

2011 Greater Cincinnati Softball Hall Of Fame Profiles:

# Jim Wessel, Sr.

Senior Career Includes Fourteen All-World Selections, A Dozen World Titles

Editorial Courtesy of Softball News; Photos Courtesy of Dee Wessel Hamilton

For most young softball players, reaching the "Open Major" level can take years of proving yourself with lower division teams before finally being "discovered" and recruited by upper level teams.

Not so for Jim "Rock" Wessel.

Wessel was only 18-years old when he found himself playing centerfield for Vaughn's Point in the ASA "Open Major" Nationals in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1955.

"I had just finished my senior year in high school and my high school baseball coach asked me to play," recalls Wessel. "His team needed an outfielder and I played centerfield. The interesting thing was that it was the first year I played and our team won the county and district and went to the National Tournament."

Wessel's softball career was put on hold from 1956-'59. After graduating from Ross High School, where his football jersey was retired, Wessel attended Xavier University in Cincinnati and became the starting halfback for the

Musketeers' football team. In 1958, he set an NCAA record for having the longest pass reception at 98 yards.

In 1960, Wessel played for National Lead, leading them to a seventh place finish in the ASA Industrial Nationals and earning All-American honors. Then a year later, Wessel returned to "open" ball, and spent thirteen out of the next fourteen years with the storied Wilsman Trucking teams of Hamilton. With Wessel patrolling centerfield, Wilsman won eleven Hamilton City Tournaments and nine State Championships, and competed in nine ASA National Championships. Wessel was named to nine All-State teams and two All-American teams with the Truckers before retiring in 1974.

Wessel's success led to his induction into the Butler County Softball Hall of Fame (charter member), the Butler County All-Sports Hall of Fame, the Dayton ASA Hall of Fame, the Ohio ASA Hall of Fame and the National Senior Softball Hall of Fame.

On January 30th of 2011, Wessel was inducted into yet another Hall of Fame, as he becomes a member of the Norwood Sorrento's Greater Cincinnati Softball Hall of Fame. But it was not his legendary career with Wilsman that earned Wessel this most recent honor.

In 1992 Wessel came out of retirement to begin an 18-year career in the senior program.

"I was watching the Metro about nineteen years ago, and a fellow that I used to play with on Wilsman, Gene Branham, asked how I was feeling," remembers Wessel. "I had a heart attack a few years before. Then he asked if I'd be interested in playing senior ball and explained what it was.

"I didn't have a whole lot of interest, but he asked me to come out and watch," says Wessel. "At the time they were playing at the VFW in Harrison, and my wife Pat and I came out to watch them play, and I thought it might be fun. And that was the beginning of my involvement with senior ball."

In 1992, Wessel joined the Joseph Chevrolet team and helped lead them to an ASA National Championship. The next two years he played with Miami Valley Masters, which won back-to-back SPA national titles and placed fourth and second at the ASA Nationals.

For the next three years from 1995-1997, Wessel played with national senior powerhouse Nothdurft Tool & Die of Detroit before





returning to Cincinnati to play with Wopac Masters (1997) and Papa John's (1998, 1999 and 2000). He then left town again to join Florida Investment Properties (2001-'03) before rejoining Joseph Chevrolet of Cincinnati again in 2004. Wessel finally retired in 2008.

During his senior career, Wessel's teams have amassed a dozen national titles, and Wessel has been named to fourteen national tournament all-tournament teams. He has won two home run titles and was named Most Valuable Player in the ASA Nationals. In 1996, he became a charter member of the National Senior Softball Hall of Fame.

Though respected nationally for his offensive skills, Wessel believes his biggest strength throughout his career has been his defense.

"Interestingly, when I played baseball, I didn't even care about hitting," says Wessel. "I just loved to field the ball and run down balls. I would much rather make a big catch than get a big hit, and I love that aspect of the game. What I've always been concerned about is that if I make an error, I'll remember that for a long period of time. But if I don't get a hit, I don't even think about it."

Wessel says that the best play he ever made in softball came during a state tournament game.

"Our right fielder misplayed a ball and it rolled toward the fence," says Wessel. "Anytime a ball was hit somewhere other than to my position, I always ran over to back up. So I went over to get the ball and threw it to the relay man, and he threw the guy out at home, and we won the game 1-0. It was not a catch, nor a hit, but it was still the best play I've ever made."

Overall, Wessel has prided himself on "fielding the ball well, a good arm, hitting for power, and hitting for a good average and to all fields."

The most rewarding accomplishment of Wessel's senior career, he says, came in the ASA 60-over nationals.

"We were playing Fairway Ford from California, and they had been a perennial top team in the country for years along with the Legends out of Florida. We played them very tight and they beat us in the winners' bracket finals, and we came back to double-dip them and win the national tournament."

Among Wessel's most rewarding personal accomplishments include "making the all-tournament teams, winning some of the national tournaments, going into the senior national Hall of Fame, and playing with teams like Nothdurft and Florida Investment."

"I really enjoyed that part of it," says Wessel.

"But the big thing for me has been the ability to play with the top players out of Cincinnati like Walt Schroyer, Bill Goedde, Dave Neiheisel, Clyde Stafford, Jim Spelbrink and Ron Garnett. And I know I'm leaving out a lot of people. But they've made senior softball so enjoyable for me and they're the reason I played it for so many years."

Schroyer, incidentally, was responsible for giving Wessel the nickname that he became recognized for on softball fields across the country - "Rock."

"When you're associated with Walt, he likes to give people nicknames," explains Wessel. "And he came up with 'Rock.' And most people call me that instead of 'Wes' or Jim. The people I've played ball with on the senior circuit as well as the players on the other teams know

me by that name."

Wessel says that the Greater Cincinnati Softball Hall of Fame "is always something I've wanted to be a part of for a long time."

"I've thought about it for many years and I realized why I was not in there, because I only played one year in Cincinnati with Jake Sweeney in 1964 instead of with Wilsman. And I enjoyed it, but I missed the people up here (in Butler County).

"I had written it (being a member of the Cincinnati Hall of Fame) off because of my lack of affiliation with the Cincinnati teams, but when the senior division opened up, it opened up an opportunity for me to go in.

"I'm very humbled and surprised to be going in so quickly when you consider all the players out there," says Wessel.

"I've been blessed to play with a lot of outstanding ball teams and ball players, and the other ball players are what have made me what I am."