

2014 Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame



Mark Becker

The Saugerties Sports Hall of Fame is proud, as it enters its second half-century, to honor Mark Becker as a new inductee for its Class of 2014. On April 26, 2014 at the Glasco Fire Hall, Mark will join many of his friends, teammates, and mentors as a member of our sports community's most prestigious club.

The Mark Becker story is a circuitous one, which began in Syracuse, New York when Mark was born on October 16, 1959. Mark's family, including his father Al, mother Joyce, and brother Jeff, lived in upstate Liverpool until 1968. When Mark's parents divorced in 1969, Joyce took the boys to Honolulu, Hawaii, where she accepted a teaching position. After only one year there, Joyce decided to move back to New York to be nearer to her parents who lived in Spruceton. When a position became available in the SHS math department, Joyce began a 15-year career as a Saugerties teacher. She settled on Willow Road in Barclay Heights and Mark and Jeff began to meet new friends, many of whom were active in the youth sports leagues in Saugerties.

Joyce retired in 1984 and lived in Spruceton for many years. She now resides in Mechanicville with Mark, his wife Tamie, and their children. Together Mark and Tamie, who were married on June 14, 1997, have four children, daughter Kimberly, stepchildren Zachary, Ryan, and Katelyn along with 2 daughters-in-law and 2 grandchildren, Kayla and Keegan. They own and operate a Cartridge World franchise in Mechanicville. Mark says of his mom Joyce, "She has always been my rock, and I will always be indebted to her for her strength as a single parent, and for all she did for Jeff and me. She survived breast cancer in 1966, and after that she always wanted to live to see us graduate. Although she cannot travel to the banquet, my friend Joe Defino will be

making a video for me to show her at home. For her to still be here at 86 to see my induction means everything to me, because I owe everything to her.” As happy as Mark is that his mom is able to celebrate his achievement, he is regretful that his brother Jeff, who sadly passed away in 2005, isn’t here to share in the excitement of this great honor.

Mark’s athletic career began in the Saugerties Bidy League, CYO Basketball, and the Saugerties Little League. Of his beginnings in sports, Mark states with pride, “I was very fortunate to come to Saugerties; to be able to grow up with a group of friends who did everything together. Sports was a big part of our youth. I feel that our success in sports was in large part due to the friendships we had, and still have to this day.”

In Bidy Basketball, Mark played for the Saints, coached by Wes Maxwell. In 1973, they were a perfect 9-0 in the teen division, with Mark leading the way in the Championship Game with a robust 45-point effort. In CYO, he played on a team with Lenny Hackett. This team had much success, and was coached by Lenny’s dad Vince, who was a father figure for Mark throughout his youth and teenage years.

In Little League, “Beck” played for Bob Lehman and Al Curl on the Legion Braves. He was selected for the All Star team in 1971 and 1972. These two teams won back-to-back District 15 titles and were coached by 2013 Hall of Fame Inductee Hal Wilsey and his son Tom. Players on the team included Hall of Famers Jay Harris, Iggy Maines, Lenny Hackett, and Steve Schaffer. Only half-jokingly, Mark said “I’m the guy in the team picture who’s as tall as the coaches.” It was this impressive presence and size which would help Mark all through his career to become a vital cog in the success enjoyed by all the teams he played on. He was an imposing scorer and rebounder who could run the floor on the fast break and finish off possessions in the paint, and got many baskets on put-backs off the offensive glass, using that size to get good position inside. In baseball Mark was a feared power threat in the middle of the lineup, one who could change a game with one swing. Being big and left-handed was a nice combination to have. It forced opposing teams into matchup problems by enabling his coaches to split the righties and lefties, which made the team harder to pitch against late in games.

Moving on to the Babe Ruth League, Mark played on a Fire Dept. team coached by Ken Blundell and Ray Maday. He led the way to a 1975 Championship with his power bat. Again chosen as an All Star, Mark was a key player along with many of the previously mentioned core group. His 1976 American Legion Post 72 team had a special season. Coached by Hall of Famers Boo Schaffer and Earl Benjamin, they conquered Kingston in the County Championship, a game in which Saugerties was down by 2 late in the contest. At this point, our team had runners on 2nd and 3rd when Kingston elected to walk Karl Lezette, loading the bases for “Beck”. He promptly unloaded a blast which went through the goal post in right field at Dietz Stadium. The ball found its way up the hill toward the zoo, and Mark was lumbering around the bases. He said, “when I was getting to 3rd I expected Boo to put up the stop sign but he waved me home, and needless to say I was out by 20 feet, so I call it the “faux grand slam.” The damage was done, though, and the 3 runs batted in led to the County Title. That game propelled Post 72 into the regionals, and they continued on to within one game of the State finals losing to East Chester Long Island in the semi-final game at Newburgh.

This group also had a very successful 1976 season as Sawyers, playing for Coach Tony Vizzie, the most successful coach in SHS history. Coming up short in the DCSL title game against John Jay, the Sawyers went on to capture the Section IX and Section IX-I open regionals beating both Nanuet and Port Cheste. Vizzie has acknowledged that this team would have had a great

chance to win a State Championship had there been such a tournament at that time due to its complete package of speed, power, defense, and a great pitching staff led by Tim Cole.

Mark moved up to the Varsity Basketball team from J.V. for his junior and senior seasons. His junior year of 1976 was a struggle, as the young Sawyers posted a dismal 1-17 record under Larry Marcus. Only one senior, Jay Harris, started that season, along with juniors Hackett, Schaffer, Cole, and Becker. Even though they took their lumps, a solid foundation for the following year was being laid. A 1977 senior-laden Sawyer team turned the tables. They set the tone for the new year in the very first game, blowing Poughkeepsie H.S. out of the Sawyer Gym, winning by 18 points. Enjoying a winning season and getting an invitation to the Section IX Tournament, the team, now led by new coach Dick Colavita, took advantage, winning a sectional game. They had the misfortune of playing against 6'10" Harold Royster, a McDonald's All American at Gorton H.S. from Yonkers, and had no answer for the big guy, losing at Iona College. Mark is justifiably proud of the way they were able to improve vastly from '76 to '77.

After graduating in June 1977, Mark went north to Columbia-Greene Community College, where he teamed with his good friend Lenny Hackett again on the Twins' basketball and baseball teams. The hoop squad, coached by John Chapman, won the Northeast Conference Championship with a 9-3 NEC record, to go along with an overall 10-7 mark. Mark was selected as an Honorable-Mention All-NEC pick, averaging 8 points and an impressive 13 boards a game for the Twins. In the regular-season finale, Mark amassed 17 pts. and 16 rebounds, sending the team into the NEC Tournament on a high note.

On a CGCC baseball team coached by Joe McCrudden, a coach who was revered by all of his players, Mark excelled at the plate. He displayed his homerun stroke on the very first pitch he saw as a collegian against Rockland CC, losing it over the right field fence for a 2-run shot. His baseball career continued in the local adult leagues as a member of Championship teams on the Kingston Braves in the Hudson Valley Rookie League in the late 70's. He was also on the new Saugerties Dutchmen team which formed in 1980, and won the HVRL title in that exciting inaugural season. Playing home games at a packed Cantine Field, "Beck" was on a team loaded with future Hall of Famers such as Maines, Lezette, Harris, Hackett, John Dodig, and John Speirs, as well as former Braves veterans Rich Koegel, Tom Whitaker, and Jerry and Nick Malgieri. managed by Dennis Sheehan, the former President of the Hall of Fame and an Atlanta Braves scout, the team lived through as special a season as any in the annals of Saugerties Sports. Mark says, "The crowds were in the thousands. It was an unbelievable environment to be a part of, and to win that title made it all the more special for us. Greg and Roy Helmsmoortel were great to play for-they gave so much to that team and the whole town was a part of our success that season."

Mark also played in the SAA Premier Basketball League, which boasted the best players and teams in the Valley. He joined the Exchange 7's and was a big addition to an already big team. Mark, John Carnright, John Speirs, and Joe Hellenschmidt were all 6'5" or better, forming an imposing front line. With Larry Panella, Tom Hallion, Tony Buono, and Tom Whitaker at the guard position, this team was a deep and talented bunch that won multiple titles in a tough league.

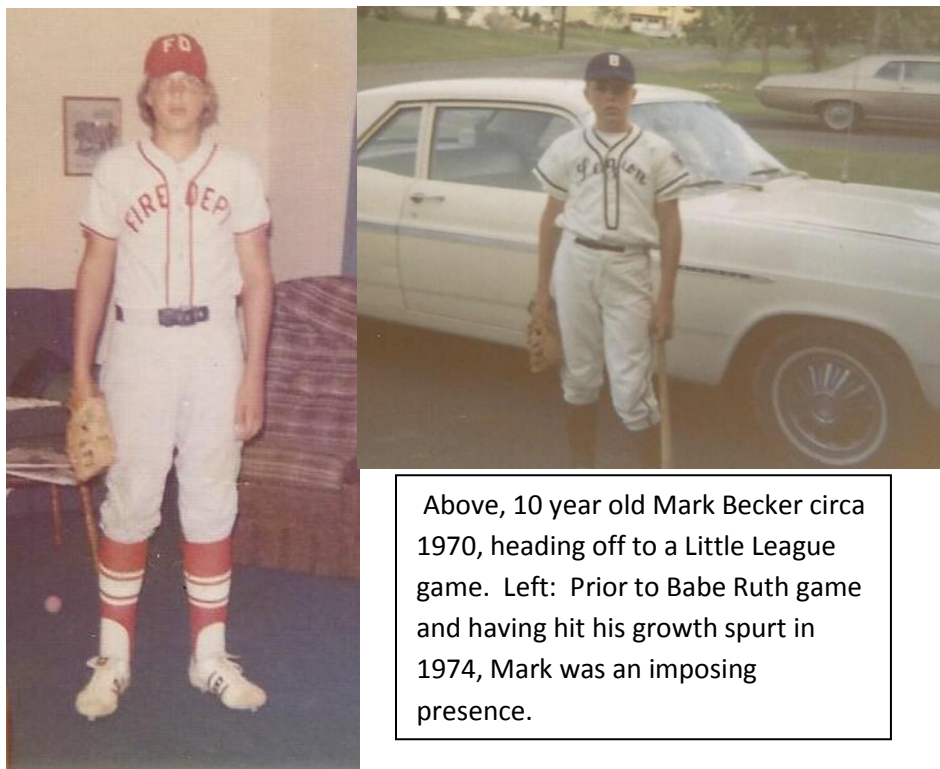
Mark has been an avid golfer for decades, using the game to renew old friendships as well as a competitive outlet. Along the way he participated in the SAA Golf League for a number of years. He also was a founder of and an original player in the Manorville Open, which started more than 25 years ago as a day of golf for a group of buddies. The event has evolved over the years into a large fund-raising event held at Blackhead Mountain, and Mark continues to play each year.

He played for the Manorville Mill team in the SAA Softball League as well. In his adopted hometown of Mechanicville, He is a member of the Elks Club, volunteering in events like the Elks National Hoop Shoot and a soccer shootout competition. Mark was active in coaching softball travel teams as well when his daughter Kimberly was a top-flight player.

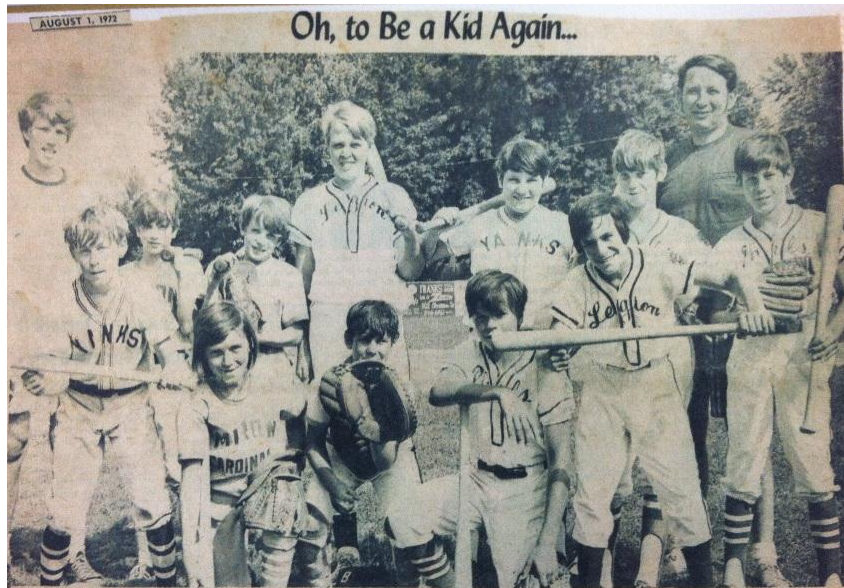
A lifetime of sports competitions has been one of the hallmarks of the Mark Becker story. He has many memories of individual and team successes. Included in these are many of his inspirations in his athletic career, the aforementioned coaches who did so much more for him than just coach teams. They helped the son of a single mom develop as a man as well as an athlete. Two men who never coached him are singled out for high praise: Jimmy Gage and Jack Keeley. Mark was always very respectful of both men for the things they did so the kids could have sports to play as well as the adults.

To summarize Mark Becker, it's a must to tell the story of not only the accomplishments of a great player, but that of a great teammate and friend who did so many things to ensure the success of the teams he played on. This is what Mark wants his legacy to be and how he'd like to be remembered. He said recently, "I am truly humbled, and I'm thankful for this great honor. I'd like to thank the Hall of Fame Club, my family, especially my wife, Tamie, and my mom, Joyce, and all my coaches, teammates and friends, for making this possible. It's something I'll cherish forever with great pride."

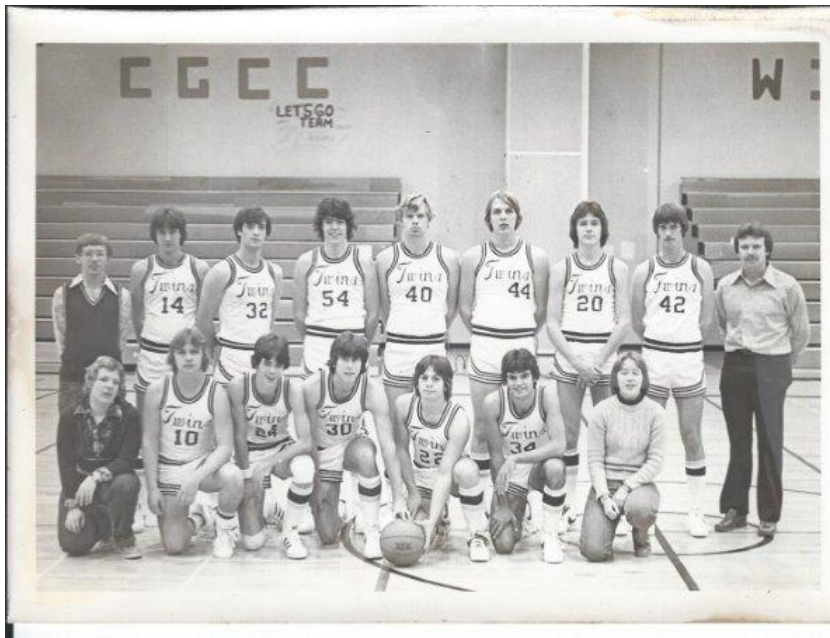
Well, "Beck", the Saugerties Sports community will thank you for all you've done in your career when, on April 26, you will be officially inducted into the Hall of Fame. It is an honor which is well-deserved, and one you should accept with pride. Welcome to the club "Beck", you have made your hometown proud of you.



Above, 10 year old Mark Becker circa 1970, heading off to a Little League game. Left: Prior to Babe Ruth game and having hit his growth spurt in 1974, Mark was an imposing presence.



1972 District 15 Champ Saugerties Little League All Stars. Mark Becker top row center, accompanied by fellow Hall of Famers Jim “ Lenny” Hackett (top row second from right) and Manager Harold Wilsey (standing behind Lenny Hackett) .



1978-79 Columbia Greene Community College “Twins” Basketball team, Where Mark, #44, and fellow Saugerties grad Lenny Hackett, #42, helped lead the Twins to a 9-3 Northeast Conference Championship.



1976 Region 3 and 4 Champion Saugerties American Legion. Team missed equaling the 1972 squad's NYS American Legion Championship appearance in Cooperstown with a last inning 5-4 loss to East Chester Long Island. 1976 team was loaded with Saugerties Sports Hall of Famers (9) including; Earl Benjamin & Boo Schaffer (coaches) Lenny Hackett, Mark Becker, John Speirs, Tim Cole, Iggy Maines, Jay Harris, and Karl Lezette

