

Jerry Ralfs - HoF - 2004

Jerry Ralfs
Davenport, Iowa

Jerry Ralfs was an outstanding left-handed pitcher and two-time ISC All-American (1969 and 1972) who threw for several teams in the Illinois and Iowa Quad Cities. He first pitched in the ISC World Tournament in 1955 in New Bedford, Illinois at the age of 18. In 1957, he was named the outstanding young player in the ISC World Tournament in New Bedford.

When he was 21, Jerry threw a no-hitter against Las Vegas in the 1958 ISC World Tournament held at Long Beach. Between the years of 1958 and 1972, he appeared in 7 ISC World Tournaments. During these years, he compiled a 13-11 record with 243 strikeouts and only 25 walks in 177 innings pitched. In 25 games, including one save, he posted an ERA of 0.63.

Jerry had his best ISC tournament in 1969 when he pitched Rock Island Sportshop to second place. He had a 5-2 record with 79 strikeouts and 6 walks in 47 1/3 innings. During the tournament, he shut out the defending ISC champion Long Beach Nitehawks twice. The Nitehawks had a tremendous hitting lineup that included Ralph Smith, Hal Martinez, Bob Osborn, Nick Hopkins, Milt Stark, and Don Sarno, players who accumulated 16 career selections among them as ISC All-Americans. In the two games, Jerry bested the formidable three-man pitching staff of Sarno, Art Bunge, and Sherm McKinnis.

Both of Jerry's defeats in the tournament were 1-0 losses to the champions, Sal's Lunch of Philadelphia, and the legendary pitcher, Ty Stofflet. Stofflet did not give up a run in the entire 1969 tournament. Jerry gave up only one earned run in the two games against Philadelphia. The other teams Jerry defeated in 1969 were Ft. Worth, Fresno, and Carson City, CO.

The 1969 games against Long Beach and Philadelphia were typical of the tremendous competition in every ISC game in the 1960s when the tournament featured only 20 to 25 teams each year. Of the losses Jerry suffered in those years, five were to ISC Hall of Fame pitchers, Ty Stofflet, George Pearson, and Jim Boender. He recorded victories over such All-American pitchers as Art Bunge, Ralph Salazar, and Ed Klecker and Hall of Fame members, Don Sarno and Howard Heuston.

His victory over Salazar came in 1972 when Jerry pitched his second ISC World Tournament

no-hitter to beat Fresno. In that tournament, he also beat Ed Klecker and the Lakewood Jets 2-1 in 19 innings in a game suspended by rain in the 15th inning at 3:30 a.m. Jerry threw a no-hitter for the first ten innings of the game against Lakewood, which was the champion of the powerful Western Softball Congress.

Immediately following completion of the Lakewood game, Jerry took the rubber against the Long Beach Nitehawks. Despite the previous night's marathon, he threw an outstanding game only to lose 1-0 on a no-hitter by the Nitehawks All-American, Bob Wills. Jerry's Hynes and Howe team from Rock Island finished third behind the Nitehawks and the champion Burbank Comets. The 1972 tournament was his second All-American selection. Jerry's contribution to fastpitch softball included his personal example of excellent sportsmanship. He always pitched with a smile on his face, hustled on and off the field, and showed respect for umpires, teammates and opponents.

His 1967 and 1968 appearances in the ISC World Tournament exemplified this sportsmanship. Both years, he pitched for teams with several inexperienced players and very little run scoring support. He earned only a 1-4 record in those two years combined despite posting a 0.56 ERA over the five games. Jerry continued to pitch well, wear a smile, and give encouragement to his teammates.

Jerry split his pitching career between the Quad Cities and Cedar Rapids, Iowa. His Cedar Rapids teams played an ASA schedule, and because of the prohibitions of the time, he did not participate in the ISC World Tournament during several of his great years between 1958 and 1972. He did team with ISC Hall of Fame pitcher, Ritchie Stephens, to pitch Cedar Rapids Welty Way to the 1971 ASA national championship. Jerry was a first team All-American in the tournament and posted a 3-0 record with a 0.00 ERA.

Jerry bracketed his top years with a no-hitter in the 1958 ISC World Tournament and a second no-hitter in the 1972 tournament. In addition to these gems, he also pitched three one-hit games and two two-hit games in his ISC World Tournament career. Included in Jerry's 13 tournament wins were 9 shutouts. Long Beach, Fresno, Clovis and Tulsa were among the hard-hitting teams that Jerry shut out during ISC World Tournament Play.

Jerry grew up on a farm outside Davenport, Iowa where he began playing softball in 4-H

leagues. He practiced pitching against the walls of the outbuildings on the farm and once managed to break the slats on the farm's corncrib by throwing a softball through them. He began pitching in the Walcott, Iowa men's fastpitch league when he was 14. While still a teenager, he joined the strong Powers Tap team from Davenport and played with eastern Iowa ISC teams in the early years of his men's fastpitch career. At that time, many small towns still sponsored strong teams, and Jerry pitched for Durant, Iowa in the 1961 ISC World Tournament where he posted a 1-1 record with 14 strikeouts and 1 walk in 13 2/3 innings. His ERA for the tournament was 0.51. Jerry defeated Gary, IN 1-0 on a one-hitter. Gary's pitcher was the crafty veteran, Horace Long. Jerry lost 1-0 to the Valpo Kings, one of the top Midwest teams of the period, led by pitcher Royal Church.

After pitching in Cedar Rapids in 1963, 1964 and 1965, Jerry returned to the Quad Cities. In 1966, he joined the Chuck Heriford TV team of Rock Island, Illinois which competed in the Illinois-Iowa Metro League. The Metro League and the Western Softball Congress were the top ISC fastpitch leagues in the country and were probably matched only by the Atlantic Seaboard League in the ASA.

The list of pitchers that Jerry competed against in the Metro League reads like a who's who from the ISC record book. Among the names are seven-time All-American and Hall of Fame member, Dick Brubaker; Jim Boender, three times an All-American and member of the Hall of Fame; Dick Thompson, outstanding third baseman as well as a pitcher who recorded two ISC tournament no-hitters and is in the Hall of Fame; Hall of Fame member, Ritchie Stephens, who spent two of his six ISC All-American seasons in the Metro League; Dick Pobanz, also a member of the Hall of Fame; Pete Carlson, Gary Hutchins, Merle Bollman, and Jim Sperry, all of whom pitched no-hitters in ISC World Tournament play; Bob Naab, All-American pitcher who had 5 wins for the 1961 Hamm's Beer team that finished third in the world tournament; and Ron Sprout who holds the ISC tournament record of 20 strikeouts in a seven-inning game.

Outstanding hitters also highlighted the rosters of the Metro League teams. ISC All-American players who Jerry pitched against in the league included Jim Aversing, Dale Cramer, Al DeWulf, Gary Dobereiner, Bob Herr, Jim Hosch, Bob Hunter, John Kipp, Don Leslie, Jack Stengel, Tom Stenger, R.C. Stevens, Dick Stiles, Chuck Thome, Charlie Toppert, Frank Trejo, Bill Unger,

and Dick Zucatto. This group of players has 5 members of the ISC Hall of Fame. In a league loaded with ISC All-American and Hall of Fame pitchers and players, Jerry Ralfs posted a winning record every year and led Rock Island Sportshop to the league championship in 1969.

Jerry pitched for 4 ISC Illinois State championship teams and 2 ISC Iowa State championship teams. Jerry finished his major level fastpitch career throwing for several strong teams in the Cedar Rapids Major Open. In the 1980s, he gave young players a chance to participate in fastpitch by organizing a local league for high school age boys. He passed his love of fastpitch along to his son who currently pitches for the Play It Again Sports team that regularly participates in the Eastern Iowa ISC qualifying tournament. This tournament consistently boasts one of the largest numbers of participating teams of any qualifier for the ISC World Tournament.

In the 1990s, Jerry returned to the rubber several times to pitch for local teams in the Eastern Iowa qualifier. He pitched his last game in the Eastern Iowa ISC tournament in 1995 at the age of fifty-eight when he played with his son Jerry, Jr. on the Play It Again Sports team. His sportsmanship, competitive spirit, smooth delivery and surprising "pop" on the ball, brought back memories of the period from 1958 through 1972 when Jerry Ralfs was a two-time ISC All-American with statistics in the World Tournament that place him among the elite pitchers of his era.