

# The Day A Frewsburg Kid Made The Grade On The Mound

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The following column appeared in The Post-Journal on June 9, 1996, a day after Frewsburg Central School's Mike Sheesley tossed a no-hitter and the Bears claimed their second straight New York State Public High School Athletic Association Class D championship and their third in six years. With the high school season scheduled to start next week, it was deemed appropriate to recognize again one of the finest performances by an area ballplayer on the state's biggest stage.

LITTLE FALLS — George Sheesley stood next to the Frewsburg dugout in Municipal Park and looked at the scoreboard 378 feet away.

As he gazed into the distance, his eyes, hidden by sunglasses, misted over as he talked about his son, Mike.

“He’s all baseball. He came here to play baseball. He came to play the game hard.”

Never harder than Saturday afternoon.

For with the New York State Public High School Athletic Association Class D championship on the line, the 16-year-old Sheesley was almost perfect.

In seven innings, he retired 21 of the 23 batters he faced, struck out eight and didn’t walk a batter.

And when Pawling’s Mike Hamm struck out to end the game, Sheesley had realized every pitcher’s dream — a no-hitter

Finally, all the hours watching and listening to his brother, Tim — a fine player in his day — had paid off. Finally, the drive and determination he had learned from his coach, Bob Schmitt, had manifested themselves all at once in the biggest game of his life.

Throw all those things together and one can understand how that might move a father to tears of joy.

But there’s something special about all these Bears. On this particular day it was Sheesley’s turn to show just how special.

“Kids are all different,” Schmitt said. “You see them joking around and running around, but you see Mike, for the most part, all by himself. He’s got his headphones on listening to his music. He needs to be in a certain mindset. He needs to think about baseball while some of them are better not thinking about it at all.”

Not coincidentally, Sheesley is ranked fifth or sixth in his class and is a member of the National Honor Society. He also has a photographic memory.

Ask him to describe the pitch he threw to the second batter in the third inning on a 3-2 pitch and he can probably tell you That’s why Schmitt, a man Sheesley so admires, let his prodigy call his own game against the Tigers.

“When he’s on like that, he can probably call pitches better than I can,” said Schmitt, who has a record

of 112-41 during his six-year career, including 21-2 in the postseason. “He can read hitters and he can remember every pitch he threw to every kid.”

Sheesley also is sensitive to remember those who have influenced him the most — his brother and his coach.

So when it came time to write a composition for Diane Benson’s English class a couple of weeks ago, Sheesley paid tribute to the two men. From all reports, the paper was a work of art.

“He writes stories about Bob,” George Sheesley said. “They’re beautiful.”

But just to underscore his devotion to his coach, Sheesley paid Schmitt the ultimate tribute in the seventh inning. Needing one more strike to end the game, Sheesley, who had called all but two pitches, pointed to Schmitt in the dugout to give him a sign one last time.

“He just looked over at me as a gesture of, ‘Thanks, a lot, Coach,’ and I called the right one.”

Hamm went down swinging, completing Sheesley’s moving performance.

Schmitt was still touched by it all more than an hour after the game. How many 16-year-olds would share the biggest moment of their lives with their coach?

“Well, we must be doing something right,” Schmitt said.

Three state championships in six years speaks for itself. So even though the names change the results are the same.

Added Schmitt: “It’s nice because at the end of the game in the dugout, Adam Beckerink is saying, ‘Wait a minute, there must be something wrong. We can’t be state champions. We lost everybody (from last year). We don’t have any pitching.’”

Of course, Beckerink’s comments were dripping with sarcasm. Truth be told, Sheesley’s pitching performance ranks up there with the best that any Frewsburg pitcher has ever thrown.

It couldn’t have happened to a nicer kid.

And, by the way, he got an A-plus on that paper.