

# JOHN HARALDSEN

**Nominated as:** Player

**Nominator:** Matt Baer

**References:** George Clam & Tom LaForce

**Nominee reviewed by Trustee:** Joe Adams (HoF 2018)

**Trustee comment:** Always a fierce competitor but as many know John Haraldsen as one quick to congratulate accomplishment and tip his cap to both teammates and opponents. John Haraldsen's player resume is strong and worthy of review. He has been part of 5 championship teams of which one was a AAAA championship.

On the field John plays the game the right way, as his coaches and teammates have stated. He is one of those "players that conduct themselves with class and sportsmanship win or lose." While every team has one, John was the model example of a good teammate and player. John is player who helps indoctrinate new players as to "how we do it". John makes it a point to talk with every new player to ease their mind, welcome them to the team and not only sharing the team philosophy but to understand who that player is and what they are all about.

Ed Kodman, who is the primary manager of the Lugnuts, is notorious for not inserting himself in the lineup. John was hotter than a pistol at the plate but at the end of a game is suggesting that Ed bat for him so Ed can get a plate appearance. This example was not the only time and seemed to happen multiple times during his tenure.

John is an ambassador for baseball. In the late 80's John was invited to join some adult players from the local Oak Lawn league in Illinois to travel to Russia to promote and help young Russians learn the game of baseball. This early Oak Lawn League was the nucleus of the current Roy Hobbs league in the Chicago area. John wanted to do all he could to help these people so prior to the trip so he wrote detailed descriptions of pitching, fielding, and hitting tips that supported the on-field demonstrations the guys were prepared to showcase. John has always gone above and beyond.

According to reference George Clam, when John arrived, he noticed that the fields they use were horrible. John indicated that for their workshops, practice sessions and exhibitions, they were often playing anywhere where there was a wide expanse of grass or dirt that could accommodate baseball. John talked about one drill where he was hitting ground balls and with the field condition bad hops were not unusual. John decided to take some infield with the boys to show them that even if they get hit with the ball, the pain is tolerable and temporary. While doing this he demonstrated the proper techniques of fielding a ball. While there, John spent time "after hours" continuing to hit infield while attempting to teach them the proper techniques. While their skills were rudimentary at best between the coaching, extra ground balls and his 'cheat sheets' that he had put together there was some improvement in their skills, however, more important was their enthusiasm for the game was markedly improved. This was all done above and beyond the expectations of this trip.

Off the field John is as gracious and supportive as he is on the field. Two examples of this are his Haraldsen's Garage which has been a model citizen in his community for almost 70 years and has supported many civic causes especially those that benefit youth organizations and youth sports. His business logo is on all the fences and walls of the local ball fields and gyms. The other example and one of the most impressive aspects of John's life which sets him apart from many is his compassion and willingness to step up and help children in need.

Something few know because John is the farthest thing from a self-promoter, is that throughout the 1970's and early 1980's, John and his wife fostered over 50 children. More impressive was this was at a

time before there were any financial incentives to do this and so John and his wife took on the financial obligation. In addition to helping so many children, the Haraldsen's adopted 2 young boys during this time.

The character of a man and his true North should be unswerving. On or off the field, when others are watching but more importantly when no one is watching. John is as consistent in his approach to life, baseball, or work. As an All-Star in his league back home or on the field at Hobbs, he quickly became one of the most popular players and a leader in his dugout.

Quoting George Clam: *It's hard to encapsulate a 77-year life and a 70 year baseball career in a few words. But in John Haraldsen, you could not find a better example of someone who loves and promotes the game and has excelled at baseball and in life. His personal attributes of friendliness, compassion and thoughtfulness permeate his actions, his character and his approach to life.*

## **Achievements:**

- John was the first inductee into the DuPage Lugnuts Hall of Fame. The traits described in this nomination for consideration for the Roy Hobbs Hall of Fame was what made him the first Lugnut inductee.
- 2021 will be John's 31st RHWS.
- Part of 5 championship teams, one a AAAA championship.
- His managers state that during a 10-year Roy Hobbs World Series run he won 80% of his starts, averaging 2-3 starts per tournament.
- From Tom LaForce: In 2002, John pitched against a Baltimore team at Lee County Stadium. That team had, I believe, at least 2 ex-major leaguers, Ross Grimsley and Pat Kelly that I can name. John shut them out in a complete game. I was playing first, and it was Pat Kelly, who reached first base and said, "your boy is a handful, damn, how many different pitches does he have?"
- Before the official A, AA, AAA, AAAA, format began, the Lugnuts, then the Los Diablos, came into Saturday morning needing to win FIVE 3-inning lightening games to advance to the semifinals. John won the first 4, pitching all 12 innings. They lost the 5<sup>th</sup> game, but John pitched that one too.
- Traveled to the Soviet Union on a baseball trip, to play and to teach baseball, in late 1980s.

## **Nominator/Reference 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.)

**1. Please tell us how this individual and his character affect the game of baseball and his baseball colleagues on and off the field, and why. Use CONCRETE examples.**

**MATT BAER:** John is the model sportsman. He always competes hard for the win, always backs his teammates with positive support and encouragement and treats everyone (umpires, opponents, friends and strangers) with dignity and respect. I marvel at how many people John knows at and around the ballpark. He seems to treat everyone as if they had been long time friends.

**GEORGE CLAM:** John's quiet determination has a motivating yet calming influence on his teammates. In the 35+ years I played with John, I have never heard him utter a word of complaint. This sets the tone for the whole team when one of your veteran players exhibits such exemplary behavior. John also serves as the team's "defacto" trainer. Need a shoelace, tape, minor glove repair? John inevitably reaches into his equipment bag and almost always comes up with what you need. He's also the first one to provide ice for an injured player or umpire. This is a consistent sign of his compassion and preparedness.

Another thing that reflects his "can do" attitude is in the area of field care. After virtually every league game, John will spend 10 to 20 minutes raking and watering the field and working on the pitcher's mound and batter's boxes. He has no responsibility to do so but does it out of his love of the game and consideration for his teammates and opponents. These actions make John a highly respected player and league member.

John was included in the inaugural class of the Lugnuts' Hall of Fame in 2017. His election is a reflection of John's impact, both on and off the field, on his current and former teammates and a clear sign of the respect that they have for John as a person and as a player.

**TOM LAFORCE:** John was an All-Star in our league from the start and quickly became one of the most popular players in the league. Always a fierce competitor but one quick to smile, congratulate accomplishment, and tip his cap to both teammates and opponents. Even from the other side of the diamond, it was obvious that he was a leader in his dugout.

John went to his first Hobbs WS in 1990. He was one of only a couple of players from our league that was even aware of Hobbs at the time. Almost all of our league players that played in the fall were going to Arizona in the early 90's. By 1994, John had established himself as one of the premier players in our local league and his strong presence, integrity, and performance carried a lot of weight. He had been touting this Roy Hobbs tourney for a couple of years, and in 1995 I was invited to join his team as a player for the 1995 tournament. The rest is history. I had a blast at Hobbs playing with a number of other Chicago area guys that also started coming to Ft Myers, ALL BECAUSE of John Haraldsen. Many, many Chicago area players owe quite a debt to John for making us aware of the Roy Hobbs organization.

***2. What qualities and/or accomplishments make this individual special ... that they STAND APART from their peers and should be recognized through induction to the Roy Hobbs Baseball Hall of Fame? Use CONCRETE examples.***

**BAER:** John was an early participant in the Roy Hobbs World Series beginning in year #2 in Orlando. He played in every RHWS up until 2020 when he did not play in RHWS 32 due to COVID precautions. I was not around in those early days of the tournament but have been told that John talked up the event and recruited many players that became long time participants. He is one of the many that have helped grow and sustain the tournament and has been an ongoing advocate for RHWS.

For many years John was the ace of the staff for the teams that played in the RHWS and would log more than his share of innings in an effort to propel the team toward and through the playoffs. He has been an integral part of several championship teams in multiple age brackets.

**CLAM:** One of the attributes that truly separates John from others is his universal likability. Virtually everyone who crosses John's path finds him friendly and congenial. I never like to follow John in the post-game handshake line because he engages many of the opponents in a conversation, not a cursory "nice game". It reflects his sincere interest in his fellow players and his friendly nature.

John's baseball skills, particularly in his prime, also set him apart. He can and has played every position on the field. Specifically, John has proven himself as a talented pitcher with a Capital "P". He does not have any single pitch that is overwhelming. But he always knew HOW to pitch. Hitting corners, changing speeds, spotting pitches, he would keep opponents off balance and unable to predict what was coming. He made his pitching an art.

In addition to his pitching prowess, John has always been a solid hitter and fielder. When not pitching, he usually plays 2nd or 3rd base. At 2nd, you routinely see him backing up 1st base on throws from the left side of the infield. His consistent hustle constantly inspires others.

John has also distinguished himself off the field. Setting John apart is his history of fostering children of all races and creeds. During the 1970s and 1980s, John and his wife fostered over 50 children. This was during an era when there was no monetary subsidy for serving as a foster parent. John and his family bore the full financial burden and costs of caring for these foster children. This was clearly a step above and beyond. In addition, John and his wife adopted 2 of the foster children, including one who was Afro-American, and raised them on an equal basis with their own children. John and his wife willingly and successfully undertook this task. It clearly shows that John is not afraid of a difficult challenge and that he

serves as a difference maker to others, particularly to the kids he fostered over the years. It also reflects John's enduring compassion, strong character and humanitarian commitment.

I know I have never heard a word of complaint from John in the 35 + years we have played together regardless of what the circumstances were. He treats his teammates, opponents and umpires with utmost respect, professionalism, and friendliness. Also, I have consistently seen John seek out the groundskeeping crews at Roy Hobbs World Series fields and thank them for taking such great care of the fields and giving us the opportunity to play on such terrific venues. That's John.

**LAFORCE:** I take great pride in fielding teams that play the game the right way. I only want players that conduct themselves with class win or lose. Never argue with an umpire or comport yourself in a manner that reflects negatively on the team or the league we represent. In our early years, John Haraldsen was the example I held out as the model of what I wanted to see as a representative of the Angels. Certainly, there are others, but John is the anchor every team needs to show new players "how we do it!"

I have never seen John lose his cool on or off the field. He is always the first to shake hands or tell a player to keep his head up. I've NEVER seen him berate or make a teammate feel bad even when a poor play cost him a run or a game. Never a rah-rah guy his character and performance drive his teammates to want to perform for John. Teammates see – and know – that he will ALWAYS take the ball! I

Off the field, John's qualities really shine. His father started a mechanic business in the early 1950's in Westmont, IL. John took over the business in the early 1970's and now his son runs the business. Unless you are honest, loyal, trustworthy, and personable, you don't run a 3-generation business of any kind in the same town much less as a mechanic. John's garage has been a model citizen in his community for almost 70 years and has supported many civic causes especially those that benefit youth organizations and youth sports. His business logo is on all the fences and walls of the local ball fields and gyms.

**3. From your list of character qualities and/or your line of reasoning in support of your candidate, if you could pick only 2, which would they be and why? These should be compelling and your stories should demonstrate how your candidate is EXCEPTIONAL.**

**BAER:** John's character and competitiveness stand out to me. John is well known and well liked. You will have a very hard time finding anyone that will not have anything but positive things to say about his character, friendliness and integrity.

As a competitor he stands alone for me. One dramatic example came at a RHWS between ten and fifteen years ago. The Dupage Lugnuts had advanced to the Friday single elimination playoffs. John pitched a complete game victory in the morning game, took a lunch break and came back to pitch a complete game victory in the afternoon game. No, he did not pitch the next day, but his iron man performance propelled us to championship Saturday.

**CLAM:** I would not describe John as a vocal leader. While he always encourages his teammates, he is not a Braveheart battle speech kind of guy. Instead, he leads by example with consistently solid performances, peer encouragement and a friendly nature. However, his quiet demeanor belies his fierce drive and competitiveness on the field.

Simply because of team demographics, John has always been one of the older players on our team and in our league. I would guess that he was always about 8-10 years older than the average player in our league. Yet he continues to exhibit enthusiasm in his participation and serve as an inspiration to other, younger team and league members. He does all this while performing at a high level. Today, at age 77, he continues to play, perform and serve as a role model for other players of all ages. Teammates and opponents observe his behavior and have developed sincere respect for his positive approach to the game of baseball and its participants. His participation and attitude make it a better experience for all involved.

I also remember a specific instance where John gave a young kid in the stands a ball. We were playing a game at Lee County Stadium. John and I were playing long toss in the outfield before the game. As we

walked to the dugout, John saw a young boy about 5 or 6 sitting in the stands with a glove on. John approaches the boy and says, "Can you catch?" The boy shakes his head yes, and John flips him the ball. The boy is smiling from ear to ear and then, for whatever reason, says "Can you sign this?" John replies, "Sure, I have a pen in the dugout." He then takes the ball from the boy and brings it into the dugout. There, he grabs a pen from his equipment bag and signs the ball. I thought that was the end of it but instead, John walked down the dugout and had every Lugnut player in there sign the boy's ball. When John walked back to the stands, he handed the ball to the boy. You would think he had a ball signed by the 1927 Yankees!

**LAFORCE:** Qualities – First is his compassion and willingness to step up and help kids in need. Second is the way he thinks of and treats others.

Something few know because John is the farthest thing from a self-promoter, is that throughout the 1970's and early 1980's, John and his wife fostered over 50 children. This blows me away! More impressive was this was at a time before there was any financial incentive to do this - the Haraldsen's paid. In addition to helping so many children, the Haraldsen's adopted 2 young boys - one is African American. They raised these young men equally with their son John Jr. and daughter Dawn. Can you imagine the positive impact he has had on so many children?

John is a true ambassador for baseball. His demeanor, willingness to do what's necessary, and can do attitude is worn on his sleeve. In the late 80's John was invited to join some adult players from the local Oak Lawn league in Illinois to travel to Russia to promote and help young Russians learn the game of baseball. This early Oak Lawn League was the nucleus of the current Roy Hobbs league in the Chicago area. John wanted to do all he could to help these people so prior to the trip so he wrote detailed descriptions of pitching, fielding, and hitting tips that supported the on field demonstrations the guys displayed – always going above and beyond.

Here are 3 examples of how he treats others:

First, are just finished warming up and waiting for the game on PDC1 to start. Johnny noticed a young boy standing back by the backstop tossing a ball up in the air and catching it in his glove. Always looking to give a youngster a positive experience at the ballfield, Johnny walked up to him and said "hey son, wanna play a little catch?" I had just left my meeting at home plate and watched the entire exchange. The kid just lit up and said yes with a great big smile. They threw the ball eight or nine times before John had to stop and join us in the dugout. It apparently had quite the effect on the youngster because after the game, the boy's father sought Johnny out after the usual line handshake to thank him for the gesture.

Second, before almost every game we've played at Hobbs, Johnny makes sure to go up to somebody on the grounds crew, shake their hand, and tell them how much we appreciate playing on such outstanding fields and that we recognize we could not do that without their hard work. John loves the aspect of groundskeeping in general. 100% of the time back home in Chicago, any game that John has been involved in will find him fixing the mound and batter's box when the game is over. This is not his responsibility but it's something he enjoys, and he knows it makes the job a little easier on those that are responsible.

Third, I have never seen John show any sign that he was upset with an umpire or any call that was made while he was pitching. I have heard him say on more than one occasion, usually after someone has bitched about an empire, that hey guys, we are amateur players lucky enough to still be playing the game we all love, and we are far from perfect as players so why should we expect a perfect umpire.