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Till's Career, Life Epitomize Meaning of Success

Winning has followed Dale Till wherever he has gone in his life. Be it in sports or in his battles with cancer, he has been successful at just about everything.

The Fredonia State baseball coach won two conference titles as the quarterback for the Fredonia High School football team from 1951-1953. He also led his high school baseball team to a Section VI title in 1953.

His success didn't stop with his graduation from high school. He attended Fredonia State during the mid-1950's and is still the holder of three Blue Devil baseball records—RBI's in a short season (20), most homeruns in one game (3), and most total bases in one game (12).

Till feels he has been the product of some very good programs over the years.

"I always felt I could be successful," Till said. "But I like to think that I'm only as successful as the people around me and that's where I've been extremely fortunate."

After college, Till continued to win. He was a member of numerous championship baseball teams in the Western New York area during the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's.

Till credits his father for encouraging him in baseball and feels that his interest in coaching stemmed from his father's involvement in athletics when he was younger.

"He was my coach when I was younger. Plus, I grew up around sports and I helped out with a bunch of teams," Till said. "And I just got the bug to do it."

He came to Fredonia State in the spring of 1974 and compiled a 16-9 record during his first year as varsity baseball coach after serving six years as an assistant. Till took over the varsity coaching job, fulltime, in 1980 and since then has put together a quality program that continues to play one of toughest schedules in all of Division III.

Over his 16 years at Fredonia, Till has piled up a Blue Devil record 344 wins. In 1990, he led Fredonia to a SUNYAC title and, SUNYAC West Division crowns in 1990 and 1991. He also garnered SUNYAC Coach of the Year honors in 1990.

Assistant coach Dave Criscione, who has worked under Till since 1980, feels that Till has put the Fredonia baseball program on the map.

“When we came here, there wasn’t much of anything in terms of baseball so we feel like we put the program together,” Criscione said.

Sophomore infielder Matt Reynolds feels that Till is a very easy coach to play because he is very laid back and relaxed.”

“He’s the type of coach that won’t get on your case but will tell you to keep working hard and improving,” Reynolds said.

Till says he’s always been able to get along with the players.

“I feel I’ve become more laid back over the years but I still want to see effort out on the field,” Till said. “If I don’t see guys giving 110 percent out there, then I get irritated.”

Even with the laid back attitude Till brings to the field, the players still have a great amount of respect for him.

“They respect him and all that he does for them,” said Criscione. “He tries to give them the best possible competition.”

Usually when a player or coach achieves the amount of success that Till has, the possibility exists that he could be elected to one hall of fame, if he’s lucky. Fortunately for Till, he has been elected to not one, not two, but three halls of fame in the past eight years.

In 1988, he was inducted into the Fredonia State Hall of Fame for his achievements as a player and coach. In 1992, Till was enshrined into the WNY Softball Hall of Fame. His latest achievement, though, is the one that he ranks above the rest. Last month, Till was honored as one of this year’s inductees into the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame.

“These awards aren’t about what I’ve done,” Till said. “I just feel lucky that I’ve been able to play with and against some great players and coaches.”

“The latest award is probably the one I’m most proud of because of the select company I am with.”

Till said that when he was younger, there was school and then there was baseball. Now, he sees a decline in the interest shown by prospective players who don’t bother to continue their playing days at the collegiate level.

“The kids today really don’t show much of an interest because they’ve been so overplayed through little leagues, high school, and summer leagues,” Till said. “When I was younger, we’d get home from school, grab our mitts and bat and head to the nearest spot where we could play ball. You don’t see that anymore.”

Change isn’t a word that would accurately describe Till. He was born, raised, and still lives in the Fredonia area and has spent most, if not all, of his playing coaching career in the Western Southern Tier of New York. This consistency has carried over to his coaching as well.

“I think I’ve tried to remain consistent with the kids but I’ve come to realize that there is more to life and coaching than just winning,” Till said. “Winning is great, but when you’ve gone through what I’ve had to, winning isn’t so important anymore.”

Till has had to endure his fair share of battles in life along with the battles on the baseball field. He has twice recovered from cancer surgery and is now an active fundraiser for Roswell Park Cancer Research Center in Buffalo. He also speaks throughout the area communities about the disease.

“I have received a lot of calls from people who just want to talk about it,” Till said. “I feel I’ve done a lot of good for the research center because I wanted to give something back to those people who helped me.”

Now in the twilight of his coaching career, Till has decided that Fredonia State will be his last stop.

“I’m taking it season-by-season for now,” Till said. “And when I feel I’ve had enough or the fire stops burning, then I know it’s time to hang ‘em up.”