

# Norwalk baseball coaching legend Phil "The Skipper" Matregrano passes away

By JOHN NASH Hour Staff Writer | Posted: Saturday, April 11, 2015 1:12 pm

NORWALK — Former Central Catholic and Norwalk American Legion baseball coach Phil Matregrano, who has a wide and vast coaching tree that is still having a profound effect on today's ball players, passed away on Saturday morning.

The man everybody called "The Skipper" was 90 years old.

Matregrano coached a who's who of city baseball coaches, including Norwalk High's Pete Tucci and Brien McMahon's John Cross, whose respective teams met on Saturday in their annual FCIAC intra-city clash.

"Today's players may not have heard of him, but they'll hear about him from me today," said Tucci, who played Legion ball for Matregrano in the 1960s. "He knew more about baseball than I'll ever know."

"We talk about him quite often, all of the classic one-liners about baseball that he'd bring up all the time," said Cross, who played at McMahon when Matregrano was an assistant coach. "The kids may not know (Matregrano) but they're aware of him because he was one of our coaches. What he taught us is in us. It's a part of us."

Matregrano was an old-school coach who could reach players through his motivational tactics, yet he was also a genius when it came to baseball strategy, according to those who knew him base.

"He was definitely old school," said former Norwalk high baseball coach Angelo Bruno, who later became an assistant coach on the Norwalk Legion team under Matregrano. "He didn't hold anything back. He was a straight shooter. That's how he got you to work hard."

Like Bruno, Brien McMahon athletic director Joe Madaffari got to see both sides of Matregrano; through the eyes of a player and as a coach.

The Skipper was an assistant at McMahon for almost a decade when Madaffari was the Senators head baseball coach.

"He was special. He didn't just know the game, he knew how to motivate kids," said Madaffari. "He made you better because he believed in you. It was like tough love, but he made me a better player. He made me a better coach. More than that, he made me a better person."

The Matregrano legacy doesn't just stop at the high school level, either.

From coaches involved at the youth level to a former player like former UConn player and Tampa Bay Rays draft pick Glenn Katz, now a private instructor and president at IST Sports Headquarters in Norwalk, Matregrano's game is still being taught to the city's youth players.

"All these kids being coached now are being coached in some way by The Skipper because he was such an influential guy in all our lives," Tucci said.

As great a coach as Matregrano would be, he was also a pretty good player.

He was signed as a third baseman by the New York Yankees in the 1940s, playing for the Amsterdam Rugmakers in the then-Class C minor league Canadian-American League.

He played 15 games for Amsterdam, hitting .264 with three doubles, a triple and a home run.

"I broke my leg early in the season and I never went back," Matregrano told The Hour's George Albano in 2003. "I was there long enough for a cup of coffee."

After that cup of coffee, however, Matregrano returned home and began his coaching career, planting the roots to a coaching tree that lasts even today and looks to continue into the future.

Funeral arrangements are pending.