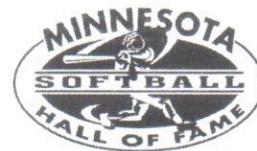




MINNESOTA SOFTBALL HALL OF FAME
NOMINATION FORM



2024

Nominee Cliff Folkens Birth date 7-17-52

Address 1422 Indian Ave City/State Rock Rapids, IA Zip 51246

Softball Community where major accomplishments were achieved Rock Rapids, IA

Is that softball community's program currently affiliated with the MSF, the MN Softball Hall of Fame Administrator/Custodian? ☒ Yes ☐ No

Home Phone (712) 472-3887 Cell Phone (712) 470-6489

Email Address barbfolkens@yahoo.com

Check the Nomination Category:

☒ Superior Performance

☒ Meritorious Service

☐ Pioneers of Yesterday

Check all that apply:

☒ Player

☒ Manager/Coach

☒ Promoter

☐ Administrator

☐ Umpire

☐ Sponsor

Check all that apply:

☒ Fastpitch

☐ Modified Pitch

☐ Slowpitch

Nominated by Greg Kruger

Date of Nomination 6-11-24

(If a relative, must have a seconding nomination by non-relative)

Address 309 S Mulberry St City/State Ellsworth, MN Zip 56129

Home Phone () Cell Phone (712) 470-5711

Email Address

Seconding Nomination Name Kurtis Myrlie, MSF Fastpitch Committee Member

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Cliff Folkens HOF Nomination Rock Rapids, IA (Border League)

The Border League in SW MN and NW IA has been in continuous existence for the last 70+ years and remains strong today. For the past 43 years, Cliff Folkens has done his part to keep our sport alive and thriving in the Border League area. In 1996, Cliff used his own farm equipment to help build the current Rock Rapids softball complex.

He has done everything from building bleachers to field maintenance, umpiring, calling on businesses for sponsorship and contributing thousands of his own dollars to the team's expenses. He is and always has been willing to do anything that needs to be done to keep fastpitch alive.

- Involved in fastpitch softball as a player, manager and promoter in NW IA and SW MN for nearly 2,000 games and 55 years and counting. 12 Years in the Rock Rapids City League and the last 43 years in the Border League.
- Participated in Minnesota State Fastpitch B/C tourney in 42 of the last 43 years.
- Instrumental in keeping fastpitch alive in Rock Rapids, IA and the Border League by hosting 42 tournaments in Rock Rapids including 12 years that hosted two tournaments per year.
- Promotes a family atmosphere on his teams and has played with his three brothers, brother in law, son, grandson and nephew. Introduced dozens of players to the great game of fastpitch that they otherwise would not have known.
- Manager of 2020 and 2024 Class C State Champions, Premier Bank as well as runner up finishes in 1992, 2013 and 2023.
- Player/manager on the second ever Border League team to play in an ASA National Tourney. 1992 ASA Class C Nationals in Salem, VA.

Typically when a softball player hits his early 40s, and their best playing days may be behind them, they retire from the game and find other interests. In the case of Cliff Folkens, reaching his early 40s in softball was just the beginning. He has since devoted an additional 30 years and counting to managing and promoting the game of fastpitch softball in the Border League and Rock Rapids, IA. Growing up in a farm family with plenty of work to do and never being allowed to play high school sports, Cliff's first taste of competitive sports came in 1970 at the age of 18. On Sunday afternoons, he and his fellow farm kid friends would get together and play pick-up games of softball which led to the organization of the Farmers Elevator team that would compete in the 10 team Rock Rapids city fastpitch league with most players playing in their blue jeans. The first season was rough with not much individual success for Cliff or the team. He had started working at pitching and recalls it not being uncommon for him to walk the bases full, walk runs in, hit batters and even pitch over the backstop from time to time. Armed with the determination and grit that would carry him through the next 54 years in the game, he would take his younger brother Jerrold into the haymow of the family's barn and make him catch Cliff's pitches through the next winter until he had improved to an acceptable level. Consistent team success in those early years was hard to find but Cliff wasn't deterred. He would be the only pitcher for the Farmer's Elevator team for 14 years when he would go on to join Alvord in the Border League for what would be the first of his 42 (and counting) years in the league while also playing on the Farmers Elevator team for two more years.

His joining Alvord was mostly by chance. He was in the stands watching the Memorial Day tourney and one of Alvord's pitchers suffered from heatstroke. They needed another pitcher and had Cliff come out of the stands to play with them for that game and the next 4 years until the team folded. Alvord found more team success while playing upwards of 50 games per year and winning at a .700 clip and began going to the Minnesota state fastpitch state tourney in 1982. To date, Cliff has participated in every Minnesota state fastpitch tourney in the last 42 years with the exception of 2009 when the Premier Bank team he manages went to the NAFA "A" Nationals in Sioux Falls and finished 7th.

In 1986, Cliff would join the hometown Rock Rapids Merchants team that is still in existence today as Premier Bank. Cliff would be the main pitcher until 1991 when he would reduce his time on the mound and added manager duties as the team was on the verge of folding if someone didn't step up and take over the role as manager. In 1992, the Rock Rapids Merchants would finish 2nd in the inaugural Class C Fastpitch state tourney held in Pipestone. When the first place team, Charlie's Café of Freeport was unable to go to the national tourney, the Merchants took their place. This would kick off a frantic couple of weeks of phone calls, pacing in the kitchen while smoking cigarettes, planning, fundraising, and booking hotel rooms and a charter bus for the team to go to Salem, VA. They would share the bus with Greg's Welding from Pipestone who had also qualified for the tourney. Rock Rapids would go 0-2 in the tourney losing their first game to the Federal Lock Falcons of Washington, DC; a team that had just formed and would be winning games in the ISC world tourney in two years. At the time, the Merchants were the second ever Border League team to compete in an ASA National

Tourney. In 1994 the Merchants would qualify for the regional tourney in St Paul losing to the Crow Bar of Sioux Falls, SD and Bo Diddley's of St James.

In 1996 a new softball complex was built in Rock Rapids. Before the construction crews even showed up, Cliff had volunteered to go with his own tractor and farm tillage equipment to disk under the bean field where the complex would be built. While this may seem odd, it was a recurring theme in Cliff's career; he loved the game of fastpitch softball and would do anything he could to continue to promote and grow the game. In the early days that included helping build and paint bleachers for the Rock Rapids league. Later on that would include running 42 total tournaments in Rock Rapids including 12 years when there would be two tournaments held per year; doing anything from taking money to umpiring to field prep and everything in between. Cliff would also go around to the local businesses seeking sponsorships for uniforms and has quietly contributed thousands of his own dollars when the team account was running low and a tourney entry fee needed to be paid or new equipment needed to be purchased.

The most sustained success that Cliff has seen in his career has come in the past 10 years as the manager of the Premier Bank team. In 2013, they broke through to finish 2nd in the Class C state tourney. This memorable run started with wins against RFG and PBI on Saturday. Sunday morning would bring a 4-2 loss to Hennager Plumbing & Heating. Premier then won games against Castle Rock and PBI before shutting out Hennager's 8-0 to avenge the loss from earlier in the day. In the Championship game Premier would beat St Paul Fastpitch 7-6 in the first game before falling to them in the "if necessary" Championship game. All told, that Sunday included 6 consecutive games from 9:00AM until after 7:00PM and announced Premier Bank as a force to be reckoned with in the Class C division. In the subsequent 10 years, Premier Bank would go on to record seven Top 4 finishes in Classes B or C with runner up finishes in 2013 and 2023 and the ultimate prize of a Class C State Championship in 2020 and again in 2024. Under Cliff's guidance Premier Bank has been at the top of the Border League as well with Championship game appearances in 9 of the last 10 year end league wide tourneys including 5 championships. Cliff has also managed a team made up largely of his current and former 40 years old and over players in the South Dakota Masters' State Tournament with three consecutive runner up finishes from 2021-23.

Over the course of 54 years and nearly 2,000 games one thing has remained constant for Cliff and the teams he has coached and that is a family atmosphere both literally and figuratively. From playing with all three of his brothers and a brother in law at one point to playing with and managing his son and even managing a grandson, the family atmosphere is always present. There have been many "come to Jesus" meetings when guys have needed some hard truths spoken to them, just like there has been an equal amount of praise heaped on good play and more importantly effort. Cliff has always taken pride in playing with "our guys" all year long and not relying on pickup players when it comes time to put the best team on the field at State softball. He has always taken pride in his teams staying around to socialize with each other after the game and not having a team full of players scatter in all different directions once the last out is made. Cliff's teams are usually one of the last to leave the parking lot and typically have

the largest pile of cans around the cooler, but it is because they respect and truly like each other; qualities that he has fostered and may be his biggest contribution to the game of fastpitch softball. Even beyond the wins and losses.