

2011 Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame



Tim Cole

There are good athletes, there are very good athletes, and then there are great athletes. Those who are celebrated as great athletes soon find that they become small fish in a big pond when measured against the oceans of talent nationally and worldwide. In 1977, Tim Cole was recognized as a whale of a talent and achieved something that tens of millions of high school and college aged kids dream about, but only a select few are able to realize. Tim Cole was recognized as “best of the best” in 1977, and his story is one that is inspiring as well as one that the Town of Saugerties is very proud of. In recognition of his athletic accomplishments we congratulate Tim Cole and are honored to welcome him as a 2011 inductee into the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame.

Born May 1, 1959, Timothy Alan Cole, was one of four children born to Herbert and Kathreen “Kay” Cole. Tim’s siblings, all of whom married and relocated from the Saugerties area, include a younger sister, Kaylyn, an older sister, Patricia, and the eldest, a brother Thomas. After raising their four children, Herb and Kay Cole enjoyed many years of spending warm winters in Florida together, however in 2005 after battling illness, Tim’s beloved mom Kay passed away. Those who knew Kay Cole will always remember her engaging smile, her warm caring personality, and her devotion to her family. Tim’s dad Herb still enjoys making the annual trip to Florida and currently resides in Saugerties staying active doing home improvement projects in the house that the Cole family has called home for nearly 60 years.

Tim Cole’s life and athletic journey began on a little cul-de-sac street on the northern fringe of Glasco. Back in the ‘60s and ‘70s, Barclay Lane, bustled with kids and there was never a time when riding or walking through this little neighborhood that the sounds of kids playing sports couldn’t be heard. Tim thrived on backyard and sandlot sports playing basketball, baseball, wiffleball, and football with kids of the

Barclay Heights and Glasco neighborhoods. Summer days were spent from early morning to dusk at Jaycee Field and the Glasco Little League where America's pastime became Tim Cole's passion.

At the age of 9, Tim began his organized sports participation in the SAA Biddy Basketball League as well as the Glasco East Kingston Little League. As a biddy basketball player Tim played with the "Pistons" and his athletic ability was soon recognized with Tim making Biddy All Star teams as both an 11 and 12 year old. As good as the young Tim Cole was on the hardwood, nothing compared to the skill that he exhibited on the baseball diamond. Playing for the Hudson Cement Giants in the Glasco East Kingston Little League, Tim's talents quickly became evident as the 'natural lefty' showed extraordinary potential as both a hitter and a pitcher at the early age of 9. Under the strict tutelage of his father Herb and following in the footsteps of his older brother Tom, who was a talented high school and college baseball player in his own right, Tim Cole's baseball talents began to be honed.

As a Little Leaguer, Tim Cole did some pretty remarkable things. Going 4 for 4 with two homeruns and striking out 16 out of 18 batters faced wasn't an untypical day for the lefty. In his final year of Little League, Tim hit an astonishing 18 homeruns, one shy of the GEKLL record of 19 hit by Bob Clausi some 10 years earlier. When Tim Cole was on the mound, batters were grossly overmatched and those watching the young southpaw mow down batter after batter experienced a baseball lover's delight. Putting an exclamation point on his Little League career, in 1970 Tim Cole pitched a 6 inning, no hit, 18 strikeout All Star game against Windham Little League. This was an extraordinary feat which is rare at any level in the Little League All Star Tournament. At the conclusion of his last year of Little League, Tim Cole was also selected to play with the Kingston Moose All Stars. That year, the area all star squad rode the back of Tim Cole into the New York State finals with Tim rolling to easy wins over some of the best competition in the State.

As early as Little League, Tim Cole had greatness written all over him. One who took particular notice of this was Glasco Little League President Fred Davi, a man who Tim holds in high esteem. As early as Tim Cole's second year in Little League, Fred Davi pegged Tim as a future professional prospect. With his trademark laugh and with great pride, Fred Davi can still be heard chuckling, "That boy is going to make it!". Davi, having an abundant pool of Major League Baseball contacts, could very well be credited as the one who initially got the spotlight on Tim Cole and from there it was all up to the talented left hander.

Tim Cole's youth baseball career saw him move up to the Saugerties Babe Ruth League in 1971 where he played for the "Masons". As was the case in Little League, Tim's dad Herb was his coach and mentor. Herb Cole was a good baseball man who knew the game and more importantly knew how to nurture Tim's pitching talents. Much debate has been made regarding the health of a pitcher's arm and the damage that throwing too much and throwing curve balls can do to a young pitchers arm. Herb Cole was ahead of his time. From Little League through Babe Ruth, Herb closely managed each of Tim's pitching outings, limiting Tim's use of the curve ball, and only allowing Tim to increase his use of the bender as his arm matured. "I always insisted that Tim not throw curve balls early on", said Herb Cole. "I tried to convince Tim that it was more important for him to work on his mechanics and control until his arm had a chance to mature". As for throwing too much, no such thing. It's no secret that Tim Cole built up his powerful pitching technique by working hard and throwing the baseball every day. "I don't believe throwing too much is ever a problem except after pitching a game". "After the strain of pitching a game, Tim would always rest a day before he did any other hard throwing", exclaimed Tim's dad. Practice makes perfect certainly comes to mind when describing Tim Cole as a young ball player. There was no one who worked harder or dedicated himself to his sport than Tim Cole.

As a Saugerties Babe Ruth All Star, Tim was a member of the 14-15 year old squad that went to the New York State finals in Vestal, NY. Having Tim Cole on the mound was like money in the bank and although the team's dream of winning the state title came to an end against Liverpool, NY, Tim Cole's superb performance on the mound, in the field, and at the plate, drew the attention of many. Most had never seen a

player that so dominated a game and made it look so easy. It appeared at this point that the sky was the limit for Tim Cole and that more great things were on the horizon.



1977 - Tim Cole wins another jump ball

As a high school athlete, Tim Cole was given the opportunity to display his talents in three sports. Playing basketball in Junior High and High School, Tim Cole developed into an outstanding shooter and rebounder. Being blessed with great lower and upper body strength, Tim was able to go head to head with much larger players and in effect played much bigger than 6'0, 185 lbs. In 1977 Tim Cole along with fellow Hall of Famers Steve Schaeffer and Iggy Maines anchored a talented varsity squad, who at that time were still competing in the DCSL. The '77 squad was very successful and had the distinction of being able to advance to sectional competition, winning one game before being eliminated by Gorton of Yonkers H.S. At the conclusion of the 1977 season, Tim received one of the many league recognition awards that he collected in his high school career by being selected to the All-DCSL basketball all star team by the coaches of the league.

In football, Tim's athleticism and great throwing arm made him the perfect candidate to play quarterback for the Sawyers JV and Varsity gridiron teams. Tim also played defensive back as well as handled the punting duties for the Sawyers from 1974-1976. Tim credits his JV Football coach and Fellow Hall of Famer Hank Smith for instilling values of pride, hard work, and discipline into his athletic ambitions. With these 'mental tools' Tim developed self confidence and mental toughness, two attributes which were certain to come in handy in the near future. In 1976, Tim Cole was recognized for his performance on the gridiron by receiving All-DCSL recognition in the highly competitive football league. Due to his imminent opportunities in baseball, Tim elected to sit out as a senior and subsequently did not participate in football in his final year of eligibility.

As a member of the Saugerties Sawyers high school varsity baseball program under coach Tony Vizzie, Tim Cole began to draw national interest as early as his Freshman year. Having been a college pitcher and suffering a career ending injury after a 13-2 pitching record at Ithaca College, Tony Vizzie was very much aware of the value of Tim Cole's left arm and made sure it was well protected. "One of my main concerns was to make sure Tim didn't hurt his arm," said Vizzie. "He was a hard thrower and required a lot of rest between starts". "He played centerfield between starts with the understanding that he would not make any unnecessary throws". Vizzie says of Tim Cole, "Tim was the best pitcher and ball player that I had ever seen in the DCSL". "He had a livelier fastball as a sophomore than did some kids I've seen at the college level". Tim Cole credits Tony Vizzie as instrumental in his development as not only a pitcher but also as a complete baseball player.



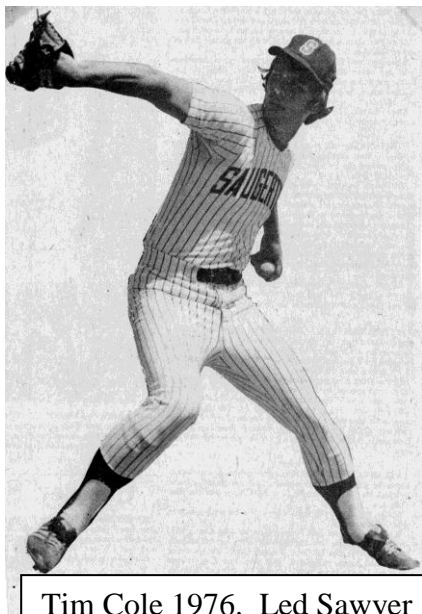
Tim throws a pass in 1976 Sawyer football game

It soon became apparent that the early care and instruction by Tim's father Herb and later on by high school baseball coach Tony Vizzie, worked very effectively. In four years under Vizzie, Tim Cole amassed an 18-7 record with 217 innings pitched, 355 strikeouts, 85 walks and a stingy 1.04 ERA, with Tim never missing a start. Vizzie recalls a few of the games Tim Cole pitched which he cherished as his coach, "I think Tim really came into his own as a sophomore during the Section One game against Port Chester when he shut them out for 10 innings and struck out 17". Other games which Vizzie called to mind were Cole's four "one hitters", two "two hitters" and his 22 strikeout no-decision performance against John Jay in the DCSL title game". Although best known for his pitching, Tim Cole was also one of the finest hitters to ever

step into the batter's box at Cantine Field. In his four years at Saugerties, Tim batted .396 with 88 hits in 222 at bats, with 28 of those hits being for extra bases. Included on the list of Tim Cole's high school baseball achievements are his selection to All DCSL/ All Freeman teams in 1975, 1976 and 1977, Freeman Player of the Year in both 1976 and 1977, and SHS Baseball Most Outstanding Contribution Award in 1977. Tim's 1976 Sawyer baseball team won the NY State Section I and IX titles finishing the season with an 18-6 record. This reflected the best season finish ever recorded by a Sawyer baseball squad.

During the summers of 1973 through 1976, Tim Cole participated on baseball teams in both Saugerties and Kingston. As a member of the 1974-1976 Saugerties American Legion Post 72 baseball team, Tim led a talented 1976 Saugerties squad to within one game of the New York State American Legion Finals. A heartbreaking late game loss to East Chester, Long Island saw the talented Saugerties team's dream of going to Cooperstown squashed, and the 1976 team relegated to the distinction of second best all time Saugerties Legion team, behind the unparalleled accomplishment of the 1972 Saugerties American Legion team which played in the Cooperstown NY State final. As a 16 year old, Tim Cole joined fellow Hall of Famers and Saugertiesians, Larry Panella, Rich Koegel, Tom Whitaker, Gerry Malgieri, and Karl Lezette as a member of Fred Davi's Kingston Braves in the Hudson Valley Rookie League. The young gun, not intimidated by the older and more experienced players in the elite 'semi pro' league, stepped on the mound at the old Dietz Stadium field and impressed all he played with and against, and furthered his notoriety as one of the area's best.

Beginning in his freshman year in high school and much as a result of the early marketing done by Fred Davi, major league scouts began to flock to Cantine Field as well as Sawyer away games to get a glimpse of the hard throwing lefty. The Montreal Expos, Detroit Tigers, New York Yankees, New York Mets, Baltimore Orioles, Chicago White Sox, Philadelphia Phillies, and pretty much every other major league team on the planet, had Tim Cole on their radar and had him pegged as a first or second round pick in the 1977 major league draft. So anxious were the scouts to see the 92-93 MPH Tim Cole fastball, that in 1977 when Tim was scheduled to pitch against Poughkeepsie High School and rain put the game in jeopardy, with 25 major league team reps in attendance, the collaboration of scouts offered to roll up their sleeves and help clear the field of the standing water so that the game could be played. Unfortunately the game was cancelled and the scouts had to settle with watching Tim throw on the sidelines for 15 minutes.



Tim Cole 1976. Led Sawyer nine to 18-6 record.

Although Tim Cole was surely to be picked in some round of the Major League draft, college baseball was still not out of the question. Tim had narrowed his list of colleges to South Florida (where MLB Hall of Famer Robin Roberts was head coach), Arizona State, Jacksonville University (where Kingston Brave teammate Kevin Coughlin attended) and Middle Tennessee State University (where long time battery mate Karl Lezette was playing). As he awaited the Major League draft, Tim Cole was poised to have a great post high school baseball career somewhere, however the 1977 June 7th draft couldn't come soon enough to once and for all determine the future path of one of Saugerties greatest baseball players.

On that June 7th day in 1977, Tim's father Herb recalls, "We fully anticipated not getting a call for at least an hour and a half into the draft, however 5 minutes after the start of the draft, the phone rang...It was the Atlanta Braves". Tim Cole had been selected in the first round of the 1977 Major League Baseball Draft, with only three other players being selected before him. Harold Baines (Chicago White Sox), Paul Molitor (Minnesota Twins) and Bill Gullickson (Montreal Expos) were the only players in the country, in the world, to be picked ahead of one of Saugerties' own.

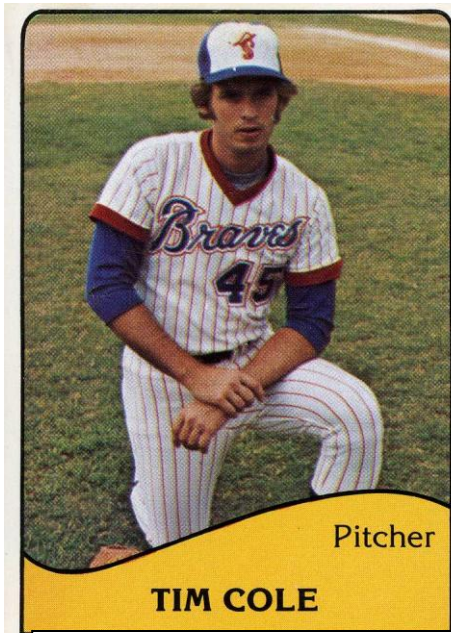
Upon being drafted by the Atlanta Braves, Tim was called by Braves executive and Baseball Hall of Famer Hank Aaron to congratulate him as well as convey his hopes and anticipation that Tim would sign with the Atlanta organization. Shortly after high school graduation and to the delight of the Atlanta Braves, Tim Cole made his decision to join Atlanta and subsequently Hank Aaron's brother-in-law, Atlanta GM Bill Lucas, was dispatched to the Cole's Barclay Lane residence for the signing of the Braves 18 year old top prospect. This day arguably reflects the most notable achievement ever realized by a Saugerties High athlete.



Tim's 1977 signing. From l-r; Tim's mom Kay, dad Herb, Atlanta Braves GM Bill Lucas, Sawyer Baseball Coach Tony Vizzie, and Braves Scout Bob Turzilli

Tim Cole began his professional baseball career with the Atlanta Braves being assigned to their Rookie team in Kingsport Tennessee. In his first season as a professional Tim notched a 3-1 record, where in 37 innings he racked up 31 strikeouts and a 4.14 ERA. Over the next 6 years Tim pitched his way through A and AA arriving at AAA Richmond in 1982. Up to that point the young left hander had recorded 40 wins while losing 58 but showing that he had the stuff that it took to make it to the big leagues as was evident by his 5 strikeouts per game average. It was in 1983 after going 5-5 at AAA Richmond with a 6.77 ERA that the Braves made the decision to send

Tim down to the A/AA levels to work on mechanics to improve his control as well as experiment with changing Tim's role to that of a reliever.



Tim Cole 1979 Baseball Card
AA Savannah Braves

The haunting control issue exacerbated by the revolving door of pitching coach egos and constant mechanics changes, as well as the discouragement of being bounced around between A and AA affiliates between 1983 and 1986, led to the unfortunate end of Tim Cole's professional baseball career in 1986. Over his 10 years in professional baseball, Tim recorded 48 wins, 64 losses, had a 5.55 ERA, notched 448 strikeouts, and had 17 complete games with 6 shutout victories. There has been much discussion as to how the Atlanta Braves could have allowed this great talent to slip through their system without a shot at the major leagues. The pressures of being a first round draft choice and the high expectations that were placed on Tim Cole surely paid a toll on the young lefty as he navigated his way through the minor leagues with a target on his back, but one can't help but wonder what could have been if Tim Cole had played under a different minor league system. One which would have allowed the hard throwing left hander to develop without the micromanagement and constant altering of pitching style. Would Tim

Cole's path have been one of major league stardom? Unfortunately we will never know.

After his professional baseball career, Tim Cole settled in the south living in North Carolina and Tennessee. Tim currently resides in Nashville Tennessee and is employed by the State of Tennessee working in the State Department of Corrections where he has done so for nearly 20 years. Tim has 3 sons; Adam (age 25), and twins, Michael and Alex (age 15). Adam was recently married and lives in North Carolina where he is an elementary teacher and also coaches high school soccer and football.

There are many things in sports that are up for debate, however Tim Cole's superior athleticism and achievements are indisputable. His journey through professional baseball although not being what he had

hoped, will never diminish the fact that Tim Cole was a great all around athlete and arguably the greatest player to ever put on a Sawyer baseball uniform.. His notoriety and accomplishments are something for which the Town of Saugerties, not to mention Tim's family, are very proud of. Tim Cole's performance and achievements in the sport of baseball were something special and will be remembered and celebrated forever in Saugerties sports history. The Saugerties community is very proud to recognize and congratulate Tim Cole for his accomplishments and it is an honor to have him as a 2011 inductee into the Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame.