

Observer

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Former baseball player, coach Dale Till passes

Former SUNY Fredonia Hall of Fame baseball player and coach Dale Till passed away on Tuesday evening in Florida. He was 79.

Till was a standout player from 1954-1958 and coached at Fredonia for 27 years, 21 as the head coach. He began as an assistant under Bill Ludwig for six years and took over the program in 1980. In 1988, he was inducted into the Fredonia State Athletics Hall of Fame.

Till was credited with 428 coaching victories during the fall and spring seasons. In 1982, the Blue Devils won the regional ECAC Upstate Championship. In 1985, three of Till's players were selected in the Major League draft, with Jeff Shaver eventually reaching the Major Leagues. The school's lone conference championship came in 1990.

As a player, Till still owns the school record with three home runs in a single game. He also earned two varsity letters in basketball.

Till saw his share of tough times, too. He won his first battle with cancer in 1972, making a complete recovery. He had a recurrence in 1988, and fought back more recurrences after that.

Till spent all of his years as a head coach alongside his trusted assistant Dave Criscione.

Criscione related how Till was always concerned with the well-being of the players.

“Dale was an all-around good guy,” Criscione said, *“and cared about all his players. The kids loved him. It was a pleasure to coach with him.”* Criscione took over the helm in 1999 when Till had his third go-round with cancer.

More than just a coach, Till left a lasting impact on his players.

“He coached and led in a caring constructive way,” former player Steve Strauber said. *“We knew that underneath he was one of the most kind-hearted people you could ever meet.”* Strauber signed with the Detroit Tigers organization following the 1985 season.

Keith Ryan, a member of Till’s early teams, had similar thoughts. *“The thing I most appreciated about Coach Till,”* Ryan said, *“is that while we worked hard as a team and had some success in the early ’90s, he never took it too seriously and allowed a nice balance of hard work and fun ... We learned many life lessons under Dale’s and Dave Criscione’s leadership, all while having a great time doing so. They say when it comes to leadership, it’s a large part about valuing results and relationships. Looking back, that’s an accurate way to describe Dale as a coach and person. He’ll be missed.”*

Coach Till made quite an impression on a young Jim Honsburger, too. *“In the 80’s,”* Honsburger said, *“there was not social media, cell phones or readily available ways to get in touch with home when young men were dorming and away for possibly the first time in their lives. Sure, Dale knew the game of baseball and coached the team, but his strength was being the father figure for so many young men throughout his many years of coaching.”*

In addition to the wins and relationships, Till was reported to have never been ejected from a game and during his coaching career at Fredonia. Since retiring, he spent his summers in Fredonia and winters in Port Charlotte, Fla., where he would catch an occasional Blue Devil game during their spring trip. Since 1999, equipment manager Mike Kozlowski has not passed out uniform number 26 in honor of Till.