb and his father Frank "Fink" Whitaker as a member of this prestigious club.

Tom Whitaker was born November 30, 1954 in Kinston, NY. His parents are the late Frank "Fink" and Margaret Whitaker. He was raised on the Southside with his brothers Steve, Lou, Dave, Herb (deceased), Frank Jr. (deceased) and sisters Brenda, Cindy, Winnie, Barbara, Peggy (deceased) and Judy (deceased).

On October 3, 1998, he married his wife Susan (Gunderud) Whitaker. He is the proud father of four boys Christopher, Marc, Ryan and Sean.



**Front: Ryan**

**Back: (L to R) Tom, Marc, Susan, Sean and Christopher**

Tom began his involvement in the Saugerties sports scene playing in the Saugerties Little League. In 1962, he played for the Senators in the Minor Leagues. He was promoted to the Major Leagues and played for the Giants for the period 1963-1966. During his Little League years, Tom was a two time All-Star. During this time period he also played basketball. He played for the Warriors in the SAA Bidy League from 1963 to 1965. After Little League, Tom played for Ferroxcube in the Saugerties Babe Ruth League (1967-1969). His team made a run at the championship in 1969 before losing in the finals. During his time in the Babe Ruth League, Tom made two All-Star appearances.

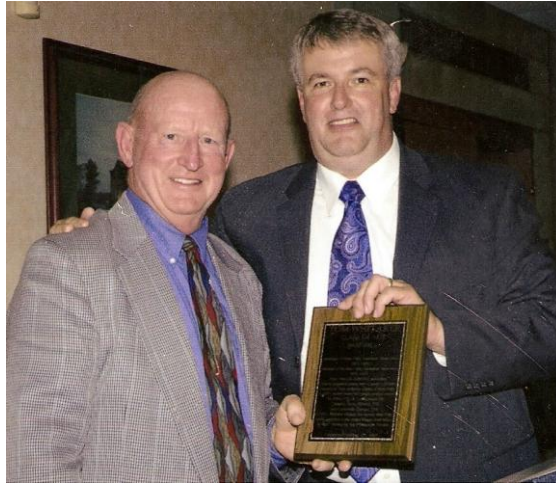
In 1966, Tom entered the Saugerties Junior/Senior High School. During his high school years Tom continued playing basketball and baseball. In 1966-1968 Tom played on the Modified Basketball team. From 1968-1970 he played on the JV Basketball team for Hall of Famer Hank Smith, he also played for the Varsity Basketball squad in 1970-1972. During the 1971-'72 season he averaged 17 points per game and earned a spot on the 2<sup>nd</sup> team of the Daily Freeman All-Star selections. This Sawyer team was the first team to have a winning season in ten years at SHS.

Tom began his SHS baseball career on the JV squad playing for Ron Kunst in the spring of 1969 and 1970. He played on the Varsity Baseball team for Tony Vizzie in the spring of 1971 and 1972. During Coach Tony Vizzie's first year at the helm in 1971, the Sawyers went 17-2 and won the Dutchess County Scholastic League and Section 9 championships. In 1972, Tom was named to the 1<sup>st</sup> team DCSL and Daily Freeman All-Star Teams as the first baseman.

Tom spent his summers playing for the Saugerties American Legion Post 72 baseball team. He was a member of the 1972 team which advanced to the New York State Final. The team lost to Utica 11-1 and Tom was the losing pitcher. Tom credits this defeat as a valuable learning experience which he used as a springboard for future successes. Tom stated, "I took the loss and gained invaluable experience in pressure baseball for college and adult baseball."

In 1972 Tom began his collegiate career. He played basketball and baseball at SUNY New Paltz. In the 1972-'73 and 1973-'74 seasons Tom was a member of the Varsity Basketball team, in the 1973-'74 season he was a starting forward and averaged 10 points per game. At one time he held the season record for free throw percentage at 88%. After two seasons Tom retired from basketball to concentrate on baseball.

On the diamond Tom had a stellar career for the Hawks. He played Varsity baseball all four years, two years under Hall of Famer Pete Kramer and two years under George Valesente. He was named All Conference (SUNY Athletic Conference) for all four years. He was All-SUNYAC at first base in 1973 and 1974, pitcher in 1975 and utility player in 1976. In 1975, Tom had an outstanding season on the mound. He was 11-1 with a 1.54 Earned Run Average and 96 strikeouts. He was 9-0 in conference play and his only defeat came at the hands of Paterson (NJ) College by the score of 1-0 in non-conference action. He led his team to the SUNYAC finals by defeating Cortland 1-0 in the semi-finals. The game was won on a suicide squeeze by teammate and Hall of Famer Larry Panella in the 9<sup>th</sup> inning. During his 1975 and 1976 seasons, he went a combined 17-3 with a 1.74 ERA. Tom finished his college career with a lifetime batting average of .325. His excellence on the diamond earned him a spot in the SUNY New Paltz Athletic Hall of Fame in October 2007 as the 59<sup>th</sup> member of the Hall.



**Tom with Pete Kramer at SUNY New Paltz  
Hall of Fame Induction (2007)**

As an adult, Tom continued his stellar baseball career. From 1970-1979 Tom played for the Kingston Braves in the Hudson Valley Rookie League. He was a key member of the Brave championship teams. In 1975, Tom went 8-1 with a 1.90 ERA and won the HVRL Pitching and ERA titles which are two of the many pitching awards he won with the Braves. During his time with the Braves, Tom also played for Finkle's Jewelers in the Albany Twilight League (1974-1975). In 1974, he was the league's Rookie of the Year after hitting .430 as the team's first baseman.

In 1977, Tom went to Florida and had a tryout with the Pittsburgh Pirates. After his tryout he signed an extended spring training contract, but was released at the conclusion of the extended spring season due to an injury.

As a member of the Braves, Tom's teammates included Rich Koegel, Karl Lezette, Nick and Jerry Malgieri and they formed a plan to bring adult baseball back to Saugerties. In 1980, their plan for a Saugerties team came to fruition and the Saugerties Dutchmen began play in the HVRL. Tom played for the Dutchmen from 1980 to 1986. During his seven seasons, the Dutchmen won four championships (1980, 1984, 1985 and 1986). In 1980, on the mound he went 9-2 with a 2.02 ERA and 60 strikeouts during the regular season and 2-1 with a 2.10 ERA with 12 strikeouts in the playoffs. At the plate, he had a .453 batting average with 14 runs batted in the 19 game regular season. In the playoffs he had a .476 batting average and 7 RBI's in 6 games. He followed that up in 1981 with a .456 batting average which was tops in the league. On the mound he was 7-2 with an ERA of 2.46. In his seven seasons Tom batted over .400 four times and won two league Most Valuable Player Awards (1980 HVRL and 1984 Mohawk-Hudson Baseball League), one pitching title, two ERA titles, two strikeout titles, two batting titles, a home run title and a runs batted in title. As of 1999, Tom's name can be found in the career leaders in many offensive and defensive categories. Offensively he ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in games (215), 2<sup>nd</sup> in at bats (689), 2<sup>nd</sup> in plate appearances (780), 1<sup>st</sup> in runs (163), 1<sup>st</sup> in hits (263), 1<sup>st</sup> in doubles (49), 2<sup>nd</sup> in triples (9), 2<sup>nd</sup> in Home runs (27), 1<sup>st</sup> in extra base hits (85), 4<sup>th</sup> in batting average (.382), 1<sup>st</sup> in total bases (411), 4<sup>th</sup> in slugging percentage (.597), 1<sup>st</sup> in runs batted in (171) and 6<sup>th</sup> in on base percentage (.440). In the pitching leaders he ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in appearances (56), 2<sup>nd</sup> in innings pitched (239.2) 2<sup>nd</sup> in games started (32), tied for 4<sup>th</sup> in relief appearances (24), 1<sup>st</sup> in complete games (24), tied for 4<sup>th</sup> in shutouts (2), 3<sup>rd</sup> in wins (26) and 1<sup>st</sup> in saves (9).

Tom has also played softball, basketball and volleyball in local adult leagues. He has played in the SAA Men's Softball League for many years. His teams have won many championships and he has won many individual awards including The Ron Lareau Most Valuable Player Award (league wide). He has also won several SAA Men's Softball Labor Day Tournament championships with Koz's Pub and Murphy's Pub.

In basketball he played for many years in the YMCA and Kingston Rec Leagues. He also played in the SAA Premier League and his team The Irish captured titles in 1972 and 1973. He also won at least one title with the Exchange 7's. He also won a scoring title during his career. Tom also competed in the SAA Half-court League. He combined with Larry Panella, Rich Koegel, Joe Hellenschmidt and Tony Buono to win championships. Individually he also won a scoring title.

Tom also played in the SAA Volleyball League with his teams winning many championships. His ability to spike the ball sent many of his rivals to defend themselves, rather than finding a way to return the ball.

Tom as a pitcher was well known for his control and knowing how to work a batter. If you have ever seen him pitch, one could never forget the crafty lefthanders pickoff move which was one of the best Saugerties players and fans had ever seen.

As a player he was known as a fierce competitor and relished the fact that his performance under pressure whether pitching, batting or shooting a clutch shot in basketball has been as good as anyone in Saugerties sports history.

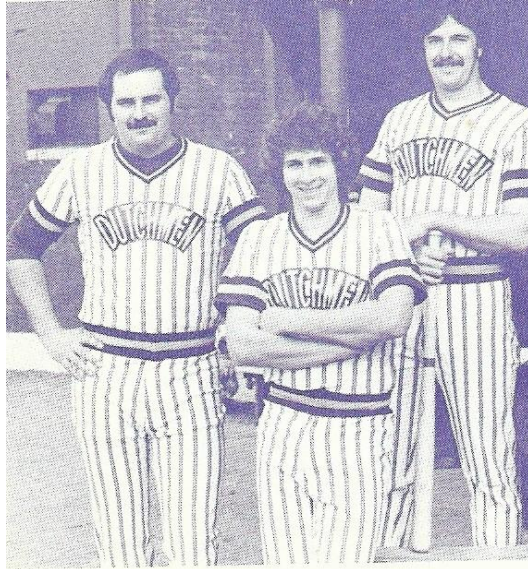
In addition to his playing career, Tom has also served his community in the role of official/umpire, administrator and coach. Tom has officiated basketball in the Kingston Over-30 Men's League, SAA Bidy League, SAA Junior League and the SAA Half-court Basketball League. He continues to help out with the Junior League and he also umpires for the Saugerties Little League as needed. He does this on a volunteer basis for the benefit of both leagues.

He has also officiated volleyball for the SAA and Kingston Rec Leagues.

As an administrator, he has served on the Saugerties Little League's Board of Directors for seven years. He also serves as the head of the league's rules committee and as head of umpires.

As a coach, Tom served two years as pitching coach for Larry Panella at Ulster County Community College. He has served and continues to serve as coach in the SAA Bidy League (7 Years), SAA Junior League (5 years), SAA Senior League (1 Year) and the Saugerties Little League (12 years). Tom states "I have many more years of coaching to do with an 8 year old and a 4 year old sons coming up through the Saugerties sports programs."

Tom has had many great moments and thrills. He cites the 1969 Ferroxcube team in the Saugerties Babe Ruth League, 1972 Saugerties American Legion Post 72 team's season (lost in state final), 1971 SHS Varsity baseball team's season (17-2, DCSL and Section 9 Champs in Coach Vizzie's first season), playing for Pete Kramer at SUNY New Paltz (great offensive season), 1975 SUNY New Paltz season (Coach Valesente, 11-1 on mound, hit over .300 with 4 HR and 30 RBI in 40 games) and of course the 1980 Dutchmen. Tom had this to say about the Dutchmen season, "Winning pennant and playoff championships with the Saugerties Dutchmen in 1980, the first year of the club. The crowds at the games, the buzz around town, the great sponsorship of the Helsmoortel family, the games, parties after the games, just the most fun I have ever had or will have in athletics. It was a special team, a special thing to come home and play after so many years in Kingston. To have the chance to do it at Cantine Field, in front of the home fans and to have it end in a championship, you could write a book about everything that happened that season."



**Rich Koegel, Karl Lezette, Tom Whitaker  
1980 Dutchmen Yearbook Photo**

Tom would like to acknowledge those who have inspired him along the way. He cites his dad, Hall of Famer Frank “Fink” Whitaker, his late brother, Herb Whitaker and Hall of Famer Pete Kramer as his inspirations in sports.

Tom had this to say about his dad, “He taught me the game of baseball at such a young age and nurtured that interest by allowing me to be around the game with him so much. It's all we ever wanted to do as kids, play ball on Christy Hubert’s playground and as we got older at Cantine Field.”

Tom also reflected on how his brother Herb inspired him, “He passed away a couple years ago. He was a big lefty, had all this power and the best arm I ever saw. All I wanted was to be able to do things he could do. I think that even though he lived in Arizona that I somehow made him proud.”

Finally he had this to say about Hall of Famer Pete Kramer, “My great friend, mentor, and coach. From my earliest teen years he took me under his wing. Giving me jobs and helping get me into college. He even coached our Legion team to the state finals. What an honor to be able to return some favors by playing for him for two years at New Paltz and later working for him running the Kaye Sports store on Main Street in Saugerties. My family and I will always be indebted to him and his wife Sylvia for all they did for me.”

Tom feels very special that his family is the first to have three generations inducted into the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame. He states, “My dad Fink and grandfather Herb are already in. I always had a soft spot for what the Hall stands for and feel it is an incredible honor to be a part of this. Year after year I have been a regular at the dinners in memory of my dad and grandfather, as well as to celebrate with those being inducted each year. This is a great thrill.”

The Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame Club extends its congratulations to Tom for his induction into the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame. Your accomplishments and contributions have made your family and community proud.

