

FHS BASEBALL

THE MAJOR LEAGUE TRADITION



In the storied 125-year history of Fresno High Athletics, the dominant performance of Warrior baseball players and teams have captured the attention, not only of knowledgeable historians of the game in the Central Valley but also across the state and in some cases across the nation. Fourteen players from Fresno High have made it to the major leagues with 10 being pitchers. There have been 7 no hitters pitched by these Warrior standouts. Commencing with the Baseball Hall of Fame induction of the 1890's notable player and manager Frank Chance, (every kid growing up from the 1920's through the 1960's remembers the often repeated folklore poem of the Chicago Cub double play combination "Tinker to Evers to Chance"). Fresno High had another Warrior standout of that era in the current inductee, Dutch Leonard, who threw 2 no hitters in his 11 seasons in the major leagues. In 1926 Howard Craghead pitched in a Valley Championship baseball game for the Warriors and struck out 24 of 27 batters, which is still a State of California record. He averaged 17 strikeouts per game his senior year. Craghead pitched briefly for the Cleveland Indians. Monte Pearson, a 1927 graduate from FHS became an all-star and World Series Champion at the major league level. Dave Odom and Ted Wills Jr. played in the Majors in 1935 and 1952 for 7 seasons. Other outstanding pitchers such as John Hoover (1980) and Bobby Jones (1988) excelled on the Echo Avenue campus and later in the major leagues. The recent (2020) WOC induction of former major league player Sean Halton is another example of the continued legacy of Warrior baseball that has been highly influential across decades in Fresno. Many former outstanding players also became excellent baseball coaches, such as Mike Noakes (WOC 2018) whose Bullard High teams of the 1970-80's, still rank as some of the best ever produced in California. Current Wall of Champions inductee, Jason Papi compiled a record setting winning percentage as head baseball coach for 12 years at FHS and 9 NYL titles in that time span, following the decades long career of his father, Ken Papi.

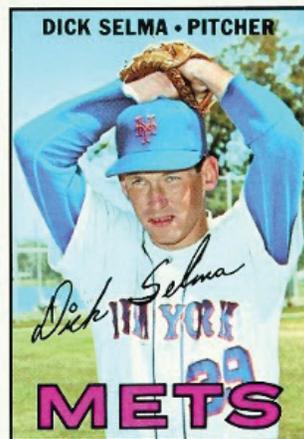
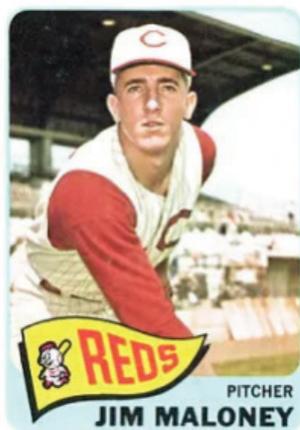
Women's softball, of course, was recognized later, but former FHS Principal, Jeanne Contel was a pioneer (and Hall of Fame inductee) in the expansion of women playing the "game". She was a highly regarded catcher on the World Champion Fresno Rockets softball team of the 1950's. Rene Polanco, (WOC 2018) as a 2 time All Conference player at Fresno State, carried on the excellent tradition of women's softball at FHS.

During the 5-year era from 1957 to 1962, Fresno High, and the Central Valley in general, produced an incredible number of elite baseball players, with Fresno High by far leading that group. Clovis had a highly regarded third baseman in Darryl Lamonica, who turned down several Major League offers to play football at Notre Dame and eventually became the famous "Mad Bomber" quarterback for the Oakland Raiders. Thad Tillotson was a very good high school pitcher from Merced who later pitched for the New York Yankees, and Wade Blasingame from Roosevelt High School, spent several years as a pitcher for the Milwaukee Braves. Certainly, players like Mike Noakes, who was one of the greatest players to ever play at FHS, and standouts on the 1958 team like Glen Schmidt, Jim Albracht, Blair Pollard. As well as in 1962, one of the best 3-sport athletes ever to play for the Warriors, Jeff Ring, carried on the tradition of excellence during that 5-year period. However, along with the stellar pitching, there was an outstanding high school catcher in Pat Corrales (who played,

managed, coached and was an executive for 60 years in the major leagues). Fresno High's reputation was elevated as being the baseball capital of not only California but also the nation, particularly as a high level pitching juggernaut. It started with Big Mike Urrizola from the 1957 Valley Champions team, who many baseball insiders of that era felt was the best pitcher to ever play at FHS. Big Mike went on after high school to pitch in pro baseball for 6 seasons and pitched a no hitter in the highly competitive California League of the 1960's. An arm injury forced him to retire from baseball. The next year, the 1958 Dream Team produced arguably two of the best high school pitchers to ever play at the high school level in Dick Ellsworth and Jim Maloney. Only five pitchers in modern baseball history of the Major Leagues, have won 20 games at an age younger than 23. Two of those five were Maloney (Cincinnati Reds) and Ellsworth (Chicago Cubs), who ironically both won 20 games on the same day in the Majors, exactly 5 years after graduating from FHS. The third pitcher on that 1958 team, Lynn Rube, was also good enough to play 6 seasons in the minor leagues, reaching Double A and Triple A in Tulsa and Rochester. Ellsworth, after signing with the Chicago Cubs, has the distinction of producing one of the rarest feats for a major league pitcher, by shutting out on 4 hits, the American League Chicago White Sox, only 5 days after his graduation from Fresno High School. No one in 60+ years has come close to duplicating that performance at that age and is an example of his dominance as a high school pitcher.

The 1957 and 1958 teams were an astonishing 53 and 1 against high school teams for those 2 years, with the only other loss being to the Fresno State Freshmen in 1958. Almost 67 years later, Cal Hi Sports still rates the 1958 team as the best ever produced in California baseball history and even considered it the best ever in the nation. Excellent Fresno High Baseball Teams in 1969, 1987 and the recent induction of the 2004 team have continued this outstanding legacy.

In 1961 Fresno High produced another high-level pitching prospect in Dick Selma, who went on to a stellar career as a reliever in the Major leagues. At one point he held the New York Mets franchise record for strikeouts in a single game. Before signing a professional contract, Selma was also the most valuable player in community college baseball, as he led the Fresno CC Rams to their 2nd and 3rd California State Championships. That followed the 1961 FCC Rams State Championship team that was anchored by several Fresno High players of those outstanding high school teams, including Tom Jacobsen, Ken Hoyt, Terry Heizenrader, Bix Haydon, Kryn Van Elswyck and Clark Bridgman. After Selma graduated from Fresno High, the next year (1962) the Warriors celebrated the arrival of the all-time Major League great, Tom Seaver, who became the second Warrior to be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame.



The combined Major League statistics for these four Warrior pitchers (four no-hitters; eight 20-game winners; 7066 Strikeouts; 607 Wins; 3.34 ERA), clearly illustrates that in that 5 year time span at Fresno High, there was a level of excellence unparalleled in high school athletics.