

By Christy Arnold

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Real People and Their Real Stories

Winning on the Field and Off

America's spirit of opportunity and justice echoes through every baseball park across the 50 states: each team is given three outs in an inning and each player is given three strikes at bat – three chances at glory.

It is a game that feasibly can last forever with no clock dictating time and it's a game that's won and lost solely on how the game was played.

On any given day, anyone can emerge as the hero.

Deep Creek resident Dale Till knows this perhaps better than anyone else: he's won more games than any other coach at Fredonia State University in New York.

But his impressive 425 victories on the field don't match his accomplishments off the field – the 63-year-old retired coach has also beat cancer three times.

With a 2-year-old, a 4-year-old and a 6-year-old, Till and his wife Ann received the most harrowing news a young couple can hear: colon cancer.

"The first time was the most difficult... I just prayed he would live five years until the youngest was in school and I could work full-time," Ann said.

But Till survived those five years and many more by beating colon cancer.

"I got a lot more than I ever dared to pray for," Ann said.

Though the joy and gratitude lasted, the Tills began praying again in 1988 when doctors diagnosed Till with colon rectal cancer.

Not only did Till knock the first curve ball thrown at him out of the park – but he got right back in the batter's box and beat cancer again.

And if life hadn't thrown him enough curve balls, the powers-that-be launched another one at him in 1999, this time with kidney cancer.

Just like the game of baseball, Till was given three chances at the plate –and emerged heroic each time.

With 425 victories on the field and three wins off the field, Till was inducted into three different Halls of Fame: Fredonia State University, Chautauqua County and Western New York Fast Pitch Softball. Till played 23 years of fast-pitch softball and was a member of 26 title-winning teams.

“Luckily, I’m here,” Till said. “I always tell people, I’m really, really lucky.”

Till’s eyes sparkle when he talks about his coaching days and his mosy successful 1982 season, with a record of 31-11-1.

But while the sparkle reveals his love of the game, the wisdom of life overtakes his soul. The winning record on the field takes a backseat to his personal triumphs outside the chalked lines.

“Then you find out these things aren’t that important,” Till said of his coaching record.

Enjoying retirement and good health, Till and his wife bought a townhouse in Deep Creek last spring.

After years of visiting friends and family in Florida, the couple now has their own home in the Sunshine State.

The snowbirds share time in Charlotte County and near Buffalo, N.Y.

Though he may step back into the game as a recreational player, Till believes his most important endeavor is educating others about cancer.

In an attempt to help find a cure, he has been part of cancer research for John Hopkins University.

Till also volunteers at Roswell Park, the institute that helped him beat cancer in New York, and helps others deal with cancer.

“They keep making strides all the time,” Till said.

While “Mighty Casey” struck out – he went down swinging. And Till believes everyone should be swinging at the plate because life is too short to watch the pitches go by.

“You never know what’s going to happen,” Till said. “You never know what tomorrow’s going to bring.”

“Do as many things today... don’t wait.”