

ERNIE STEVENS

Nominated as: Player

Nominator: Howard Elson

References: Mark Jekel & Rich Kline

Nominee reviewed by Trustee: Ted Lesiak

Trustee comment: Ernie Stevens was nominated by Howard Elson in 2020, however did not receive the required votes for induction. In 2021, he was once again nominated by Mr. Elson.

The information provided in the nomination form is almost identical for both years. I asked but did not receive any further information from Mr. Elson. I have received two references for the Stevens nomination. Other than Roy Hobbs records and information received through the nominators and references, I have not been able to independently verify the baseball accomplishments included in the nomination. However, there is no reason to question the information received. Reference Rich Kline did not submit any new information. I am including his statement from 2020.

I have done a background check, and did not find any negative issues that should be considered.

Stevens has significant accomplishments as a baseball player and as a manager in his younger years.

Reference Mark Jekel never played baseball with Stevens, however he did give me an interesting reference. Mr. Jekel provided information about Stevens with his family and in the workplace. He also provided information from Stevens' teammates that he interviewed for the reference. This information reveals good character on the field, but little in particular that is exceptional (other than his playing ability) that defines Stevens as a great leader or a great teammate.

If there are any negatives, I did not receive any from the references.

Achievements:

- 1975 MVP Pleasant Hills American Legion
- 1976-80 Varsity, University of Pittsburgh
- 1976-2003 28 years playing in The McKeesport Daily News League, a semi-professional league in Western PA. Holds the record for most hits, runs scored, triples, stolen bases and walks.
- 1988-93 Player-MANAGER in The McKeesport Daily News League.
- Retired from the league (after re-locating to Endicott, MD) as the oldest "everyday" player.
- Was awarded a plaque for "25 years of service" to the league in 2000.
- 1992,'93 Member of MSBL Fall Classic Championship Pittsburgh teams.
- 1994-2013 Roy Hobbs National Tournament. Member of 10 National Championship teams with Pittsburgh and Border City.
- 2013 MVP for Over 53 National Championship Border City team in Roy Hobbs 25th Anniversary tournament.

Nominator comments

Nominator and references were requested to respond to questions. What follows are their responses to the questions or their letter of reference, if submitted. (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. *

HOWARD ELSON: I played with, and against, Ernie Stevens for over 20 years. For many of those years, we were teammates on the great Pittsburgh teams that won many regional tournaments and national championships. In local league play, we were opponents; me, pitching, Ernie, at the plate, on the base paths, in the outfield, doing everything else. I have never met a baseball player who could control, change or dictate the flow of a game better than Ernie Stevens.

As I stated when I was part of the broadcast team for a televised national championship game, "Ernie Stevens is the catalyst. He has power and speed, he's the total package. When he gets on base, the game takes on another dimension."

As a leadoff hitter Ernie had a great "eye," could take a walk, bunt for a base hit, had gap power and speed that turned singles into doubles, doubles into triples. On the base paths, he was the ultimate disruptor. He took a huge lead, daring the opposing pitcher to pay too much attention to him. He was, always, a threat to steal and rarely got thrown out. Pitchers were distracted. Catchers called for fastballs, knowing they had no chance to throw him out otherwise, setting up the middle of the lineup that knew what was coming. Middle infielders would cheat towards second base, opening up holes. He always "took the extra base." Defensively, he was the ultimate centerfielder. Smart, speedy, sure-handed. He never took a "bad route", ran down and caught fly balls in either "gap" that other outfielders would play "on one bounce," and had the arm to throw a runner out. His style of play energized and inspired his team and made his teammates better. I saw it and experienced it on numerous occasions.

From an administrative/managerial perspective, Ernie has demonstrated his character and responsibility to the game on several occasions. In addition to the 17 years Ernie excelled in Roy Hobbs, he also played for 28 years in The McKeesport Daily News League (DNL,) a very highly regarded semi-pro league in Western PA. For 6 of those years ('88-93) Ernie managed, played and financially supported a highly competitive team in that highly competitive league. He organized, managed and played on the team he founded, the Bethel A's. He acquired the field permits for two separate fields and purchased all the equipment and supplies to field a competitive team. Throughout that period, Ernie spent over \$7000 of his own money in support of his team and league.

Additionally, with his contacts, time and energy, Ernie was the driving force behind getting to play the 1992 DNL All Star Game at Three Rivers Stadium, a unique and memorable experience for many of his teammates and rivals. He also contributed \$500 of his own money to the DNL commissioner to use towards the fee for using the Pittsburgh Pirates home field.

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.

ELSON: Longevity, excellence, consistency of effort, concentration and focus... From the first pitch to the last out, in ALL the aspects of the game; in the batter's box, on the base paths, in the outfield.

Longevity, in baseball, is a "funny" thing. As many of us age, and our talents and physical attributes diminish, we make accommodations in order to continue playing the game we love. Pitchers who "lose something on their fastballs" have to find other ways to get hitters out. Power hitters who lose their "pop," find other ways to get on base. That is admirable.

Ernie Stevens, from his childhood days on the sandlots of West Homestead, PA, through American Legion ball, where he was MVP of his team in 1975, 4 years playing for the University of Pittsburgh, 28 years playing in the semi-pro McKeesport Daily News League, where he holds virtually all lifetime batting records, through 17 years in the Roy Hobbs league and tournaments where he was MVP for the "Over 53" Border City national champions, Ernie Stevens has NEVER had to "change his game." From the sandlots to the "Over 53's," Ernie Stevens has been the consummate leadoff hitter and centerfielder that all others aspire to be. That is remarkable...

Throughout his life; through job loss (due to industry and economic downturn,) relocation, divorce, baseball has been, for Ernie, "the constant." Were it not for his relocation and the parental responsibilities he feels for his two daughters, Ernie Stevens would still be excelling on the baseball diamond.

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.

ELSON: 1. From an "on the field" perspective: The ability to influence a game in so many ways. Ernie was, truly, a "5 tool player." He could hit, hit for power, run, field, throw. From the lead-off spot, I have seen him inspire his team and teammates with timely hits (in 2009 his 2-run triple led Pittsburgh to a 2-0 win in the championship game,) stolen bases, extra bases, and fielding gems (on numerous occasions in championship games, Ernie has made run saving, game saving diving catches). These were not "only" individual achievements. I saw how they served to energize and inspire his team and teammates.

Additionally, as previously stated, through the sandlots, Division I college baseball, 28 years in high level semi-pro leagues, and of course, 17 years in Roy Hobbs, Ernie Stevens' level of play and style of play never changed. He was the consummate speedy, pesky lead-off man and centerfielder who could do it all.

2. From an administrative/managerial perspective, as stated previously, Ernie stepped up and demonstrated his character and responsibility to the game by founding, managing and financially supporting a competitive team in a competitive league and being instrumental in securing a Major League venue for that league's All-Star game.

Reference comments

Reference, Mark Jekel

The character reference that I am providing herein is a little different from many that I have read, in that I have never played competitive baseball with Ernie, and I have never played for Roy Hobbs. My connection with Ernie is from work. I have known Ernie since 2004, when he was brought on to do software for us related to a job on which we were bidding, and he has been with the company ever since. I have known him from work and from personal interactions, doing social things with him outside of work.

First, I will discuss Ernie's character as I see it off the field. After that, I will share interactions I have had with multiple people who have played with Ernie over the years, having contacted these people for direct interviews.

I would like to point out that Ernie has two great daughters, 12 and 14 years old. He loves them and is always planning for how to do nice things for them and how to give them the best childhood he is able to as a single parent. Ernie stops by my office, on a somewhat regular basis, to discuss things. He has shared exciting things and difficult things. In my view, the real test of a person's character, is their behavior during difficult times. I have been struck with this aspect of Ernie's character: he does not bad-mouth people. He carries himself in a classy way, even when things are difficult, and he has had his share of challenges.

In 2007, Ernie and I were working on the same program at our company. During this time, there was a conflict between two individuals that got heated on a number of occasions. Ernie's responsibilities resulted in interacting regularly with both of the two, and I saw him trying to be reasonable with each and trying to bring resolution to the problem as a peacemaker. This incident was not isolated, but rather is in keeping with the way I have seen him treat people in our sphere, caring about people and connecting with them; Ernie is a relationship builder. He goes out of his way to keep up with different people and show his concern for them personally.

We will now transition from my personal experiences with Ernie, to the results of my interviews with people who have been eyewitnesses of Ernie's behavior through the years.

Ernie was involved in the Daily News League from 1976 through the 2003 season (28 consecutive seasons). First, he played for Jefferson A's 1976-1983. From 1984-1985 he played for Bethel Park's team. From 1986-1987 he played for the Carrick Lancers. These teams had all folded, due to the manager not being able to run the team anymore, so from 1988 to 1993, Ernie created, built, and ran a team called the Bethel A's. As team owner/manager/secretary, he recruited players, paid for field permits, paid umpire fees, paid for uniforms, and paid the league fee. All told, the cost for running the team was about \$1200.00 (which of course would be a significantly higher figure in today's dollars). From 1994 to 2003 played for the Antoncic Phillies.

Here are some comments from those I talked to:

Hutch Chiapetta: Ernie played with Hutch in the DNL. According to Hutch, many of the people that Ernie recruited for the team could not pay their own fees, so Ernie covered the cost for all of them out of his own earnings; otherwise,

they would not have been able to play. Hutch said that Ernie would leave work over lunch and begin prepping the fields and then shoot back to work. After work, he would show up early to the field and continue to prep the field. If it had rained, he would try to get the field in good enough shape to play.

Ken Barna: He said that Ernie was kind to all the players and would encourage them. Ernie was one of the better players on any of the teams he played on. When people made mistakes or errors, Ken said that Ernie never told them off, made them feel foolish, or berated them in front of their teammates. He would say "don't worry about it" or "it's ok". He wanted people to do their best, but gave players room to improve and grow in the sport.

Ed Engstler: said that what you saw immediately upon spending time with Ernie was his love and passion for the game of baseball. He said that Ernie was always encouraging the people on the team to play their best. Ed described his way with the players as caring, kind and thoughtful.

Ted Jasko: manager of the Antoncic Phillies, for which Ernie played for his final 10 years in the DNL. This team won the championship 8 times. As Ernie's manager, he had a view of his play and interactions with other players that is unique. Ted said that one aspect of Ernie's character is his dependability. If Ernie said he would be at a certain field on a certain day, at a certain time, he would be there. Also, he said that there was never one game wherein Ernie did not give everything he had to playing the best ball he could, a total dedication to excellence over a decade.

According to Ted, not once in 10 years did Ernie ever cause a problem of any kind for him. Never caused a fight, never gave the umpires a piece of his mind, never argued about the manager's decisions etc., never made a single problem in a decade of play. Never in 10 years did Ernie give a younger, less experienced or less talented player a hard time about a mistake they made...not once. Never in 10 years did he lose his temper. Everyone has bad days and most people I know have said things during such times that they wished they could take back. This level of self-control, focus, and professionalism speaks to a solid, strong character.

George Aromatorio: George played with Ernie in two tournaments with the Roy Hobbs organization. George and Ernie's team won one of these. During these tournaments, George never saw Ernie lose his cool, and always maintained a respectful tone toward the coach and the umpires. George saw Ernie as a team player and a critical member.

Jim Ahlborn: Jim played against Ernie in the DNL from 1988 to 2003. Ernie's team beat them in many championships during those years. Jim remembers watching Ernie "hustle his butt off" on multiple occasions. Jim said that Ernie dominated center field, managed many difficult plays and had a significant impact on his team's ability to move on the bases. He was also impressed with how intense, smart and fast Ernie was on the bases, stretching doubles into triples. When they were putting together a team for Roy Hobbs, he was so impressed with Ernie's play that he told the coach to try to get Ernie to play center field for them.

They successfully recruited Ernie and played two RH tournaments together. The Roy Hobbs team quietly went about their business with a high degree of focus. According to Jim, this team had an unusually good team spirit. Everyone was friends. They were all comfortable with each other and there was a really strong camaraderie.