

2023 Hall of Fame Inductee Joe Bonacquista – Pueblo

Joe Bonacquista was born in 1942, with a shortstop's glove on one hand and a ticket to a World Series in the other...or so it seemed. In reality, it took twenty years for Joe to make his first College World Series appearance in Omaha with the 1962 University of Northern Colorado Bears. As youthful player, Joe's skills were razor sharp, earning him the top hitter award virtually everywhere he played. Later in life, on the senior baseball league circuit, He was named most valuable player on his World Series champion Denver Zephyrs 50+ MSBL team as a 69-year-old.

Starting with those early days in Trinidad, Colorado, what was to follow in Joe's sterling playing career would be a total of nineteen amateur World Series appearances beginning at age twenty and ending a remarkable forty-nine years later in three different classifications. He started with the College World Series in Omaha and ended with Senior League World Series stops in Phoenix and Ft. Myers. As a senior player, Joe collected five national age-group championships and eight division championships thanks to the Denver Men's Senior Baseball League and the Roy Hobbs League of Ft. Myers. In his "prime", Joe was named his team's top hitter five times and was named to all-star teams nine times. Later in life, Joe was a senior league MVP twice, named Comeback Player of the Year once, and earned the Denver Zephyr Team Spirit Award.

Off the field, Joe was a championship coach. Over a ten-year period, his teams, both high school and summer, claimed another seventeen championships. He was named South-Central (HS) League coach of the year three times with a startling total of one hundred seventy-five wins to his credit, not to mention his youth baseball coaching record of another sixty wins. In short, from his first coaching job in 1964 in Keenesburg, Colorado to his last coaching stint in 1971 at Pueblo East High School, Joe was the gold standard of coaching excellence. Three of his former players went on to have careers in professional baseball. Joe's son, Jeff, who led the South High Colts to a state championship in 1984, went on to play for Wichita State. Together the Bonacquista's are one of only nine father-son combinations to every appear in the College World Series. Both have been inducted into the Greater Pueblo Sports Association Hall of Fame.

Joe is enshrined in five different halls of fame from Pueblo to Greeley and has been honored four times with induction into Who's Who Among America's Teachers during his 33-year tenure teaching United States and Colorado History. His civic involvement didn't stray far from the baseball diamond either. Joe was a featured clinician at coaching clinics in Southern Colorado, served on the Runyon Field Board of Directors as a member and president, and for a change of scenery was a volunteer coach in the local YMCA basketball program.