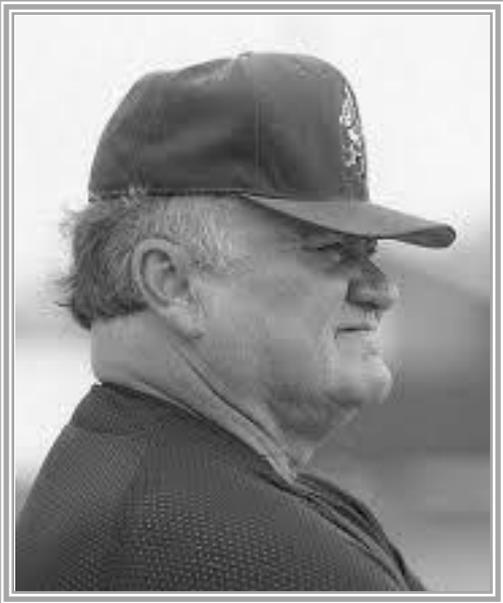


Rod Peterson - HoF -



Talk with anyone who has only the faintest awareness of the sport of fastpitch softball and they are most likely to mention the "four-man team" or "The King and His Court" (Eddie Feigner). That is what the casual fan can identify; it's what they remember.

Talk with anyone who has only the faintest awareness of the International Softball Congress and they are likely to bring up the incredible 34-inning game of the 1981 ISC World Tournament in Saginaw, Michigan. It's what the casual ISC fan can identify; it's what they remember.

But talk with a man who was THERE in Saginaw that night, and early morning, a man who was up to his ears playing in that legendary game and he can't recall how many times he STRUCK OUT on that August night.

That man is Rod Peterson who was the sponsor and the player-manager of The Farm Tavern of Madison, Wisconsin - - the team which lost that marathon struggle: "One highlight of that game for me was that I struck out seven straight times, or maybe it was nine straight!" the affable Peterson says with a deep chuckle.

The 70 year old Peterson has been short on strikeouts and long on successes since 1975 when he bought The Farm Tavern and fielded his own team. Playing consistently at the top level of fastball competition, Peterson's teams have been a fixture among the top teams in national and international competition. The Farm's victory last August in Kitchener marked the third I.S.C. World Championship for Peterson and his lads. They also nailed I.S.C. titles in 1997 and 1999.

That '97 win is described by Peterson as "the greatest thrill I'd ever had in my life" - - an experience celebrated by "drinking champagne out of cups and dancing at a club until 4:00 A.M. It was quite an ordeal." (Author's note: It must have been grueling duty having to celebrate all night in Victoria, B.C. But Rod and his lads surely were able to tough it out!)

Indeed in 11 of the last 12 seasons, The Farm Tavern has finished among the top four in I.S.C. World Tournaments. There have also been a few A.S.A. national titles along the way. Peterson was rumored as getting ready to hang 'em up after the 2007 campaign, but when Korrey Gareau hurled The Farm to the world title, picking up his second "Outstanding Pitcher" award, Peterson surveyed the situation and stated, "We'll be back to defend! I know I'm coming toward the end. I'm getting older and every year the kids seem younger. It's a tremendous amount of work." But the 2008 World Tournament is in nearby Kimberly, Wis. You can bet the farm boy from Rio, Wis. and The Farm Tavern will be there.

That is good news for the sport of fastball - - - and good news for the International Softball Congress.

Peterson was drawn to the game by a friend in the early 1960's. He became a first baseman, and in 1966 he became manager of the Music Box Tavern team in the Madison city recreation league. That role fit him just fine and it has fit so very well ever since. The indelible image of the powerfully built Peterson, hat pulled down over his eyes, with an intense and competitive visage strolling to the coaching box or to the mound is one that every follower of the top levels of the game knows very well.

He has seen, managed, or opposed all of the great ones over the last four decades of the game. He reflected on the top hurlers who have pitched for him over the years naming Paul Algar, who captured the "Outstanding Pitcher" awards in both '97 and '99 as The Farm prevailed ("In 1999, Paul was the only pitcher we had; he threw the whole tournament and we had some low-score games. I guess that speaks for itself").

In the same breath he named Korrey Gareau citing his 2007 performance as "pitching as good as any pitcher I have seen. It seemed the more he pitched the better he got."

Rod also mentioned his ace of many seasons, Peter Meredith (who was on the mound in that incredible 34-inning game). "Peter could throw as hard as anybody in the game. Maybe Joe Lynch could throw it a little harder, but Peter could throw it hard for as long as anybody."

The late Kevin Herlihy came in for high praise from Peterson. "He pitched just one year for me. I wish I had him in his prime. He could pinpoint every pitch, and he was very smart - - - he had the heart of a lion. I can describe Kevin in one word - - AWESOME!"

He also paid tribute to Peter Finn, the southpaw hurler who struck him out so many times in that 1981 classic, "It was the most amazing game I ever saw. Both pitchers were awesome that night and though I could be wrong, I don't think either pitcher was quite the same afterward. Peter Finn had a rise ball that night unlike any I ever saw in my 15 years of playing."

And on the hitting side, "I had a lot of good hitters, but the six who stick out in my mind are Jody Hennigar, Brian Martie, Donny Hale, Chris Delarwelle, Colin Abbott, and Rob Gray. Abbott and Tim Wahl each captured I.S.C. "Most Valuable Player" awards while playing for The Farm teams.

With his long experience in the game, Rod Peterson is in a great position to comment on the state of the game. He puts it this way, "Fastball has too many other activities to compete against. The kids have more money to do other things with today. I believe the I.S.C. is doing a good job trying to keep the game top-notch. They have gone back to a double-elimination format, and I approve of that. I do wish they would do away with the one final game.

The I.S.C. is starting to keep up with the times by having fewer teams. I also think they should make the World Tournament shorter. Last year we played on Saturday and didn't play again until Monday. It costs a lot of money to house a team and have them just lay around. The A.S.A. has opened up their tournament and I think this helps the game. The thing I really miss is not having more road trips. We used to be able to drive to tournaments on weekends, and these were some really good times. I miss that a lot"

And just what would this living legend of fastball say to a young guy who might be in the position he was in 1975 when The Farm Tavern came to live in the fastball scene?

Rod tells it this way: "I would tell him if he's in it for the long haul, he must be honest and loyal to his ball players. Treat every player the same. If you get a bad apple, get rid of him as soon as possible since one player can ruin a whole club. Be sure to get every guy on the roster playing time so that every player is contributing to what you are trying to do - - - win championships! And listen to your players - - someone might have a better idea than you. I tell my players I will listen to you and think about it, and if I feel it is a good idea, I will try it. But they must know that the final decision has to be the manager's - - that a ball club is the biggest dictatorship you will ever see. There are no team votes; there has to be one man running the show. And if you are fair, nobody has a problem with it.

Also when it comes to World or National tournaments, the manager has a responsibility to all players to put the best team on the field. You can't be worried about someone's feelings then. And lastly, don't give up on a player because he has a bad year. Just about every player has a bad year now and then. I think some managers give up on some players too soon."

That advice is coming from a man who has persevered into a fourth decade of sponsoring, and managing, and organizing a perpetual top-drawer team - - a man inducted into the I.S.C. Hall of Fame in 1994. If an award were given to a "keeper of the flame" for the sport of fastball, Rod Peterson would own that one too.

So if you talk with anyone who is a TRUE fastball fan, when it comes to naming the true giants of the game, they are nearly certain to mention the name ROD PETERSON. It's a name they can identify; it's what they remember.

And no wonder!!!!