

Andy Yates (Iowa Fastpitch Hall Of Fame 2005 Inductee)



For almost thirty years in central Iowa, fastpitch softball was king of the cool summer nights. Andy Yates was one of the rugged individuals that was at the center of it all. He, along with scores of young men that loved the game spent each summer night chasing a dream.

Iowa was a special place for fastpitch softball. It seemed that every small town had a team. The larger cities had several teams. Each summer schedules were made, leagues were formed, tournaments were arranged, and the game was on.

On any given night hundreds of guys like Andy would rush home from work, disappear into the bedroom and reappear seconds later in full uniform. It was like Superman. Mom told the kids to be ready, because Dad had a game that night, and it was in Clear Lake so we would have to hurry. Off we would go into the Iowa night, with a dried beef sandwich in one hand, and a Coke in the other, as Andy would roar down the hi-way towards the next game. The radio blasted Johnny Cash, and Andy sang along. The kids dreamed of sno cones and hotdogs, and of getting to see the men that had become their heroes play ball.

The game was different back then. Men had old floppy gloves. There was no such thing as a metal bat. Black cleats were your only choice for footwear. Most shoes had tape on them to hold the cleats on by the end of the year. The entire team drank from a community bucket with a ladle, or a cup on a string. Everybody on the home team helped get the field ready. Pregame routine consisted of a hotdog and a cigarette, five minutes of playing catch, five minutes of pepper, five minutes of infield, and it was time to play ball. They were there to play a double header.

Once the game started it was serious business. I still remember sitting in the dugout as a batboy and seeing the faces of these otherwise friendly guys. They all had the same purposeful look about them. Fastpitch was played with a passion. That time spent between the lines was for serious, highly skilled athletes to face off against their opponents. This was not a game for the faint of heart. You had to be of a special breed to live the fastpitch life. You had to love the game.

No one loved the game more than Andy. Born in central Iowa in 1935, Andy was always an outstanding athlete. In highschool he was quarterback for the Webster City Lynx, and also starred in baseball and basketball. He played baseball and basketball for Iowa Central Junior College. But early on, even in junior high, Andy discovered he had a knack for "chuckin' the rock". As a kid he started pitching against grown men. Along with his older brother Wendy, the two became quite a pitching duo.

By the late 1950's Andy had become the ace hurler for the Webster City Merchants. He was making a name for himself around central Iowa as a hard nosed pitcher with an exploding riseball, and pinpoint control. He was also known as an outstanding hitter during the first half of his career. As he racked up strike outs, and wins, and no hitters, he soon became one of the elite pitchers in central Iowa.

In the fall of 1960 Andy lost the ring finger on his left hand in a farm accident. He didn't miss a beat when it came to playing ball though. He went on to lead his team in hitting the following season. Along with the loss of his finger came Andy's career long trademark. Since he now had no ring finger on his glove hand, his glove was always loose. Instinctively just before going into his windup he would raise his glove in the air and vigorously shake it to make sure it was on tight. Well, as a batter you surely thought

this guy was some kind of nut. Why was he shaking his glove at you? A few seconds later after you had waved at three rise balls, one on the inside corner, and two on the outside corner, you ambled back to the dugout shaking your head, still wondering why that guy was shaking his glove at you.

Andy played most of his career with the Webster City Merchants. He also played for Kamrar, Webster City Held and Simmons, Fort Dodge Sandy's, and Woolstock's LL's Boosters. Andy also was "picked up" by numerous teams to go to the state tournament when his team didn't make it.

Andy was lucky enough to play for two different Hall of Fame managers. Dean Williams, and the late Lawrence Cheney. Andy was also team mates with many Hall of Fame players, including Lawrence Cheney, Roger Buddin, Mike Palleson, Zip Hansen, Dean and Gene Olson. The list of Hall of Famers Andy regularly played against will make your head spin. Great players like Zunkel, Hensley, Slagle, Busch, Dreesman, Sturges, Wilkerson, Knop, Savage, Aceto, Blankenburg, Messerly, and Leroy Carlson. The list goes on of these legends that regularly did battle with Andy over the years.

For over a quarter of a century Andy Yates was one of the top pitchers in the state of Iowa. His consistent excellence year in and year out, his character on and off the field, and his love and respect for the game can only be matched by those few who have went down this path.

During Andy's career he played in some 600 games. He racked up over 400 wins, and over 4000 strike outs along the way. He had 9 no-hitters, and won more than 35 tournaments. Andy's teams won numerous district titles, and won sub state titles 9 times. Andy played in 14 state tournaments and finished in the top 6, eight times.

The Webster City Merchants finished second three times, and in 1972 they went undefeated all the way to the finals, beating the eventual champion Clear Lake Butter Topp along the way. The Merchants lost in the finals to Clear Lake. The team awarded Andy the MVP trophy for the tournament.

Six years later Andy was coaxed out of a brief retirement so that he could play with his son, and frankly he still had some of the old magic. Playing with the upstart Woolstock LL's Boosters Andy led the way at age 43 to the district championship, the substate

title, and all the way to a sixth place finish in the state tourney in Des Moines.

Andy Yates will forever be remembered as a giant in the Iowa softball circles. He was a true sportsman in the best sense of the word. He played hard. He played fair. Most of all he loved the great game of fastpitch softball.

In 2004 Andy had quadruple bypass surgery. Don't let that fool you though. If you ask Andy today to play a little catch he will gladly join you. Even at his age he can still make the glove pop. With that smooth easy motion that only a softball pitcher has he can still "chuck the rock".

Andy is retired and lives in Webster City with Charlene, his wife of nearly fifty years. Call him up for a round of golf, or just to chat about the "Golden years" of Iowa softball. Those were truly the good old days.

I respectfully submit Andy Yates for consideration to join the Iowa Fastpitch Hall of Fame for the class of 2005.

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