

Dick Gonzales - HoF - 1987



As I have outlived almost everyone that could have written this for me, I will do it myself. It will also give me a chance to reflect on those events which began approximately 60 years ago, and give credit to those who helped along the way.

Let me start by saying that my Dad was a wonderful man and tremendous ball player. Even though he has been gone from this earth 30 years, I still talk to him daily. He would have been extremely proud of my being inducted into the Hall of Fame, and I wish he could have been with me at the time. Any good things I have accomplished in life are to his credit, and to my beautiful Mother who has been with Dad for the past 10 years. As an only child, I was truly blessed to have such marvelous parents.

Dad was the catcher for a Waco softball team (Barnes Lumber Co.) in 1940. His pitcher was Jay Brock, a legend in Central Texas. I was the batboy, and Clyde Fortune, now deceased president of the ISC, was the right fielder. When WWII broke out in 1941, I was 14 and more or less got to play when so many of the players went in the service. When the War ended, the game of softball became extremely popular. It was a wonderful time of life as the country was completely united and my softball career began in earnest.

Clyde Fortune (HoF) returned from the military to manage Morris Jewelers, a local team that had Clayton Dugger (Hall of Fame) pitcher, and Johnny Appell (Hall of Fame) right fielder, and I was allowed to play first base. This was the start of wonderful friendships which continue to this day.

Before the ISC, there was the NSC (National Softball Congress), and a team called United Tile Co. played in the World Tournament at Phoenix in 1947. We came in fourth, and the fellowship that developed drove me to start each year thereafter with the goal to somehow make it to the next year's World Tournament. In fact, the following 19 years found me playing in a World Tournament somewhere, usually with Clayton Dugger pitching.

In 1951, Waco was indeed a city loaded with good Softball players. The city league was extremely strong, and Johnny Appell led a team composed of 2 or 3 players from several teams to play as a unit in the little town of Calvert, 60 miles southwest of Waco. This was a team consisting of Louis Williams catcher, Cecil Ellis pitcher, Frank Carpenter third base, Buddy Furrer shortstop, Bill DeLoach second base (one of the greatest hitters I ever saw), Johnny Appell left fielder, Buddy Storer center fielder, and Willie Hopkins right fielder. I was the first baseman. We played 83 games that year as Calvert, and won 80, including the World Tournament in Phoenix. Bill DeLoach was named the MVP of the tournament.

In 1952, Calvert came in second to San Pedro's Mary Star All-stars, where I first saw the two greatest players I ever played against, Lucky Humiston and Cleo Goyette, both in the Hall of Fame after many years with the Long Beach Nitehawks. This year we had Dugger and Ellis both pitching and alternating in right field, as they both could hit and field with the best.

In 1953, we came in third in Salt Lake City, and in 1954 were fourth again in Phoenix. Several of my teammates were then hired by Phillips Petroleum Co., where I enjoyed playing my last few years in Waco.

In 1959, I moved to California and played with Mary Star in the first year of the WSC, a league that was tougher than any I had ever seen. We played at least two 9-inning double headers a week, and every team had at least one All-America pitcher. It was not uncommon to face Richie Stephen one night, Jack Newman the next, then Don Sarno, Eddie Waymire, Gale Woods, Les Haney, etc. And the next year when the Nitehawks joined the league, we got to face Virgil Jones, Jack Randall, Leroy Zimmerman, Bob Bomar--just to name a few. Thank goodness I was privileged to play behind George Pearson those first two years of the Western Softball Congress.

By 1963, I was playing for the Gardena Merchants, managed by Dean Corbett. We managed to get the services of K. G. Fincher to pitch for us, and Don Leslie to play third base, and ultimately settled on Glen Posten shortstop, Frank Doucette second base, Don Guy catcher, Larry Roy left field (one of the very best softball players I ever played with),

Darold Klein center field, and Frank Schmidt right field. Later, we had Bob Guy at third base.

It goes without saying that I owe whatever success I had in softball to the players I played with. It is certainly no coincidence that I played with two of the greatest pitchers who ever lived--the first years with Clayton Dugger and the last years with K. G. Fincher. Also, I would be remiss not to mention my next-to-last fling with the San Bernardino Flame, where I was privileged to assist in the development of Hice Stiles and Bob Todd.

I played my last softball game in 1970 or 1971 with a team in Inglewood, Calif. I wound up playing behind Jack Newman who was pitching to Dick Zuccato, with Bobby Hunter in the outfield. Not a bad way to hang 'em up.

As I reflect on my ball career, it is with a great deal of nostalgia and wistfulness that I remember all of the guys I played with and for during those years. An especial thanks to all of you who tolerated me bringing my son Robin to the games and helping in his growing into a very fine man and Police Sergeant here in Las Vegas.

He has given me three Granddaughters: Brittany is 18 and will graduate from high school this year; Nicki is a high school freshman, and Kasi is a typical extremely young and lively grade schooler.

And to all of you who I competed against and made me a better player because of it--my good friend Frank Trejo, Dude and Dutch Ausmus, Art Bunge, and many others--it would be so nice if someday, somewhere we could end up together playing that marvellous game called fast pitch softball.