

# GARY FISCHER

**Nominated as: Player**

**Nominator: Dave Hitchner**

**References: Rich Kurtz & Joe Adams (HoF 2018)**

**Nominee reviewed by Trustee: Gary Dover (HoF 2015)**

**Trustee comment:** It is clear to me that Gary Fischer has and continues to be all about having a passion for the game. He's consistently found ways to channel his passion far beyond his own individual success as a player.

As impressive as his accomplishments are on the field as a World Series Champion to a multiple-time Most Valuable Player award winner, it can be argued that they are surpassed by his contributions to the game off the field. As attested to by his nominator and references, he's used his passion as the springboard to introduce young people to the game, to teach it, and provide opportunities for others to compete, succeed and most importantly, learn the many invaluable life lessons the game teaches anyone who plays it.

One measure of a person's character is how they treat people who are in no position to benefit them, and it is this quality that separates Gary Fischer apart from others. His excellence as player, genuineness as a teammate and commitment to advance opportunities in the game are the embodiment of a Roy Hobbs Hall of Fame inductee.

## **Achievements:**

- Sacred Heart High School - Team Captain of Baseball State Champion in 1979 and State Baseball Champion in 1978
- Sacred Heart High School - Named Most Valuable Player in 1978
- York College of PA - Regional Tournament - Pitched a complete game against #1 ranked Marietta College of Georgia in 1981
- Sports Illustrated Magazine's "Old Spice Athlete of the Year" in 1995-1996
- United States Over Thirty Baseball League's 1993 Triple Crown Winner for the Most Valuable Player, Cy Young and Batting Title Awards
- United States Over Thirty Baseball Cy Young Award Winner in 1997 and 1998
- South Jersey Seminoles Most Valuable Player and Most Valuable Pitcher Awards in 1998
- Bridgeton Invitational Tournament's Most Valuable Pitcher in 1998
- South Jersey Seminoles Manager's Award in 1998 - Recognizes Outstanding Qualities of Leadership, Sportsmanship and Versatility
- Bridgeton Invitational Tournament Achievement Award for Outstanding contributions to the Tournament for having played in 5 decades ( 1979 through 2016)
- Roy Hobbs World Series - current player since 1993 to present and have played for 8 different teams.

## **Nominator comments:**

Nominator and references responded to questions. What follows are their responses to the questions or their letter of reference. (Some of this material has been edited for redundancy.)

***Please tell us what IMPACT this player and his character have on his dugout and his teammates, and why. Examples are helpful.***

**Dave Hitchner (NOMINATOR):** Baseball has been continuously "in his blood and veins" from Little League, high school, college semi pro and numerous baseball organizations. Just like a pro leader in the clubhouse, his leadership skills demonstrate good decision-making, consistently never too high, too low, and one who initiates communication, emphasizing the positives of performance and encouragement to correct mistakes in judgment.

As an example of Gary's impact on others, sometime ago he installed a batting / pitching mound cage in his backyard providing opportunities for instruction to his two sons, neighborhood kids, teammates, community young adults as well as himself for self-improvement. He later brought that same passion for sharing his knowledge of hitting a baseball or pitching off the mound by establishing a small business named, "The Bat Rack," located in a small community strip mall. It was there Gary invited several others to visit and meet his friend, Jeff Trout and his son, Mike, centerfielder for the LA Angels.

**Joe Adams:** What makes him so liked with his teammates is that he is always there to provide counsel to the younger players and always willing to share in the spotlight. This begins with treating the game and all who participate in it as a teammate, opponent, or an umpire with respect. His depth of knowledge of the game, willingness to share it with others and unwavering commitment to play the game the right way is among the bedrocks of his success. In Gary's case as an example, after a big RHWS game where he pitched one-run ball over 7 innings and hit a decisive 3-run home run, it would have been easy to just take in the praise, but instead Gary chose to recognize a player who was in his first year with the Twins and made him a hero by talking about him being player of the game, getting his first two hits at the series and making an outstanding play in the field to save a run. That player is still with the Twins today and speaks about how that simple gesture made him feel part of the team right out of the gate.

**Rich Kurtz:** Gary is the ultimate team player. Here are a few examples:

He has never questioned where he was batting or where he was playing, making managing a team a lot easier and setting a positive example for his teammates to do the same.

I have asked Gary to catch a game in 90-degree heat and then come into pitch. I have asked him to pitch the semifinals and finals in the same day. I have asked him to start a game in the morning and close a game in the evening in different leagues. Not once – did he ever refuse to take the ball.

***In your opinion, what qualities and/or accomplishments make this individual special ... that he STANDS APART from his peers and should be recognized through induction to the Roy Hobbs Baseball Hall of Fame?***

**HITCHNER:** I vividly remember Gary as a player, then a coach/manager of a local semi-pro team in the historic Salem County (NJ) League. He did it all; player, manager, representative at league meetings, field preparation and maintenance and vocal cheerleader! He was always the first to arrive and the last to leave.

From my first-hand experiences knowing Gary and sharing time with him as a player and coach for me at West Cumberland Little League levels, and the 53-year-old Bridgeton Invitational Tournament as a player and now, as the tournament director, over the past 25 + baseball seasons, Gary's always established ways to improve the team (with the goal of putting the very best on the field) as well planning ahead to prevent problems from arising.

**ADAMS:** As a player Gary is multifaceted, with the ability to play any position on the diamond at a high level of performance. He has delivered exceptional results as a pitcher, where he has perennially been the staff #1 or #2 starter on multiple championship teams he has participated on, resulting in a .700 winning percentage in Roy Hobbs World Series competition. On multiple occasions Gary has been both ends of the "battery" starting the game as its catcher and finishing it as its pitcher, with no loss of ability to compete, oftentimes in dominating fashion. Over 17 years with the Twins Gary has carried a .350 batting average. Gary's teammates on 4 different teams have voted him 8 team Most Valuable Player awards.

**KURTZ:** He has continued with his passion for the game through several area college-level leagues well into his 30's and 40's, winning multiple league championships. In 1996 Gary was named the Amateur Baseball Athlete of the Year by Sports Illustrated magazine.

Gary has excelled as a player and currently as a Director for the Bridgeton Invitational Tournament for over five decades (1979-2021). This event has been featured by Sports Illustrated for its innovations such as the DH rule, time clock for the batter and the pitcher speed-up rule.

***How is this person a difference-maker with his teammates? In what ways does this person create positive or negative energy in the dugout?***

**HITCHNER:** Unlike the Roy Hobbs fictional character, Gary Fischer has never had “a pause” in his baseball career; still having the urge to play at a highly competitive level since he was 8 years old. His respect for and appreciation of the game provides the drive for him to succeed on the field, the mound or behind the plate. Gary’s continual pursuit of achieving satisfaction from baseball-related activities is a testament to his love of the game.

**ADAMS:** Gary has been my assistant coach and bench coach for 15 years. He has a keen understanding of the time commitment needed to manage the team, establish the team’s culture and values and most importantly effectively communicating and aligning them to what is needed for the team’s success. This takes time, work, and the trust of the team. I never asked Gary to assist but he was thrust into this role by the team. He is a natural leader in the clubhouse and on the field. Always quick to encourage and comfortable initiating communication with teammates always focusing on positives reinforcement even in the face of discussing mistakes on and off the field.

Here is an example of his natural leadership ability: We had locker room incident with a player who allowed another team into the lockers, which was not allowed. After we talked with Hobbs, Gary went to that player and speak with him about the incident. Having done this the player then apologized and then addressed it with our team. Gary addressed it with the team on his own as a leader in the clubhouse so that we could 1) support our teammate who made a mistake, assuming he did not do this again 2) ensure that the rules were reinforced with the team so this would not happen again with anyone else.

**KURTZ:** Gary is all about team and getting better. It is that simple. He creates a positive energy in the dugout by supporting his teammates no matter what the score may be. His teammates know they can seek him out for advice on any aspect of the game, be it hitting, pitching, or fielding. He picks you up when needed and is always willing to hit ground balls, have a catch, throw batting practice or soft toss. After the game will sit and chat about the game and what he saw and ask what you saw in certain situations.

***Is this person a difference-maker off the field, away from the game? Please explain.***

**ADAMS:** When competitors talk to Gary, there is respect both for him as a player and a person. I have been part of many conversations over the years and in all of those with Gary he will ask about them, their family or about something that he remembers from a previous year...he makes it personal, and this is who Gary is.

For example, I remember one time when Gary asked about a player’s health, an issue the previous year. The player lit up and the discussion went on for 20 minutes about the Tom House Rehab drills and the long road back. Gary made a connection because he was genuinely interested in hearing about how this player went through rehab and was back on the field. This player felt like he was the only player in the locker room.

**KURTZ:** A successful businessperson and family man, this is only surpassed by Gary’s love for his family, baseball, and his community over the years. He has raised two sons, Gary, Jr., and Darren and continues to be a mentor and role model to both. Darren was selected in 16<sup>th</sup> round of the 2013 draft by the Tampa Bay Rays and Darren and Gary work together giving lessons and doing camps helping promote baseball to the youth in our areas. Their training has proven to be educational, fundamental and health conscious to the individuals partaking in their camps. Not all camps care about the health of the young players these days.

As I mentioned before, Gary took over as the Director of the Bridgeton Invitational Tournament after city administrators decided it was not worth their effort to continue. Gary stepped up and secured sponsors and volunteers to keep the tourney alive with new ideas and format in 2018. Although the COVID-19 pandemic forced cancelation of the event it is back in 2021.

***In your opinion, how has this nominee promoted the game of Baseball for his teammates and you?***

**HITCHNER:** Possibly the zenith encompassing all of Gary's baseball experiences and achievements combined his efforts as a father, mentor, and role model for his sons, Gary Jr., and Darren. Both sons have played partly due to their father's influence and their innate love of baseball. Gary Sr.'s persistence in providing training opportunities and involvement in coaching, eventual led to Darren's group of 15-16 year old Senior League team winning the 2008 World Series for Little League Inc.

As Director of the Bridgeton Invitational Tournament from 2017 to present (two years it wasn't held due to a complete washout of the field and last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic), Gary has admirably demonstrated skill in decision-making and teamwork. Often multitasking, he surrounded himself with a team and coordinated required services resulting in a successful tournament. On a personal note, and after considering the mission statement of the Roy Hobbs Hall of Fame organization, I recall the time Gary Fischer was coaching a local Little League team and learned another coach with the same team had sold his house and needed a place for his wife and him to live as settlement on his house was a few months prior to the completion of the house they were building. After hearing the complete situation, without hesitation, Gary offered the coach, and his wife to temporarily move into his house with him. I thought his offer was a sacrificial testament to his character off the field. By the way, the other coach was me!

**ADAMS:** Gary has always been a stand-up person who sets up for others to be able to play and enjoy the game of baseball. For example:

He gives back to the community and the youth on his and the neighboring towns, serving as a coach, manager official and mentor to youth of all ages at West Cumberland Little League including the 2008 World Series Champion Senior League Boys Baseball Team.

He has provided an indoor training facility for kids to train year-round and served as a trainer for baseball skills to local little leagues in the greater Cumberland and Salem County areas. I witnessed a young man using his batting cage; Gary went over unsolicited to help this young man with his swing. He worked with him for 30 minutes doing T-work and then back in the cage where the improvement left this young man with a huge smile and invigorated when he left the Bat Rack.

For the past 5 years, he has served as the Director of the Bridgeton Invitational Baseball Tournament. This semi-pro tournament is in its 55th year and its specialty are "Speed Up Rules" and is operated by a clock, all of which is currently being considered by Major League Baseball. This event has had former professional players and celebrities throughout its existence. As the years went on the tournament faded a bit from the limelight and about to be mothballed, Gary stepped in and volunteered his time. He took on the challenge of bringing this tournament back to its glory days and provide a format for young players to compete at the top levels of competition.

This shows some of the core qualities that Gary possesses. His leadership and humility along with his loyalty to people and the game have provided opportunities to play, learn and enjoy the game of baseball for both the youth that he trains and coaches and the adults that he plays with and against.