

The Way We Worked A High School Baseball Coach

Evolving into an organized sport in the 1840s and 1850s, baseball became America's sport. The first recorded baseball contest took place in 1846 in New Jersey. In the late 1800's baseball was being played in high schools. By 1866 baseball was being referred to as the national pastime. Little League Baseball originated in the 1930s. The history of baseball, its players, and its coaches provides an insight into the history of America. One of Georgia's best high school baseball coaches is now retired Coach John DeVore.

Born March 30, 1943, at his home in Crabapple, Georgia, Coach John DeVore grew up in Crabapple, Georgia, and attended Milton High School in Alpharetta, Georgia. Coach DeVore developed his love for the sport of baseball playing in elementary school and in church leagues. He was a pitcher and an outfielder. Coach DeVore played four years at Milton High School and three years at West Georgia College in Carrollton, Georgia. During DeVore's junior year in college, he began to think about a career as a baseball coach. After college Coach DeVore played for a short period of time with the New York Mets' farm system in Marion, Virginia.

During pitching lessons with Coach John DeVore in February of 2007, I, Brandon Beans, discussed with Coach DeVore his history in coaching high school baseball. Coach DeVore was eager to share his years with me – probably because he still loves the game and working with young baseball players.

Coach John DeVore wanted to help young people go from high school to college baseball. He said, "The coaches I had did not help me or anyone else, so we had to get

our scholarships on our own.” Coach DeVore had to work a year after high school before he was able to get into West Georgia College.

After earning his college degree in education and his master’s degree in education, and after being released from professional baseball, Coach DeVore applied for a job at Southwest DeKalb High School in Decatur, Georgia. He was hired as a teacher of social studies and coached junior varsity baseball in 1966. In 1968 Coach DeVore became the head varsity coach at Southwest DeKalb, and he also coached football. From 1966 to 1980 Coach DeVore coached baseball at Southwest DeKalb. From 1980 to 1996 he was the head varsity baseball coach at Shamrock High School in Decatur, Georgia.

Coach John DeVore’s salary during his early years of coaching was less than \$2,500 a month. He would work from 7 a.m. until 8 p.m. for baseball, football, and teaching. The hardest part of his job was keeping the field in shape to play. When he started coaching, he was all by himself. Coach DeVore stated, “I had to learn how to play each position well enough to teach a player how to play that position.” Coach DeVore learned to do his job by attending coaches clinics, pro camps, pitching camps, and asking many questions to many, many people. He said, “The hardest part to learn was how to teach someone to do what I did naturally.”

Much success came to Coach John DeVore. He lists some of his highlights in his career as state champions in football in 1972, 2nd place in state championship in baseball in 1973, numerous Dug-Out and regional baseball championships, and 56 straight region wins at Shamrock High. Coach DeVore was named Teacher of the Year twice. He is in West Georgia College’s Athletic Hall of Fame and in Georgia High School Coaches Hall of Fame. He was also honored as a Braves 400 Club Coach of the Year, Region Baseball

Coach of the Year for many years, and Georgia Dug-Out Club Coach of the Year. He is now regarded as one of the best private pitching instructors in Georgia.

Coach John DeVore recommends becoming a high school baseball coach to future baseball players if they enjoy young people and do not mind hard work and low pay. The most important skill to possess in doing this job is the ability to work with young people in a positive and respectful manner. Coach DeVore said, "You have to respect them and they have to respect you." When asked about the hardest thing to do in coaching high school baseball, he replied, "Making cuts. I never wanted to tell a young person that they could not play." When asked about the most rewarding thing, he stated, "Seeing young people become successful. Baseball is like life. It has its ups and downs, but we survive."

Over the years Coach John DeVore has met many interesting people through baseball. He has met baseball greats Hank Aaron, Warren Spaw, Dale Murphy, John Smoltz, Tom Glavine, Andrew Jones, Chipper Jones, Leo Mazzone, Bobby Cox, Cecil Upshaw, and many others.

After over 34 years in teaching baseball at some level, Coach DeVore still enjoys this work. He stays in contact with people he has worked with through Teacher Retirement Clubs and the Georgia Dug-Out Club.

I asked Coach DeVore, "What has changed about coaching high school baseball over the years? How is it different today?" Coach DeVore replied, "High school baseball today is more of a business than a sport. Coaches do not teach players to play the game. They are expected to be able to play when they get to high school. Way too much emphasis is put on winning versus helping kids get to the next level."

My final question to Coach John DeVore was, “Would you like to pass on anything to someone interested in coaching high school baseball?” Coach DeVore responded, “The rewards are great! The money is not good. Just remember – a coach cannot win without players.”



Coach John DeVore on far left as Varsity Head Coach of Southwest DeKalb High School.