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### Sharkey Lauren tops Fairfield County Fame honorees

Rich DePreta Updated 10:45 pm, Tuesday, June 17, 2014

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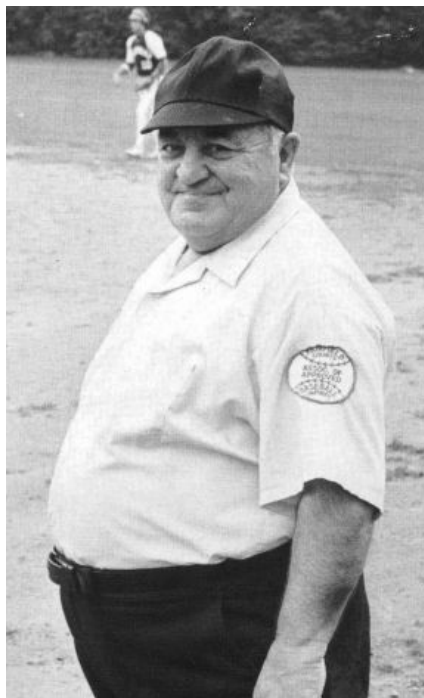
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Sharkey Lauren. Photo: Contributed Photo



STAMFORD -- The size and scope of youth sports in Stamford is so vast these days they can almost be taken for granted.

But before these programs ascended to corporation status, they were just an idea in someone's mind.



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A person with a vision to build a foundation and give them the tools to grow.

One of those pioneers was the late John "Sharkey" Laureno.

Laureno was the founder of Stamford Babe Ruth Baseball as well as the Shoreline Softball League.

Laureno's career as a youth coach as well as more than 40 years as a baseball, basketball and football official was legendary.



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Laureno's contributions were honored Tuesday as he was one of seven of the 2014 inductees into the Fairfield County Sports Hall of Fame, which resides at Stamford UConn.

This 10th anniversary Fairfield County Sports Hall of Fame class will be formally inducted at the annual Sport Night Dinner on Monday October 20 at the Hyatt Regency in Greenwich.

Laureno was joined in the J. Walter Kennedy Community Service Wing by Fairfield Prep and Nore Dame of Fairfield boys ice hockey coach Marty Roos and Bridgeport soccer legend 90-year-old Efrain "Chico" Chacurian.

Joining the Hall of Fame's Jackie Robinson Professional Wing were Boston Red Sox, Yale University and Trumbull High School lefty pitcher Craig Breslow along with 4-time U.S. women's ice hockey Olympian Julie Chu of Fairfield.

Honorees to the James O'Rourke Amateur Wing were basketball standout Nadine Domond of Bridgeport and the late Mickey Connolly of Norwalk.

Laureno, who passed away in 1987 but has an annual summer memorial baseball tournament at Cubeta Stadium as well as a foundation that awards annual scholarships in his name, opened doors to generations of Stamford athletes.

Laureno coached Stamford Babe Ruth baseball teams to seven World Series appearances and three national Babe Ruth titles (1952-54). His teams won 45 straight New England Babe Ruth Tournament contests.

Laureno was the most influential coach in the baseball career of Stamford's Bobby Valentine.

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"I remember when I was around eight years old going to my grandfather's house for Sunday dinners. Grandma would say 'He's at his other home -- Scalzi Park.' " Sharkey's grandson John Laurenos said. "I do remember a lot of days when Sharkey would show me his collection of photos from the 1950s and 1960s in the garage. Our family is so proud to see the impact today of his influence on Stamford youth sports. He'd be proud of his legacy too."

Sharkey Laurenos's officiating acumen had a lasting impact on another young man in Stamford.

[Bennett Salvatore](#) just completed his 32nd year as an [NBA](#) referee.

"Sharkey was an icon in the community. If you talked Stamford baseball, Sharkey's name was attached to every conversation," Salvatore said. "He taught sportsmanship and how to play the game."

"Sharkey was the first person to get me involved in officiating. He twisted my arm to help him officiate some Stamford Youth Basketball games," Salvatore continued. "I had no idea what I was doing then. But as time went on, I grew to love officiating basketball."

And what a wonderful lifetime vocation it has become for Salvatore, who like Valentine, is also a restaurateur of note.

"Whether Sharkey was coaching or officiating, he made you respect the game and respect your opponent," Salvatore said. "On the NBA level, it's a business and a profession. But I still carry with me a lot of the basic philosophies Sharkey taught me 50 years ago. Sharkey taught me the rules of the game. To compete with the last ounce of energy in your body. And if you lost, lose with dignity."

Julie Chu was in Los Angeles Tuesday so she was represented at the Hall of Fame ceremony by her father, Wah Chu.

"This award means a lot to Julie and to our family," Chu said. "We moved to Fairfield County from New York in 1984. For us, Fairfield County was a unique place. It was a nurturing place. We always felt welcome in Fairfield County. We're grateful for that."

"Being in the U.S. Olympic women's ice hockey program for 14 years and part of four U.S. Olympic teams Julie was able to follow her heart and her passion. Hockey wasn't work. It was a privilege to play," Wah Chu continued. "To see her represent the U.S. at four Olympics and see her joy when she stepped on the ice is unforgettable for our family. Hockey is the fabric that has kept our family so close. What we've learned is people come together at Olympic venues as friends. It would be nice if the entire world could live together with the Olympic spirit."

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