

Fast Pitch Softball Resume of Clayton “Sonny” Kalishek

Career mainly in Protivin, Iowa (Now of New Hampton, Iowa)

It was 1956 and the regular pitcher for the Protivin men’s fast pitch team was called to the military. Protivin was part of a highly competitive league in Northern Iowa and Manager Julius Shileny had no idea what to do, so he had all the players warm up pitching before the game against Puritan of Cresco a team full of top hitters.

A strong young boy of 14 caught the eye of Shileny and Shileny told the youth, “You’re going to pitch tonight”. The young lad said to Shileny, “I don’t know if I can do it”. Shileny responded, “If you’re going to play on this team, you’re going to do what I tell you”

The Protivin team won that game 7-2 and the opposing manager said to Shileny, “Your boy is not very good”. Shileny responded, “But he was good enough to beat you”

The 14 year old boy was Clayton “Sonny” Kalishek. The rest as they say is history.

Kalishek got a lot better and would go on and win over 800 games in the next 25 years and not only pitch his team from a town of just over 300 to the state tournament, but also pitched his military team to a European Championship in 1965, while in the Army in Germany.

Kalishek’s fast-pitch softball career was not only limited to some amazing exploits from the pitching rubber, but he was also one of the most feared hitters of his era cracking over 400 Home Runs while maintaining a batting average of over .300 during his career.

Kalishek’s arsenal of pitches included deadly rise balls and drop balls clocked by an engineer from McDonald-Douglas, using some sophisticated equipment, at 96 mph in 1963. Many who faced Kalishek said he threw as hard or harder than pitchers who claimed to throw over 100 mph. He also had an almost unhittable knuckle-ball that when the wind was right he could almost exclusively get by with it.

Kalishek’s pre-military career in Iowa was highlighted when he pitched his Protivin team population 302 to the State Tournament in 1962. In those days, there was one class and one state tournament limited to 8 teams. At the state tournament, Kalishek locked horns with Hall-of-Fame pitcher Leroy Carlson of Sioux City. At the end of regulation neither team had scored a run against the opposing team’s fire baller. The only run of the game scored on an error on a bunt play in the eighth inning and Protivin fell, 1-0. The game ended with a runner on and a drive off the bat of Bill Prochaska (later the coach/AD at Upper Iowa for over 30 years) to the deepest part of the park caught by the Sioux City outfielder right at the fence. The 1962 Protivin team also included Bernie Kerian in centerfield the father of hall-of-famer Steve Kerian.

From 1964-1966, Kalishek was stationed in Germany and was considered one of the top if not THE Top fast pitch pitcher in Europe. He pitched his team to the European Championship in 1965 and was on the way to doing it again in 1966 when he was transferred back to the states.

He returned home and in 1967 picked up where he left off in Iowa. Over the next several years though still one of the best pitchers in the Upper Midwest he would suffer through some arm problems and would play first base much of the time where he let his bat do the talking with long home runs.

In the late 60s and early 70s he was recruited by Larry Lange Ford out of Cedar Falls to be a regular. They had a job and everything all lined up for "Sonny", but because of commitment to the family business at home, Kalishek was unable to play on a full-time basis.

He still had some big moments with Larry Lange including a pitching duel win over Jerry Ralfs of Welty Way in 1970.

In 1971, while pitching for Protivin, Kalishek pitched and hit his team to victory in a duel with Hall-Of-Famer Denny Linderbaum. In the early season game, Kalishek hit 2 2 run home runs accounting for all his team's runs in a 4-3 victory. The team from Cresco also included two other Hall-of-Famers, Jim Soverign and Al Rausch.

Mainly because of Kalishek, the team though from a small town made up of local young players, never shied away from the toughest competition they could find. In 1972, through the first 8 games of the season, 4 double-headers against the defending Wisconsin State Champs, the runner-up in Wisconsin and the runner-up in Minnesota, and the team that finished third in Iowa, the team was 4-4, but 4-2 in games Kalishek played and 3-0 in games he pitched. In addition, Kalishek had 3 home runs in the 6 games against the best competition in the 3 states.

The 1972 season was also highlighted with another trip to the state tournament for Kalishek and Protivin, the third in 10 years. Also, during that season, Kalishek dueled against Clear Lake "Buttr Top" the team that eventually ended up tenth in the country and lost to them 4 times by 1-run.

The "Kalishek Influence" affected several others from the small community. John Svoboda practiced endlessly emulating Kalishek and was considered one of the top pitchers in Iowa by the time he graduated from high school in 1966. Arm problems limited Svoboda's pitching career, but he did become a top player in the Midwest as an outfielder for Larry Lange of Cedar Falls and teams out of Kansas City. Kalishek also had two younger brothers that became top fast-pitch players; Gary who was a tremendous outfielder and hitter and Joe who caught and played third, while developing into a feared hitter.

The Sonny Kalishek influence can also be seen in the development of top pitchers out of Protivin in the girl's high school game. Three girls including Sheryl Vrba, Mary Lensing, and Meagan Novotny from and around the community won over 135 games in their high school careers making Protivin the only community of any size in Iowa (and maybe the nation) that can make such a claim. In addition, another,

Diane Jirak won 99 games. Kalishek's influence directly and indirectly affected all of them in a positive way.

Through the years, Kalishek and Jim Soverign (HOF) from nearby Cresco had many battles on the softball field, with Kalishek gaining the upper hand most of the time. Kalishek would not only pitch the team to victory, but many times deliver a big blow from the plate.

Kalishek's legend was such that during the 60s and 70s in softball circles in the Tri-State area from Waterloo to Clear Lake from Austin to Rochester to Winona to LaCrosse to Madison to Prairie du Chien to Garnavillo to Manchester to Oelwein and all the softball towns in between, though a popular nickname of the day, when you said "Sonny" everyone knew who you meant.

It's also a testament to Kalishek and the teams from Protivin that during those years even though the top players from the top teams from the circle mentioned above had trouble pronouncing the town and most of its player's names, they didn't need a map to know how to get there to play softball.

Sonny now in his 70s is retired and lives in New Hampton where he still loves to talk about the game.

We have known Sonny for over 50 years and witnessed first-hand much of what this "Mr. Softball" accomplished on the field and the influence he has had on others who have achieved in the game.

We are deeply honored for this opportunity to respectfully submit for consideration:

Clayton "Sonny" Kalishek for the Iowa Fast Pitch Hall of Fame for the year 2012.

By

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Career Statistics for Sonny Kalishek

Pitching Career won 815 lost 147 winning pct .847
Home Runs 401

Clayton "Sonny" Kalishek

Pitching Stats and Home Runs by Year

Year	Team(s)	Pitching Record	Home Runs
1956	Protivin Merchants	8-2	-
1957	Protivin Merchants	24-6	2
1958	Protivin Merchants	22-7	12
1959	Protivin Merchants	27-7	18
1960	Protivin Merchants	34-3	21
1961	Protivin Merchants	40-7	22
1962	Protivin Merchants	52-8	18
1963	Protivin Merchants	54-9	24
1964	US Army Germany	37-6	10
1965	US Army Germany	44-3	12
1966	US Army Germany	41-1	11
1967	Protivin Merchants	27-3	22
1968	Protivin Merchants/Cresco	47-8	18
1969	Protivin//St. Lucas/Larry Lange	48-6	22
1970	Protivin/Larry Lange/St. Lucas	44-7	31
1971	Protivin Merchants	40-10	18
1972	Protivin Merchants	41-12	19
1973	Protivin Merchants	28-3	15
1974	Protivin Merchants	33-7	17
1975	Protivin Merchants	27-6	19
1976	Protivin Merchants	17-5	16
1977	Protivin Merchants	18-4	11
1978	Frederika	22-4	16
1979	Frederika/Waverly	23-7	12
1980	Frederika	17-6	15

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