

Leigh Hohenstein

Lakefield Fastpitch / PJ's Fastpitch

Leigh's accomplishments on the softball field speak for themselves and shout Hall of Fame, even though the modest man rarely talks about his accomplishments himself. He was a rare dual threat player who was both a right-handed hitting slugger and a feared right-handed ace toeing the rubber.

As his pitching prowess grew, he was known for a devastating changeup that made many a hitter look foolish; and was always one of the first pitchers drafted for state and national tournaments when teams were only allowed to add pitchers and catchers to their rosters. He was selected by many strong teams such as Vesta, Holland, Ruthton, and Year-Round Cab (Lake Crystal/Vernon Center) just to name a few.

He had numerous offers over the years to leave his local Jackson County teams, but always remained loyal focusing on playing with family and friends, and building a legacy that resulted in the PJ's team competing to this day.

History & Teams

After watching a few local tournaments, Leigh started playing fastpitch in the southwestern MN town of Lakefield at the age of 15 in 1972. He then moved to the Okabena Farm Supply team from 1976-1979. He learned pitching from his teammate Swede Barber, and later Marly Johnson from Fairmont was instrumental in his development.

In 1980, he wanted to pitch more consistently so was a founding member of the new Lakefield team, along with Dave Frodermann and Wally Rubis, that had several sponsors throughout the 80's. They eventually landed sponsorship in late 80's from PJ's lounge of Wilder and then Bingham Lake for the remainder of his career. The team enjoyed good success playing tournaments mainly in southwestern MN, northwest IA, and eastern SD. They played in the Southern Star league with strong teams such as Fairmont, Odin, St. James, Windom and others in a time when you had to place high at the District level to even make the State tournament, and they typically competed well.

In the 1990's, PJ's started to see more team success as several younger ballplayers were added to the mix, including his son John. The mix of veterans and youth played in the Worthington

and then Jackson county leagues. They earned a top 3 finish in the ASA State Class B tournament and also played in the ASA Class A National tournament (Minot, ND) in 1995 after winning entry via Regional competition. They also started playing NAFA National tournaments in 1998 (Hutchinson, KS) with a 9th out of 48 finish. Leigh turned 40 in 1996 and began playing in the MN Masters state tournament with Curry Sanitation of Redwood Falls winning multiple state titles at that level.

The 2000's saw continued success with:

- 2000 – 5th in ASA Class B MN State, 9th out of 48 at NAFA Nationals in Fargo, ND, and a MN Masters State title
- 2001 – 5th in ASA Class B MN State, 7th out of 64 in the 2001 NAFA Nationals in Hutchinson, KS, and another MN Master's state title.
- 2002- 2nd ASA Class B MN State, 3rd place MN State NAFA, and MN Master's State title
- 2003-2005 – NAFA Nationals in Chippewa Falls WI, Hutchinson KS and Mankato, MN and another MN Masters title

Leigh retired from the sport in 2006 at age 49 after tearing his right bicep in 2005 and not fully recovering.

Memorable Statistics & Games/Players

Statistics were never a big part of the reason Leigh played the game. He enjoyed the competition along with playing with family and friends, and developing relationships with other ballplayers. However, he estimates being close to a .280 hitter for his career in a time of tough pitching, hitting double digit home runs each year during his prime, and consistently winning 20+ games each season when pitching.

Some specific statistical memories include pitching a perfect game and multiple no hitters, striking out 15+ batters numerous times, hitting five homeruns during a weekend tournament in Sioux Falls, and striking out a high of 19 during a tournament in Leota where they didn't invite Lakefield back the next year because of that game.

The best illustration of Leigh's skillset was winning the Okabena tournament in the late 1980's when in the Championship game he pitched a shutout and hit a solo homerun against MN legend Shane Bouman for a 1-0 victory.

In a similar timeframe, the Lakefield team also won a 16-team tournament in Worthington playing against tough competition from Sioux Falls, SD and Sioux City, IA, along with local teams. Lakefield picked up Shane Bouman for the weekend due to Leigh having some arm soreness, but Leigh was on fire pitching every game but one and never losing a game.

Another memorable game in the 1990's was coming back to beat the Rice Street team out of St. Paul for a 5-4 victory in 10 innings during the MN State ASA B tournament leading to the best finish for the PJ's team until that time.

There were so many memorable games against strong competition that it's hard to remember most. But teams that stand out include the likes of the James Gang from St. James, Ellsworth, Ruthton, Edgerton/JB's, Holland/Buffalo Ridge, Odin, Fairmont, Vesta, Wabasso, Fischer Group, Scarletts, Sioux Falls Sox, and Sioux Falls Chiefs.

The three toughest hitters Leigh remembers include Billy Menke from Fairmont, Trevor Nau from St. James, and Chad Boom from Ellsworth. While they had plenty of hits, Leigh got them out plenty as well.

Humorous Moments

One game, his son John was telling Leigh to stop throwing so many balls and Leigh yelled out "you get your ass out here" to the mound. The umpire thought Leigh was upset with him and just hid behind John at the plate. Everyone laughed at that one.

One season there was a push by umpires not to switch balls if the pitcher didn't like it, and make them throw it anyways. So Leigh just pitched the ball over the backstop and put up his glove to receive a new ball. After a few seconds the umpire called "ball", and threw a new one out. Nobody had ever seen that happen before.

Another game Leigh was getting a really small strike zone. He threw a rise-ball to his catcher (Wayne Rogers) who missed the ball (possibly on purpose), turned to the umpire and said "that one really moved didn't it?" The zone got better after that.

During a close game against Fairmont with runners on base, Leigh faced one of the hitters of his career, Billy Menke. There was a conference at the mound where Dave said to just walk him (first base was open). Leigh said, "I can get him out." Billy proceeded to hit a home run.

Leigh was a proponent of swinging at 3-0 pitches if they were strikes, but always told John you better hit a homerun if you do it. Leigh accomplished that several times in his career.

Post-Career Highlights

Leigh continued to follow the game after his retirement in 2006. He spent many weekends following his son John and the Odin team enjoyed great success through early 2020's. He now enjoys his time spending it with his wife Cathy, playing golf 3-4 times a week, bowling in winter leagues, fishing, and watching his grandkids events (especially hockey).