

MIKE MILLER

Nominated as: Player

Nominator: Dan Marino

References: Tom Wedlock & Dan Cugini

Nominee reviewed by Trustee: Bill Russo

Trustee comment: What comes through loud and clear is not only is Mike an excellent player with numerous accolades and Championships that his teammates attribute to Mike's play, but his character as a person. Not only will he take the time to make new teammates feel welcome, he will work with anyone to help them get better.

He is also a loyal teammate. Even though teams continue to ask him to play with them, he will only do so if his team is not playing. In addition to playing, he was assistant commissioner and commissioner the first 3 years that the Naples Adult Baseball league existed.

Mike learned early how personal attention can impact a player. One of his coaches took time after a game to work with him. He improved from that point on. It was a valuable experience that he uses to pay it forward. He works with young people not only in baseball but other sports to help them realize that the potential is there. The just need to work on certain things to gain the experience and confidence to make them better.

Mike has coached at various levels and even started a baseball program at The Community School with no pay just to give the young people an opportunity to learn and to play the game well.

Achievements:

- Mike has been a 12-time MVP, won 6 RHWS championships, been a winning pitcher every year, and has had the highest batting average on his teams almost every year I have known him.
- Was the assistant commissioner of the Naples Adult Baseball league in the 1st year of the league and commissioner 2 years
- Was nominated for the State Farm Good Sportsmanship Coach of The Year
- Has coached at Saint Ann's, Naples High, Lely and Seacrest.
- Started the program at The Community School
- Coached at the YMCA, St John's Neumann, and the San Carlos and Bonita Little League.

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.)

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. *

DAN MARINO: Mike has been around the game for 50 years. He has had the opportunity to work with people to help them become the best ball player possible. After Mike's college career was cut short by injury, the path to higher level ball was difficult and not in the cards for him. However, Mike had the ability to reflect on those who believed in him along his journey and decided he should do the same.

As a teacher for over 30 years, he gives back every day. Some would say that's enough, but Mike has been providing his baseball wisdom and knowledge to the youth of SW Florida for more than 25 years by volunteering. He has provided hitting lessons at his house and local fields. He volunteered as a little league coach in the Bonita and San Carlos Little Leagues. He took a leadership role in the Naples Adult Baseball league as acting commissioner.

Mike's values crossover to the field as well. I have played with Mike for nearly a decade and never have I seen a more supportive teammate. He never has a critical word for a struggling player. I've seen Mike many times take a player aside to help them with their swing or talk strategy and technique after a play gone awry.

Mike is an incredible competitor but never lets that cloud his judgment of what men's amateur baseball is about - the camaraderie, the fun and lifelong friendships.

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. *

MARINO: Mike has won 12 MVP awards in the Roy Hobbs WS, been on 6 championship teams and has an incredible winning record as a pitcher. He is sought after by many teams to play for them, but his loyalty to his core teammates keeps him from running off to play for a perennial championship team. People with Mike's talent have a choice all the time. But he is a man of character and commitment. As a hitter Mike not only can hit for power but average and to all fields in situational spots. I'd rather have Mike up in a "need a hit" spot than nearly anyone else.

All that being said about his abilities, I have never seen Mike act as if a lesser player is beneath him. He roots hard for lesser players to rise to the occasion, supporting them with a quick tip from the bench with 2 strikes. And, he offers encouraging words if things don't quite work out. Mike's underdog viewpoint is probably from the years of support he received as an underdog himself. This is why Mike gives back to the sport by volunteering and teaching those who volunteer so they can provide quality training to the youth who play this great game

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.

MARINO: Mike's qualities are many. He is humble, dedicated, compassionate, spiritual, supportive and committed. But to me, Mike's biggest qualities are loyalty and commitment. Mike is a person I met simply because we played on the same team. Our commonality was baseball. Mike's main position is pitcher, and he is a good one. So, he is heavily sought after especially for tournament play. I will admit we have not always had the best teams at times. I have personally heard Mike tell a manager who is trying to recruit him, "Hey if my current team doesn't put a team in, I'll let you know." Even though he would probably play on a sponsored team, hit 4th and pitch when he wanted to, he stays with his "boys".

Mike almost never misses a game. In the past two years he has been struggling with his health. Yes, he will take a few innings off now and then, but he tells his teammates go in and play 3rd base, tells me he wanted to make sure guys get their time. His commitment to his teammates and to the game cannot be challenged.

Mike has always been a person who does what is right, not what is popular or just what is expected. Winning is secondary to his personal standards. Mike told me this story a few years ago which exemplifies his character and his desire to give back to the game.

In Little League, Mike had a coach named Coach Woj. One day after going 0-for-3 at the plate, Coach Woj asked Mike to stay after the game. Mike, thinking he was in for a serious talk, was surprised to learn that the coach wanted to work with him to see what could be done about improving his hitting. Coach Woj stayed after the game with Mike, in the dark no less, to work with him. That time spent with Mike paid off. He went on to have 3 hits the next game. Mike says that the time spent in that moment made him the player he is today in many ways. He directly attributed that time to becoming a better hitter that very day as the "hitting light bulb" went on for him. More importantly, as Mike reflected back on that day as an adult, he realized the real gift was the time the coach took at that very moment to work with a struggling player. Mike has given his whole life to coaching and teaching players and students about things he knows. He realized that, at any given moment, you can be a great influence on someone for good or bad. This is where Mike's consistent, even personality and attitude comes from. Never wanting to be a bad influence.

One player that Mike influenced in a huge way is a boy named John R. John was in 6th grade at the time and not always the best family situation. Recognizing this, Mike kept a special eye on John. He was a great basketball player and Mike was coaching him. The other teams knew John was great and would double or triple team him, effectively shutting John down. He was very distraught by his lack of performance. Mike sat John down and said, "It

can't be done all by yourself." They devised a plan to have John bring his teammates more into the game and play the role of the "sleeper" until the end of the game. John would then have a man-to-man situation which might give him the opportunity to win a game for the team. The plan worked and worked very well. During the time Mike coached John, they were 54 and 10. After John left, the team went on to a 113 and 7 record over the next 4 years.

John became the spark for those players, and he never forgot that. He attributes his success today as an Ophthalmologist to Mike Miller. Mike will tell you John gives him too much credit, but John says it's because Mike taught him how to adapt to road blocks, bring others along with you and that it takes a team to be a success.

Reference comments, did not directly answer questions:

Tom Wedlock: I have played with Mike Miller off and on for the past 20 plus years. He has always been an amazing player, teammate, and friend! I started playing with Mike in the mid 90's when I was a new arrival from out of town. He was one of the first players to welcome me with open arms to an experience which I would have never been able to predict at that time

I took several years off after my initial experience playing almost 10 years with Mike and the team to focus on other things. Mike was the one who reached out to me, got me back involved, and reminded me of what I was missing. Since then, I have been so thankful to Mike for having experienced the great times that have continued to today.

On the field, he has always been as solid as they come with his glove, the bat and most of all on the mound. He has a mind and strategy for pitching that I never experienced before. I never realized how much he was thinking out there until I had a chance to pitch for the first time while he was playing third base. He would give me advice on the next 3 hitters coming up to bat...and I needed to get a note pad to remember it all!! This experience gave me a lot more insight to understand what and how he accomplished the things that I was so fortunate to observe.

That's Mike! He was always out there to compete at a high level, help his teammates, and motivate those around him. Even when he would offer constructive criticism which was always well deserved...it was with great detail while offering suggestions for improvement. His goal has always been to improve himself and others with the team in mind.

Dan Cugini: Mike's impacts our teams. The coaches let us go out and play our game, and we are all able to play freely because we know that if we start faltering, we can bring Mike in to close the door on the opposing team because he is such a power pitcher. We have a Mariano Rivera waiting in the wings, so we play very relaxed. He is a ferocious competitor regardless of how well he does.

Mike and I ride to the games together as we both live in Naples and the games are in Fort Myers 45 minutes away. One day I was talking about my 12-year-old daughter and that she had quit acting and singing abruptly because some of her peers told her she wasn't good at it. I told Mike that she had finally taken an interest in something else, volleyball. Mike immediately offered to teach her because he had coached volleyball in his past. "No charge of course," he said, "you are family." So far, he has coached her for 6 months and has given her the confidence to join a volleyball team which she now loves.