

# 2013 Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame



**John Dodig**

How a man chooses to live his life and what he accomplishes in his lifetime defines how those he leaves behind will remember him. John Dodig left this world far too early, but those who knew him will always remember and be forever grateful for the selfless contributions John made to the Saugerties sports community. For his enthusiastic and unwavering involvement as a community volunteer and sports booster the members of the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame are proud to posthumously honor John Dodig with his well deserved induction into the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame.

Born 8/27/35 in Swoyersville Pennsylvania, John Dodig was the son of John and Catherine (Orsulich) Dodig and the brother of Steve, Mike, Bob, and Rose Dodig. John's dad worked in the coal mines and his mom raised the children while young John attended Swoyersville High School and graduated there in 1953. Swoyersville H.S. was a gold mine of athletic talent, boasting a long storied history as a football, baseball, and basketball powerhouse. Ironically, John scarcely participated in high school sports and those who know the Dodigs and the athletic prowess of the family would find that peculiar. When speaking to youngest brother and Saugerties Sports Hall of Famer Mike Dodig and inquiring about John's conspicuous absence from high school sports, Mike recalls, "John had family responsibilities at an early age. He worked in our dad's family business helping support the family. He unselfishly gave up many things including high school athletics for the betterment of our family. I know that he was very sports oriented and immersed in the high school sports scene while his kids participated so you could say he really made up for lost time later in life"! For whatever the reason, John's early preclusion from high school athletics never diminished his enthusiasm or devotion for sports. John Dodig was as intellectually and emotionally connected to sports as anyone could be. In 1956, oldest brother Steve became involved in construction work and soon after moved to Saugerties to live with his paternal grandparents gaining employment in the Hudson Valley. In 1957, the entire Dodig family pulled up roots following the eldest sibling and made the move to Saugerties where they have lived ever since. It was in Saugerties where John Dodig's sports legacy would be established and his impact on the sports community would be substantial.

In 1958, John Dodig was drafted into the U.S. Army and served until being honorably discharged in 1960. John had the fortune of being stationed locally at West Point where he worked as a



John at his summer home (Cantine Field)

Company Clerk, served as a member of the Army Honor Guard, and became involved in coaching the Army's travel basketball team, one of John's first serious involvements in team sports. Brother Mike shares a humorous story regarding John's stay at West Point and recalls how friend and fellow Saugertesian Billy McCormick had just been drafted by the Army and John had been invited to dinner at Billy's house. The always amiable Mrs. McCormick was very nervous over not knowing where her son was going to be assigned.

John trying his best to ease her nervousness told her, "don't worry Mrs. McCormick, I'll get Billy stationed at West Point with me".

Having absolutely no pull whatsoever to fulfill the half-hearted white lie he had told Mrs. McCormick, John had to sweat it out for the next few weeks but was happily relieved to find out that somehow, miraculously, Billy McCormick actually did get an assignment at West Point. Mike Dodig recalls, "Mrs. McCormick was eternally grateful to John for pulling strings with the Commanding General and making the arrangements to get Billy stationed at West Point and John was thankful for good old fashioned dumb luck!"

While stationed at West Point, John met his bride to be, the former Dorothy Dumovich of Brooklyn. On 11/27/60, John and Dorothy were married at Sacred Heart Church in Monroe, NY and soon after moved to Plattsburgh NY where John worked on the Air Force's ballistic missile system project. In 1962, John and Dorothy returned to Saugerties where they welcomed their first born child, John. John's birth was soon to be followed by a son Jeff, a daughter Jill, and youngest son Jay. Establishing residence in Quarryville, John became actively involved with the lives of his growing family and jumped head first into his children's interests and activities.

As a lover of sports and the father of four athletic children, John cherished the opportunity to teach and support his children throughout their early youth, high school, and college sports careers. From 1968 to 1979 John acted as both coach and manager of Saugerties Little League teams including T-Ball, minors, majors, and Sr. girls, closely following the development of his children. Not to show preferential attention to the boys, along with wife Dorothy, John saw to it that he also participated in helping coach daughter Jill's teams throughout her early sports career. Jill fondly recalls her beloved dad, "My dad taught me not to be afraid and tackle anything that is in front of me with all the emotion I had inside myself and to pull my shoulders back and be proud of who I am". Jill obviously listened and followed her dad's words of wisdom as she went on to thrive as an athlete being honored as Saugerties High School's 1987 Outstanding Female Athlete of the Year. From 1970-1983 John also became involved in coaching with the Saugerties Babe Ruth League during the timeframe that his three sons participated. In 1977 as eldest son John moved up into the American Legion ranks, father John was there again doing double duty splitting his time between Babe Ruth and American Legion as a coach and it wasn't until 1983 when youngest son Jay completed his American Legion career that John Dodig retired as a baseball coach.

In addition to baseball, John Dodig also found time to participate with the SAA Bidy Basketball League as a coach. From 1970 to 1979 John lent his expertise and passion to the Saugerties

youth hoop program teaching kids the fundamentals as well as how to play with heart and enthusiasm. There were moments, however, when John's enthusiasm sometimes landed him in trouble and he will always be fondly remembered for his passion for the game. Brother Mike recalls, "Every now and then I would referee Bidy League games, and I remember once doing one of John's games. Things got a little heated and I had to throw him out. It wasn't too often that a Bidy coach got fired up enough to get thrown out but John certainly had the potential at any time. John definitely had a fire for competition". For over 15 years, John Dodig was a fixture on the courts and fields of Saugerties youth sports, coaching and teaching kids "the right way to play the game". His hard work ethic and spirit for the game will never be forgotten nor will John's high intensity or moments of 'strenuous objections' with referees and umpires ever be outdone. He was one of a kind.

Where John Dodig becomes most important to Saugerties sports history, ironically, isn't on a court or playing field. His foremost impact isn't as one who led teams to championships or as one who excelled in athletics himself creating great sports moments in high school, college, or professionally. No, John Dodig's selfless contributions quietly resonated throughout the Saugerties community with little fan fare or acknowledgement, however the results of John's efforts have literally left his impression on the landscape of Saugerties sports history for all future generations to enjoy. John Dodig made it possible for Saugerties sports to develop



John with his SAA Bidy All Stars (son Jeff middle row 2<sup>nd</sup> from left)

and flourish by being one of the instrumental players involved in the Saugerties recreational development movement of the 1970's. This movement was the beginning of the vast expansion of Cantine Memorial Complex which resulted in the development of state of the art playing fields for baseball, softball, and soccer, giving participants of all ages their own opportunity to create great sports moments.

From 1970-1980 John Dodig was an instrumental part of a Town Recreation Board that was made up of a dynamic group of makers and shakers who could be credited, in a large part, for Saugerties' standing today as a sports/recreational Mecca and the bench mark for recreational complexes across New York State. John Dodig along with current fellow Hall of Famers Vince Hackett, Gladys Hutton, Jack Keeley, and Karl Lezette Sr., not to mention long time recreation board members Jennifer Peetom, Joan Zuckerman, and Bob Grant, were the brain trust in creating the vision for the Cantine Memorial Complex and putting in place the personnel to see through their hopes and expectations.

The hiring of John Mayone as head of Parks and Recreation was the beginning of what was to be a renaissance of sorts, leading to development of one of the finest Parks and Recreation departments in the State, if not in the country. Mayone's retirement and relatively short 5 year stay as Parks and Recreation head, led to the Recreation Board's decision to push for the assignment of a young, but amply qualified candidate who they felt could carry through what John Mayone had started and do so with ambition and aggressiveness. The assignment of Greg Chorvas as Parks and Recreation Commissioner was certainly one of the most important decisions made by this Recreation Board, and the fruits of that decision are evident to all who live in Saugerties.

John Dodig's administrative participation as a Recreation Board member at that time was just a small piece of his involvement in the development of the Cantine Complex. At the time John and his fellow recreation board members took over the Town's recreation programs, the only existing playing fields were the main baseball diamond (Cantine Field), Sauer Little League Field, and a softball field (later to be named the Jack Keeley Field). In the approximate 10 year span that John was a board member, the development of the entire west side of the Cantine Complex was completed. Thornton Little League Field, the girls softball fields (later to be named the Gladys Hutton and Fick Fields), the girls minors field, the "West" men's and women's softball fields, the "Teddy Lorenz" Babe Ruth Field, and the Saugerties youth soccer fields were projects that, over this timeframe, were on a fast track to completion. Having to share equipment with the Town Highway Department, Greg Chorvas' Parks and Recreation staff had difficulty getting the necessary excavation work done in order to complete these projects on the aggressive schedule they had hoped. This is where John Dodig's expertise and skills became invaluable and where he left his distinguished mark on the landscape of the Cantine Complex as well as Saugerties sports.

Working his entire life in construction as an equipment engineer and operator, John Dodig was the perfect man to spearhead the development efforts to clear land, dig footings, lay electric and water lines, and carve playing fields into the land that the Saugerties community has enjoyed for decades as a recreational oasis. John's selfless volunteer efforts at the Cantine Complex devoured countless hours of his personal time such that, after dinner and on his days off, John could be seen at Cantine operating a bulldozer, backhoe, or excavator, sometimes working into the dark trying to complete a phase of construction so that Greg Chorvas and staff would be able to continue their part of the project on the following day and so that loaned equipment could be returned to the highway department. John Dodig's participation in the development of the Cantine Complex existed under the radar which is in the true spirit of dedicated community involvement and volunteerism. Hall of Famer and Saugerties Recreation Chairman of the '70s, Karl Lezette Sr. recalls, "Guys like John Dodig were always rolling up their sleeves to see what could be done. His generosity and hard work complimented what Greg (Chorvas) was doing and without guys like John, things wouldn't have gotten done, or at best would have cost the Town a lot of money or taken quite a bit longer to accomplish. John was a doer and he was key to the work that we got done back then".



John and Dorothy Dodig

John Dodig's work on the Town Recreation Board and at the Cantine Complex reflects only one of the volunteer hats worn by John during the '70s and '80s. John was also well known for his longtime involvement as an active member of the Saugerties High School Sports Booster Club where he participated for many years organizing fundraising activities to assist the advancement of Saugerties High School sports. Along with his fundraising activities, John was known as the "voice of Sawyer Football" acting as announcer for varsity football games for many years. John additionally volunteered his service to the Sawyer baseball and basketball programs serving as scorekeeper for both programs throughout the timeframe his four children participated in Saugerties HS athletics. Brother Mike Dodig recalls, "I think one of the more unique fund raisers that my brother was involved in was a boxing benefit. I remember him building a makeshift boxing ring in the high school gym and the Catskill Boxing Club coming to Saugerties to compete in matches. Cus D'Amato ran the club and one of the boxers he brought down was a kid named Mike Tyson. Who'd have known!". In

recognition of John's efforts with the Saugerties HS Sports Booster Club, he was posthumously honored by the community at a 1998 ceremony organized by the Booster Club and SHS Administration and his family presented with a plaque for John's long, dedicated commitment to SHS sports.

Recreationally, John Dodig participated in many activities. He was an avid golfer, rode snow mobiles, cross country skied, played tennis, bowled, and also participated in the SAA softball league. With the creation of the Saugerties Dutchmen in 1980, John also became involved as the popular team's public address announcer for a number of years. Of John's many interests and activities, his family was always his top priority. With John's untimely passing in 1998, he left behind wife Dorothy, sons John, Jeff, and Jay, and daughter Jill (Cohan). John's children gave him many joys and excitement over the years with all four being stellar high school and collegiate athletes and with the signing of a professional contract with the Atlanta Braves chalked to the credit of son Jeff being icing on the cake. As much pleasure as John's children gave him, arguably the joy John would have most cherished would have been being able to spend more time with his 12 grandchildren and watching them grow and develop as he did his own children. Prior to his passing we're sure John had many dreams which unfortunately could not be fulfilled. Youngest son Jay proudly professes, "My two sons never had the opportunity to meet my dad, however they experience his beliefs and values through me every day. I hope to be able to fulfill the responsibility of passing down his legacy every second of every day".



l-r; Jeff, Dorothy, Jill, John, and Jay Dodig at 1998 recognition ceremony for John.

John's legacy lives today through all his children each of whom both he and his wife Dorothy are very proud of. John's children have nothing but love and respect for their departed dad and live their lives as he would have wanted. Middle son Jeff recalls, "Whether it was a collect call to home when I was at college or playing minor league baseball, or stopping by "the Seat" to mop floors, he always took the time to listen and encourage me. He was a great dad". Eldest son and fellow 2013 Inductee John, reminisces, "My dad was a wonderful man. He was a kind, caring, compassionate gentle giant who would give a stranger the shirt off his back. I'll never forget the batting practices when he brought my brothers and me to hit at Cantine Field. He'd always say, "you can't end on that one" or "end on a good one". I used these same words every time I pitched to my own children". Many who follow or have played baseball live by the credence "baseball is life" as it is truly a game of individual success overcoming the many opportunities for failure. We're sure John is smiling in baseball heaven and knows that the words "end on a good one" meant more than just another batting practice swing. Baseball is full of lessons, and one thing John taught his children was that along with hard work comes frustration and setbacks, however eventually there comes reward. Well done Mr. Dodig.

John Dodig's commitment as a community volunteer has paid Saugerties handsomely. When experiencing the many joys that the Cantine Complex brings us, we reap the dividends of the many hours invested by John in both planning as well as developing and building the Cantine Complex. Participants of Little League, AYSO Soccer, Babe Ruth, and SAA Men's and Women's softball owe a debt of gratitude to John for being one of the driving forces in ensuring that the pleasures of sports and athletic competition could be experienced by our Community

over many lifetimes. Our High School athletes also owe a world of thanks to John Dodig for his unwavering commitment as an active Booster Club member. John's fundraising efforts ensured funding for equipment, uniforms, awards, and countless other necessities of the SHS sports programs while the devotion of his time at Saugerties High School sporting events exemplified his loyalty and support to our teams in the true essence of school spirit and youth development.

It was that same spirit that could be seen every morning on Fair Street in Kingston where John Dodig operated his "County Seat" café restaurant. As greeter, waiter, cook, and head dishwasher, John held court each morning dishing up breakfast while simultaneously holding



John at work at the "County Seat"

friendly but vigorous debate with his regulars as to which baseball team was better, Saugerties or Kingston, or how Kingston should be ashamed to lose any sporting contest to the likes of a small school like Saugerties.

Sometimes outnumbered 6 to 1, hardcore Kingston HS boosters like Joe Dittus, George Uhl, Al Spada, Bob Sudlow, Charlie Saccoman, John Dwyer, Dr. Habeeb and Dr. Mauceri did their best to frustrate John. But to no avail. They were only subjected to the indignity of getting outshouted, outwitted, and being served cold toast. Victory Sawyers!

It is with great pleasure that the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame membership recognize John Dodig for his contributions to Saugerties sports and proudly welcome him as a 2013 Inductee into the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame. Congratulations to John's family for this great achievement and for his being bestowed with this cherished honor.