

AHS RECOGNIZES BOB COONS

Amenia has always been a baseball town



*Pictured in the foreground, from left to right:
Bob Sullivan, Barry Bullymont, Tom Tompkins, Pat Nelligan, Robert W. Coons*

On August 10, 1985 the Robert W. Coons Softball Field was dedicated at Beekman Park in Amenia, NY. It is one of the three fields located there for the sports of baseball and softball. Many Softball Tournaments were played in his name through the 1980's into the early 1990's to raise scholarship monies for a Webutuck Central School Senior entering a Criminal Justice or Law related career. The large plaque and flag pole at the entrance to the fields was also donated from monies raised at tournament events. Besides playing softball, he also coached Little League baseball when it was first evolving as a youth sport in Amenia in the 1950's. Who was this legendary man who had a field named for him?

Bob lived with his family in Wassaic, NY. He was employed at the Wassaic Developmental Center as a Safety Officer and also did part-time stints as Special Deputy for the Dutchess County Sheriff's Office, for the Village of Millerton Police Department, and as Town Constable for Amenia. Bob volunteered many hours to the town using his own car, said Charlotte Murphy. He was a member of the Wassaic Fire Department; and Barney Epstein, as a youth growing up in Amenia and a recent visitor to an AHS event, remembers him driving the school bus.

In the decade of the 1950's the game of softball was becoming popular in the U.S and around the world. Invented as an indoor sport in 1887 by George Hancock of the Chicago Board of Trade, it was Lewis Rober, a member of the Minneapolis, Minn. fire department who invented the outdoor game in 1895: "to keep the firemen in shape and busy during the time they spent at the firehouse". In 1952 the International Softball Federation was organized (*Microsoft Encarta 2001*). Amenia, always in the mix when it came to ball playing, fielded teams, and Bob Coons was right there in the action. He was a pitcher.

John Ladoceur, a fellow Safety Officer, Treasurer for the Tournament teams, and a Pine Plains resident, said that each team in a Tournament paid an entry fee. At game time, money was also raised through the indirect sale of "beverage" donated by local merchants. Judges Jim Murphy and Paul Thompson as well as baseball stalwarts like Joe Carroll, Sr. volunteered their services as umpires. He remembered one game when Bob was jokingly thrown a grapefruit to pitch. John then went on to say, affectionately, how he and his wife-to-be changed their marriage date because it conflicted with a Bob Coons Tournament.

Also in the 1950's Little League Baseball had arrived on the scene in Amenia. Bob Coons became a part of the coaching staff and an Assistant to Coach Bob Sullivan who had been a premier baseball player in Dutchess County and had also played some major league baseball. Tom Tompkins, an early 1960's Webutuck graduate who resides in California and played Little League ball for both Bob's, said that "Bob Coons really inspired the Little League players by his relaxed attitude and his wonderful personality". "Bob C. was very helpful to me", Bob Sullivan said, as we talked together after the 2007 Webutuck Awards Ceremony and he recalled teaching the rudiments of the game to the youngsters in preparation for League formation.

In June, 1982 Charlene Mayville, Don Cummings and David Decker as a Committee came before the Amenia Town Board requesting that the Beekman Park softball field be named in memory of Bob Coons who had died unexpectedly. On June 24th at a Special Meeting the motion was made and passed. Tournaments to raise funds for the memorial began and included teams from the NY State Troopers, the DC Sheriffs Department, The Wassaic Developmental Safety Officers and the Amenia, Wassaic and Millerton Fire Departments. Finally in 1985 enough money had been raised; and the plaque was installed in recognition of a man, who in his time, gave so much to Amenia's youth and its townspeople.

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