

## Corbo still finds time to go to bat for young players

By Dave Ruden

Staff Writer

Article Launched: 08/19/2008 03:59:31 AM EDT

STAMFORD - To those who only know him from the periphery, hanging out by the entrance to Cubeta Stadium, Nick Corbo is something of a comic in pinstripes, whose gregarious personality and booming laugh made him a friend to home fans and visitors alike.

On road trips to Babe Ruth tournaments, Corbo is the one who was known to everyone in hotel lobbies by the end of the week.

But to those who have been in the trenches with him - the baseball trenches, in the dugouts, on the practice fields - Corbo has always been about the players.

"I love the kids, I really do," Corbo said. "I like to see the kids grow, from the time they are 13 coming in until they graduate as 18-year-olds. To watch them develop. It is just really pleasurable."

Corbo has been involved in Stamford youth baseball as a coach or administrator for 33 years, and Sunday concluded one of his favorite events, the Sharkey Laureno Tournament. Corbo is the co-chairman, and this year about \$18,000 in scholarships were handed out.

Players from the other end of Fairfield County to New York City have been fielding teams for years, and the two weeks have always counted among the favorite on Corbo's calendar.

"I really enjoy going down and watching the kids play, whether they are from Stamford or not," Corbo said. "I could be in the Westchester Mall and someone will come up to me and say: 'Aren't you the guy involved in the Sharkey Laureno Tournament?' I always ask them what they are doing now."

Corbo is one of the faces associated with Stamford baseball, but this year the trips to Cubeta have been more difficult than pleasurable. Exactly two years ago, Corbo was

diagnosed with prostate cancer. With the same intensity he led teams into battle, Corbo has bravely fought the insidious disease.

Corbo said the cancer has spread to his spinal cord and rib cage, and that he is Stage 4 terminal.

Despite the pain and mental anguish, Corbo was at the Laurenno Tournament nearly every day, sometimes able to stay for only a half hour or so, but determined to make an appearance.

"This tournament has always been like his child," said Al Simeone, the assistant state commissioner for Babe Ruth baseball. "To see him not doing what he is able to do on the field, teaching kids ... It's been a tough year for him. He's not able to do what he is capable of doing."

Corbo has always been one of the selfless rocks that have formed the foundation of youth baseball in the city. He has one daughter so never had an agenda. He admits to "never being blessed with great baseball ability," but taught himself the path to bring out the best in others who did.

"I hope I have affected young people's lives as a positive," Corbo said. "I tried to win, but teaching them the right way always gave me pleasure."

An example of his success is Simeone's son, Albie, who is about to begin his senior year at Fordham and hopes to become an orthopedic surgeon.

Corbo choked up as he said, "That kid is one of the nicest kids you will ever meet."

"From day one Nick embraced Albert," Al Simeone said. "He came to him just as a father figure. Nick really taught him values to become an upstanding person. Nick had a profound impact."

There is a long line of kids who have felt Corbo's touch, extending way beyond the approximately \$160,000 he guesses the Laurenno Tournament has given away over the last 22 years.

"Nick was one of the few coaches who never had an ax to grind," said Lou Sclafani, who shared a dugout with Corbo nearly 25 years ago and is a co-treasurer of the Laurenno Tournament. "He never had ulterior motives. He has been generous to a fault, understanding and upbeat."

How many kids can tell stories of Corbo coming by their house to offer a ride to the ballpark, or going into his own wallet to buy a hot dog and soda for an underprivileged player?

Corbo said he cannot imagine how he would have occupied the past 33 years if he didn't have a day at Cubeta to look forward to. Turn it around and how many kids would not have taken the fast-track to success if Corbo never decided to dedicate himself to coaching?

Corbo's biggest hope is for the Laureno Tournament to continue to grow and prosper behind a new generation that shares his dedication.

"This might be my last one," Corbo said. "Even though I couldn't coach this year, young kids would come up to me and it was nice to see them. This whole thing is going to be turned over to younger adults. I hope they make it survive and continue."

If, like many of his former players, they just follow in Corbo's footsteps, the tournament will be just fine.

- Staff Writer Dave Ruden can be reached at [dave.ruden@scni.com](mailto:dave.ruden@scni.com) or at 964-2253.