

THE BUFFALO NEWS



Don Colpoys won 325 games as the head coach for Canisius College. (Buffalo News File Photo)

Remembering the baseball legacy of Buffalo's Don Colpoys

By Amy Moritz (http://buffalonews.com/author/amy_moritz/) | Published March 30, 2018 | Updated March 30, 2018

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He didn't just love baseball. Don Colpoys lived baseball. It was his life. It was his passion. It was his family.

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"It was his life and he never cared about getting paid for doing it," his son, Donny said. "We abused him all the time for it. He basically did it for free. He loved it and never made any money in baseball. ... But he was there to win. There was no fooling around. He wanted to win and if we get beat, we'll beat them tomorrow. He loved the game dearly, but he was going to win."

Win Colpoys did, in all kinds of ways. The 83-year-old died on Thursday night. He was a professional player, a scout, a coach and a general manager. His fingerprints are all over Western New York baseball.

The Buffalo native began his baseball career as a catcher at Bishop Timon signing with the St. Louis Cardinals in 1954. He then was a scout for the Philadelphia Phillies and managed the Niagara Falls Pirates of the NY-Penn League in 1978.

Then came 1979, the year Colpoys helped bring professional baseball back to Buffalo. It was Colpoys who learned that Jersey City would not be able to host a team that season in the Double-A Eastern League. Colpoys contacted Buffalo Mayor Jimmy Griffin and started the process of bringing the team to Buffalo, playing in War Memorial Stadium. Colpoys was the general manager of the Bisons from 1979 through 1984.

"Don was one of Buffalo's true legendary baseball people," Bisons vice president and general manager Mike Buczkowski said. "I always enjoyed our conversations about the game, not only the

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current state of baseball but also his extensive knowledge of the great history of the sport. On behalf of the Bisons, our heartfelt condolences go out to his family."

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Colpoys' Hall call a neighborhood thing Says honor goes to everyone who helped him run team

By Amy Moritz: For the most part, Don Colpoys feels he is only the representative face being inducted to the Buffalo Baseball Hall of Fame. Colpoys was the general

Family and baseball were synonymous in the Colpoys household.

Donny recalled helping out those first two seasons of the Bisons in War Memorial Stadium, painting numbers on the seats, selling programs, and working at the concession stands.

Later, when Colpoys became the head coach for Canisius College, the family, including seven children, piled in for a drive to Florida where they joined the Golden Griffins for their spring training trip.

"We were lucky and blessed," Donny said. "We went to Florida every year with the Canisius baseball team. Often we'd pack all seven of us in one room in Florida and we thought we had died and gone to heaven. None of our friends or neighbors could go to Florida. Because of dad we were able to go."

Donny would eventually play for his father at Canisius. In 25 years as the Griffs head coach, Colpoys won a school-record 325 games, retiring in 2001.

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His best season at Canisius came in 1994, when the Griffs posted 28 wins and secured the first Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference regular-season championship in program history. He was also honored as the MAAC North Coach of the Year at the end of that season. The Griffs' 1994 roster featured pitcher Joe Mamott, who was taken in the sixth round of the 1994 MLB Draft by the Boston Red Sox.

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"This is a sad day for Canisius College, our baseball program and the baseball community in Western New York," Canisius director of athletics Bill Maher said. "Don Colpoys will forever be one of the pillars in the history of Canisius baseball. His impact on the game of baseball in Buffalo, and the student-athletes he coached during his time leading our program goes far beyond the diamond. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Don's family and everyone who had the special opportunity to be able to call him coach."

And many called him coach, even when he wasn't technically the coach.

His son recalled that first season of the Bisons in 1979 which featured the young catcher Tony Pena.

"Tony Pena was an outstanding defensive catcher and destined for the big leagues but he couldn't hit the ball the other way," Donny said. "My dad was the general manager and he had nothing to do with the teams or players, but he knew a lot about the game. So after every home game, he would take off his suit coat and tie and throw

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batting practice to Tony Pena. He would throw fastballs at the outside corner to teach him to the hit the other way."

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His success in the game brought him accolades. He was inducted into the Canisius Sports Hall of Fame in 2012, the Buffalo Baseball Hall of Fame in 2007, and the Greater Buffalo Sports Hall of Fame in 2011.

But more than the professional players that were part of his circle or the honors he received, Colpoys greatest love was watching his family love baseball the way he did.

"I have a 12-year-old boy Luke," Donny said. "This summer, Luke played in an all-star game and my father was there and he was sick at the time. Of all the things my father has done around baseball, Luke homered in that game and I never saw my dad so happy in his whole life as to watch Luke hit that home run. That's something that will stick out in my mind the rest of my life. To see my dad's reaction was priceless."

Calling hours will be from 2-7 p.m. Monday at Reddington Funeral Home, 657 Abbott Rd. A Mass of Christian Burial will take place at 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday at St. Thomas Aquinas Church, 450 Abbott Rd.

Canisius College is inviting former players, friends and fans to submit their memories of Don Colpoys via email (maddock@canisius.edu) to be posted on GoGriffs.com and through various social media channels throughout the week.

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