

Dick Thompson - HoF - 2000

DICK THOMPSON - MASTER OF THE 'BIG GAME'

An I.S.C. Hall of Fame Tribute and Biography

By: Gordon L. Wise - - - ISC Information Officer

Ty Stofflet, likely the greatest lefthanded pitcher in fastball history, got it right Describing a key defensive play turned in by thirdbaseman Dick Thompson during the 1964 ISC World Tournament, Stofflet cited Thompson for "saving the game - - - a BIG game - - - for his team".

How prophetic were those words! Indeed the career of Dick Thompson, a 2000 inductee into the International Softball Congress Hall of Fame, reflects the achievements of a man who has competed in - - - and won - - - many such BIG games during his lifetime. And those BIG games haven't been limited to contests on the ballfields of Thompson's Midwest homeland.

The thousands of teammates, coaches, and young people whose lives have been touched, and often transformed, by the soft-spoken Thompson bear witness to some of the BIG games the native of Quincy, Illinois has played over more than half a century of service to his teammates, his schools, his students, his community, his church, and the sports which he has loved and played so well.

Consider the BIG games he played as he led his high school team to a runner-up finish in the incredibly tough Illinois state basketball tournament as a junior and then went on to be an Illinois All-State selection in his senior year. And how many such BIG games were involved as he collected 11 letters (basketball, baseball, football, and track) en route to a high school career which saw him enshrined in the Quincy High School Hall of Fame in 1988?

How about the BIG games which were a part of his college basketball career, first at University of Illinois, and then at Quincy College where he graduated in 1957 and was elected to that school's Hall of Fame in 1982?

How about the long career as a public school teacher and administrator - - where he spent 16 years in the junior high classroom as a math teacher followed by nearly two decades as an administrator, primarily as Assistant Principal? In those classroom years there was both love and respect as witnessed by the testimony of sportswriter Mike Moyers who in later years reflected on Thompson with these words, "As much as I hated math, I always looked forward to 'Mr. T's' class. Although he made it tough, he always made it fun."

Obviously those years in the classroom touched on more that just long division and algebra. Again in the words of Mike Moyers, "Everyone should be so lucky to have a special guy like Dick Thompson as their teacher and friend."

Those sentiments are echoed today by Quincy Mayor Charles Scholz who says of Mr. Thompson, "For decades Dick Thompson has helped maintain and enhance the quality of life in this city through his service to our community and the Quincy Public School System. Dick Thompson has been a tremendous role model as an educator and helped countless young people find their way along the road of life. He's still active today (2002) in many worthwhile endeavors throughout our city." That's sure a lot of BIG games to be winning - - - and it hardly touches on his exploits in the great sport of fastball, or in the type of career which led to his election to the ISC Hall of Fame. There were some BIG games there too.

Dick Thompson competed in six ISC World Tournaments. He was twice selected to the ISC "All-World" team. His Disco Foods Bombers of Rock Falls, Illinois, went well into the tournaments of both 1963 and 1964. In the '63 tournament, he pitched both a No-hitter and a One-hitter yet was so outstanding with the glove and the bat that his selection to the "All-World" team was as an infielder. He hit .333 and belted two home runs along the way. In the '64 World Tournament, Thompson tossed a PERFECT GAME against Salt Lake City, (scoring both runs for his team in the contest), batted .400 and was selected as the tournament's Most Valuable Player! Ty Stofflet's tribute calls him "a great thirdbaseman and a very good hitter" 'Nuff said!!

ISC Treasurer Charlie Smith faced Thompson's teams on the ball diamond and remembers Thompson most as a hurler "pitching with his cap turned a bit toward first base. He was hard to hit against because a person didn't know if he was throwing at the catcher, the batter, or to first base. You sure didn't want to dig in on him."

ISC President Dick Mason remembers Dick Thompson as "one of my childhood heroes the way he played basketball in Illinois and at Quincy College."

Fellow ISC Hall of Fame member, Bill Van Dine, remembers Dick Thompson from the years when Van Dine was manager of many ISC World Tournaments held in Rock Island, Illinois. "He was one of the most versatile and talented players ever; always a gentleman in any situation. Thompson was an aggressive thirdbaseman who played the position as well as any individual in the game."

And just consider how many BIG games this remarkable man impacted during his 29 years as a revered high school basketball referee and his 25 years calling 'em as a high school football official - - during which he officiated in many state championship contests - - plus several years as a college basketball official!

And how many BIG events, and BIG impacts have been part of his 47 year marriage to his wife Mary, and to their five children as well as now to grandchildren and even great-grandchildren!

His community involvement and contributions are legion and include such items as the YMCA Board; the Kids First Coalition; and the Breakfast Optimists. His church has benefited from this BIG game man through his chairmanship of its Board of Trustees. He is involved in both local and state Promise Keepers activities.

In his acceptance of induction into the ISC Hall of Fame, Thompson touched on his opportunities to use his talents, "God blessed us by putting the right people in our paths and lives to make each situation a positive experience, allowing each of us to grow."

The BIG plays, the BIG games Stofflet referenced have come Dick Thompson's way many times over the years, and just like that critical game back in the '64 World Tournament, he has responded. And his response has made an impact on countless others.

The plaque in the ISC Hall of Fame in Kimberly, Wisconsin, extols the fastball exploits of Dick Thompson. His contributions in the BIG game of LIFE are inscribed on the lives of those he has touched along the way.