

THE SPECTATOR

You can't think and hit at the same time. Yogi Berra

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Local legend: Longtime coach Dick Traen leaves legacy on, off field

Reprinted article written by **Julie Gunderson** on Monday, October 23, 2006.

There's no better place for a kid to be on a summer afternoon than standing on a baseball field, squinting into the sun, learning how to lay down a bunt, turn a double play, throw a changeup. That's what longtime baseball coach and former teacher Dick Traen believed and that's why he dedicated so much of his life to making sure Delano youngsters had a chance to learn the game.

Traen died Sunday, Oct. 15, 2006 at his home in Delano.

For more than three decades Traen was at the helm of Delano High School's baseball program; he won 359 games, the most by any Wright County Conference coach. He spent more than 20 years in amateur baseball, including serving as president of the North Star Amateur Baseball League. He was recognized with lifetime achievement awards in both high school and town baseball and was inducted in to the Minnesota High School Baseball Coach's Hall of Fame.

But even with all these accolades, Traen might best be remembered by his former players and those who grew up playing on the city's ball fields as simply being the coach and mentor who taught them how to play.

He did so, on his summer vacations away from the high school biology classroom where he taught for 33 years. He started a Little League summer recreational program and set to work teaching the fundamentals of baseball to Delano's youth.

"It's what we did from 9 to noon in the summers. Go down to the park and play baseball," said Steve Elien, a former player of Traen's and the current coach of the Delano Athletics. "He wanted to see to it that kids had an opportunity to come and learn the game. It didn't matter what level you were at. He gave every kid a chance. If you didn't have a glove, he'd give you one."

PASSION FOR THE GAME

Traen's enthusiasm for teaching the game was the reason why he devoted so much of his time to the sport.

"He loved to see kids learn to play the sport the right way," said Brian Larson, who spent more than 30 years in amateur baseball with Traen. "It's what he loved to do."

Traen's passion for the game was also expressed in the fun-loving attitude he brought with him to the ballpark.

"He had this air about him. He could make anybody feel good. And he could tell stories like crazy," said Jerry Litfin, who played for Traen in the 1960s and then returned to Delano as his assistant coach.

It was a sense of humor that often showed itself in the creative nicknames he came up with for his players and friends.

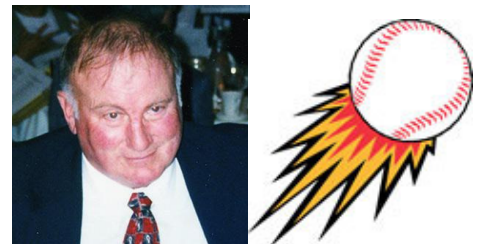
"Anyone who has a nickname in town, probably got it from him," Litfin said.

Traen also was well connected to the game and through those connections was able to bring a bit of baseball star power to Delano, including former New York Yankee catcher and Minneapolis native Johnny Blanchard.

"He was so humble," Litfin said about Traen. "He was always bringing in these guys, former players as experts, saying that they should be the ones teaching the game. But I mean here he was such a great coach, but just so humble about it."

Traen also worked hard to stay connected to his former players. For years he traveled on Sundays with Larson to town baseball games in the region, checking up on his ex-charges who were scattered on town baseball diamonds throughout the area.

"He always got a lot pleasure out of seeing his former players continuing to play town ball," Larson said. "He'd always talked about what they had been like when they were in high school and had played for him."



MORE THAN BASEBALL

The game meant a lot to Traen, but so too did giving back to the community.

He was so much bigger than baseball," Litfin said. "He was a great community guy. He loved getting involved and helping out."

Litfin was a longtime member of the city's parks and Fourth of July committees. And, along with starting up his summer recreation league, he organized town baseball, softball and basketball leagues.

"He was a tremendous citizen," Litfin said. "He was someone who believed in giving back and he showed that."

ALWAYS TEACHING

Whether it was on the field or in the classroom, Traen was foremost a teacher. Former Delano High School principal Ted May remembered Traen as a lover of the outdoors and someone who taught his students the importance of conservation and protecting the environment.

His teaching philosophy was the same as the way he managed on the baseball field.

"Dick was from the old school of teaching," May said. "He believed in instilling discipline and accountability to his students."

Things were no different for his players, where Traen also modeled hard work and an appreciation for the game - spending hours doing upkeep for the baseball field, including weaving ivy along the outfield fence.

"He always believed in maintaining the field and having the kids do the work, not leaving it for the city work crews," Litfin said. "It could be a two- or three-hour practice, and he'd say 'okay grab a rake' and we'd start to prepare the field for the next day."

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It was one of his ways of showing us that it was important to take care of things and take responsibility for them."

That caretaker attitude spilled more than into the way Traen's teams played the game. "He ran a tight ship," Elien said. "He was a big believer in the fundamentals of the game. That's what his teams were known for, playing sound, fundamental baseball."

In Minnesota high school baseball circles, Traen will long be remembered for his list of accomplishments. His record wins, his teams' 12 conference titles, 11 district titles, three state tournament appearances, including state-runner up in 1982, and his town baseball team's state title, which came in 1988.

But there are others who will remember Traen for more than just his records.

"He was an important influence in my life," Elien said. "And I know there are a lot of his players that feel the same way. With all the time he put into helping young kids learn the game, it went beyond just being a good coach. He was a great teacher."

Traen's influence also inspired others to pass on the game and the gift of learning.

"A lot of us went into teaching and coaching because of the way he role modeled," Litfin said.

For most, Traen will be remembered as that larger than life figure that locals will be sharing stories about for years to come.

"He's a local legend," May said.

A legend who in Delano won't soon be forgotten.



The Central



D-C SAINTS—ONLY UNDEFEATED TEAM

The Central division usually gets off to good start, playing many of the East and West teams early and their own division later in the summer. Only D-C has come through unscathed so far. The usual cast of characters are coming through for the Saints. Dan Birkholz, John Riewer and Eric Hansen continue to handle the bulk of the pitching with Brent Opsahl, Justin McKinley, Cole Flick, Birkholz and Riewer all hitting well.

The rest of the division is closely bunched with 3 or 4 wins each. Maple Lake has received 2 complete games from Chad Raiche who along with Nate Johnson and Darren and Cody Decker are hitting over .300.

The A's count on Jeff Jansen and Todd Roth for most of their mound

work and that combination keeps them in every game. Jon Wilson and Brent Muckenhirn have been the main offensive weapons.

St. Michael is working Joe Barbeln back into form and Adam McGrane returns to give St. Michael a strong presence on the mound as the season moves into the meaty section of the schedule. The Saints are receiving run production from their whole line up with Tyler Carlson leading the league in hitting and Mike Freske, Nick Volkman, Kyle Krzmarzck and Derek Brant among the top hitters in the Central.

Hutchinson has been up and down in the scoring department with Brooks Albrecht, Erik Katzenmeyer, Luke Klitzke, Jordan Schwarze and Tim Thode providing some fireworks.



I blew it the way I saw it.

Ralph DeLeonardis, umpire, commenting on a disputed call.



CENTRAL STANDINGS

	W	L	G.B.
DC	6	0	...
Maple Lake	3	1	2
Delano	4	2	2
St. Michael	3	2	2.5
Hutchinson	3	3	3

CENTRAL STATS

BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVE.
T Carlson StM	16	8	9	0.563
B Opsahl DC	21	6	11	0.524
B Albrecht Hut	26	7	12	0.462
N Johnson ML	16	3	7	0.438
C Raiche ML	16	3	7	0.438
Katzenmeyer,Hut	14	4	6	0.429
J Schwarze Hut	24	7	10	0.417
J Riewer DC	23	8	9	0.391
D Birkholz DC	18	7	7	0.389
D Brant StM	13	2	5	0.385
M Freske StM	20	3	7	0.350
D Decker ML	18	5	6	0.333
N Volkman StM	18	8	6	0.333
Krzmarzck StM	18	4	6	0.333
C Decker ML	12	3	4	0.333
J McKinley DC	25	8	8	0.320
J Wilson Del	22	4	7	0.318
L Klitzke Hut	19	4	6	0.316
C Flick DC	13	2	4	0.308
Muckenhirn Del	20	2	6	0.300

2B Leader	3B Leader
J McKinley DC 4	T Carlson StM 2
HR Leaders	RBI Leader
T Thode Hut 2	T Thode Hut 10
GWRBI Leader	J McKinley DC 2

Team Pitching Leaders				
NAME	IP	W-L	SO	E.R.A.
A Padnos Hut	22	2-1	15	0.40
C Raiche ML	17	2-0	11	0.53
J Barbeln StM	23	2-0	26	1.55
J Janzen Del	19	1-0	15	2.37
D Birkholz DC	22	3-0	25	4.09

EAST STANDINGS

	W	L	G.B.
Maple Plain	5	2	...
Loretto	3	3	1.5
Mound	1	5	3.5
Rogers	1	5	3.5
Albertville	1	7	4.5

The East

EAST STATS

BATTING LEADERS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVE.
K Koch Lor	19	1	9	0.474
A Engebretson MP	14	5	6	0.429
P Sycks Md	17	5	7	0.412
B Mussgjerd Rog	13	1	5	0.385
E Schutte Lor	23	4	8	0.348
A Gregg MP	27	6	9	0.333
L Gregg MP	30	4	10	0.333
Z DeMars Rog	21	3	7	0.333
J Smith Rog	15	1	5	0.333
A Grinde Alb	15	3	5	0.333
D Brant Alb	22	5	7	0.318
B Mazer MP	26	4	8	0.308
E Kutz Md	26	2	8	0.308
P Harrell Md	23	4	7	0.304
J Jarvis Alb	23	2	7	0.304
P Olson Alb	20	3	6	0.300



Rogers



DIAMOND DEVILS TAKE EARLY LEAD

The Diamond Devils have come through the toughest part of their schedule with three wins over Central division rivals Delano, Maple Lake and St. Michael, handing Adam McGrane of the Saints his first regular season loss in the North Star league. Pat McPherson and Paul Kunz have tossed a majority of the teams innings off of the mound. The offense has come largely from Adam and Lee Gregg, Andrew Engebretson and Brad Mazer.

Loretto has emerged 3-3 with a strong pitching performance from Nate Triplett shutting out Rockford and using a ninth inning rally to knock off Hutchinson. The early hitting leaders have been Kent Koch and Eric Schutte.

The Mallards continue to hit with Pete Sycks, Eddie Kutz and Peter Harrell leading the attack. Luke Ludvigson recorded their win hurling a 5-4 victory over Monti, but while Mound's pitchers have kept them close, they can't seem to close out many wins.

Rogers has started predictably slow, winning the first North Star game with an 8-2 outburst against Mound. Beau Mussgjerd, Zach DeMars and Jason Smith sport good early averages. The Red Devils top pitcher to date has been Scott Bosacher and Mussgjerd picked up their only league win.

The Villains have received 3 complete games, 2 from Paul Schumacher and one from Ryan Dutton, but only won one, Paul's 4-2 victory over Rogers. The others were a 4-3 and a 5-3 late inning loss. Albertville has gotten their hits off the bats of A. Grinde, Dan Brant, Jeff Jarvis and P. Olson.

2B Leaders

L Gregg MP 6

3B Leader

E Schutte Lor 2

HR Leader

A Gregg MP 2

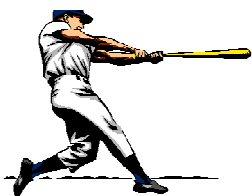
RBI Leader

J Jarvis Alb 7

GWRBI Leader — A Gregg MP 2

Team Pitching Leaders

Name	IP	W-L	SO	E.R.A.
P McPherson Mp	21	2-0	13	2.57
N Koch Lor	25	1-1	8	3.91
P Sycks Md	16	1-1	6	5.63
R Dutton Alb	26	0-3	17	6.92
S Bosacher Rog	13	0-1	5	7.81



"I just can't understand why that umpire can't make the correct call being so close to the base when from here we can obviously see that our runner was safe!"





WEST STANDINGS

	W	L	G.B.
Howard Lake	6	1	...
Rockford	5	5	2.5
Buffalo	3	3	2.5
Monticello	1	3	3.5
Kingston	2	5	4

The West



*What does a mama bear on the pill have
in common with the World Series?
No cubs.*

Perfect !!

Jason Lesser was staked to a 15 run lead in the first two innings while he was retiring all 21 Rogers batters he faced to notch the first perfect game recorded in North Star history. Rockford has relied on Jason's arm for the bulk of their pitching again this year. The difference this year is that Nathan Hochmuth and Cole Hansen are also chipping in quality innings. The Bandit bats have come alive this year with Maher, Fontana, Ryan Rassat, Hansen, Keen, Littlefield, Lewin and Lesser all coming up with games of 3 or more hits.

The Orphans had an incredible 16 game regular season winning streak end this past Wednesday. Howard Lake won their last 10 games lat year and reeled off 6 more to start 2007 before Buffalo knocked them out of the ranks of the undefeated 3-1. The score of 3-1 seems to be a recurring theme for the Orphans as they beat Hutchinson, Maple Plain and Kingston by that score. Ben Borrell is the early hitting leader in the West.

Buffalo got back to .500 by defeating Howard Lake. The 2 run difference was their first game not decided by one run this year. Ramon Vega pitched a complete game 1-0 loss to Hutch. The Bulldogs also lost 6-5 to D-C and to Rockford 10-9 while defeating Kingston 7-6 and Albertville 4-3. Top hitters have been Vega, Derek Bauer and Corey Braun.

Monticello has lost two extra inning games or their record could be reversed. Hardie and Matt Loegering are on the leader board in the west batting averages. Alex Stein heads the pitching staff with many arms throwing a few innings.

WEST STATS

NAME	AB	R	H	AVE.
B Borrell HL	25	5	12	0.480
C Hansen Roc	33	10	14	0.424
R Vega Buf	15	2	6	0.400
C Hardie Mon	13	3	5	0.385
T Maher Roc	30	4	11	0.367
J Berg HL	22	3	8	0.364
R Rassatt Roc	25	3	9	0.360
D Bauer Buf	25	6	9	0.360
C Braun Buf	28	0	10	0.357
Mt Loegering M	17	2	6	0.353
E Cox Buf	15	1	5	0.333
J Rassatt Roc	37	5	12	0.324
B Aho Kin	25	4	8	0.320
D Littlefield Roc	26	6	8	0.308
T Sonnek HL	20	3	6	0.300

2B Leader

N Lewin Roc 4

HR Leaders

B Fontana Roc 1

GWRBI Leaders

J Stueven HL 2

T Maher Roc 2

Team Pitching Leaders

Name	IP	W-L	SO	E.R.A.
J Streich HL	20	2-0	18	0.00
C Braun Buf	15	0-0	20	1.20
J Lesser Roc	39	3-3	21	3.46
B Dietz Kin	14	1-1	12	5.14
Stein Mon	12	1-1	6	5.25

3B Leaders

J Stueven HL 2

RBI Leader

R Rassatt Roc 9

Kingston's games have also gone down to the wire as they've lost close ones to Howard Lake, Delano and Buffalo. Chris Picken's pitching keeps the Kings in most games and firepower is being produced from the bat of Billy Aho and Alan Hendrickson. .