



Long Island's Own Baseball Legend

MIKE LEIDERMAN (1961-2018)

How many organizations can say they went to Cuba, played in Havana and beat an international powerhouse that hadn't lost at home in seventeen years? Mike Leiderman and his Storm baseball did just that. Nick Clark recalls the experience quite well. "First off, getting down to Cuba was a challenge in itself. Half our team traveled through Canada, while the other half traveled through the Bahamas. The game was unbelievable. We played well because we were loose and we wanted to have fun. There were about 2,000 people at that first game. Chris Kozlowski pitched the game of his life. The first time I stepped up to the plate a fastball came at me at 99 mph. I looked over at Mike down at third and just cracked a smile. We ended up shocking both the team and the fans. I hit a homerun in the sixth inning and it was so quiet. The whole experience was just unbelievable." This accomplishment came in 2003, but there is a history of this organization, and Leiderman, that precedes this amazing victory.

Mike Leiderman, a graduate from Queens College, and record holding batting champion, with a .437 average, wanted to play baseball. A talented baseball player he was, but he knew he wasn't going to be playing in the Major Leagues. Not ready to hang up his cleats, he decided to start a summer travel team with some of his buddies in 1989. They played about thirty-five games in the Stan Musial League and came out on top. With that win they earned a regional appearance, but were eventually defeated, ending their season. In 1990, 1991 and 1992 the Long Island Brewers, as they were known then, made it to the regionals, but again had season ending defeats must to the chagrin of Leiderman. Being as competitive as he was, Mike had

plans to make this team better and get them to the next level. There were over 5,000 teams playing amateur baseball across the United States, and only one team was crowned the winner of the AABC and NABF. Mike wanted his team to be a national power and he wasn't going to stop until they were recognized as just that.

In 1993, Leiderman decided that his team was going to travel. The team wasn't going to be playing only in the metropolitan area anymore. Playing in two organiza-

"Mike was of the most selfless and generous people - a super successful guy in business. He was passionate about baseball and gave hundreds of players the opportunity to play around the world on his dime. He asked that you play the game with everything you had and would accept nothing less."

- Gregg Sarra

tions, the National Amateur Baseball Federation and the American Amateur Baseball Congress, being the best in both organizations was where Mike was headed. The world series for the AABC was in Michigan each year, so to the Midwest they went. They competed in tournaments and ended up winning a tournament in Ohio. These ballplayers were on the map, which was the first of many goals. Traveling out to the Midwest proved to be a success when later that year they played for the NABF Championship in Louisville, Kentucky and were crowned champions.

The following years, the Brewers officially became the Storm. They were com-

petitive throughout the United States. From 1994-1999 they made it to the regionals of the AABC each year, but never any farther than that. In 1999, the Storm won the NABF for the second time, the only repeat team in history, but still hadn't received the crown of the AABC title. In 2000, they got their chance in Michigan, but came away empty.

In 2002, Mike changed it up again. This time the team was going international. They traveled to British Columbia to compete in the World Cup of Amateur Baseball. There they played the national teams of Dominican Republic, Chinese Taipei, and Cuba. On the mound, and in the field were future major leaguers, including Jose Contreras and Kendry Morales. This tournament was the best of the best of amateur players. As fifty scouts looked on, the Storm defeated the Dominican Republic and then took on the very respected powerhouse, Cuba. Five thousand people watched as the Cuban National Team took the field. A close game through seven innings, with the Storm only down by one, ended eventually in a 4-1 loss. This game opened the eyes of many. Who were these ball players from Long Island taking on national teams from around the world?

In 2004, Mike decided to add to the competition. He wasn't just going to play the amateur teams in the USA, he was going after the professionals. The team played the Phillies Single A affiliate, the Threshers, in Clearwater Florida. The Storm and the Threshers played a three game series, winning 6-1, 4-0 and 3-1. The Storm team played hard and was ready to compete. 2004 brought them back to Michigan again for the AABC Championship, but were again defeated, this time in the World Series. In 2005, the Storm went back to Spring Training, this

“I think everybody in their life runs across a person that there are not enough adjectives to describe them, that was Mike to me larger than life... truly one of a kind”

- Shaun Manning

time for a twelve-day road trip. They played the Reds, Pirates, Marlins, Mets and Phillies. The road trip ended with the team going 12-1.

Finally, in 2006, Mike and his Storm baseball team got what they were after. They played for the AABC World Series Amateur Championship, now being played in Huntsville, Texas. Five thousand teams came down to two. Playing against a team from Tampa, Florida the Storm came away with a 7-5 win, and their first AABC title.

Mike had 375 Minor Leaguers and 52 Major Leaguers come through his Storm team. Now you wonder, what would be next for Mike Leiderman with all that he accomplished. In 2005 Mike bought, what is now known as the The Storm Baseball Academy, in West Hempstead, New York. Within the next two to three years it was decided, by himself and Nick Clark, that Storm baseball would begin to work with kids of all levels, creating an opportunity for every level of player. “I started this program for kids to help them set up for life. We are about real-life experiences, not just with baseball, but also education,” said Mike. You will not just find ballplayers from Long Island in this facility or playing on these teams. There are many players from New York City that are also playing for the Storm. It should be no surprise that the ultimate goal of Leiderman and the Storm Baseball Academy is “to become the best teaching academy in the United States. It’s not about traveling to tournaments and winning. It’s about traveling to tournaments and being seen by as many colleges as possible.” In its’ first year in 2008 the Storm had twelve travel baseball teams. The following year, 2011, was their first graduating class. That year they had 17 players committed to playing baseball in college. These players attended schools such as North Carolina Central University, Dartmouth, Siena, Adelphi, Middlebury and Dowling. “The goal is to have all our kids attending the right colleges for the individual player,” said Shaun Manning, who has developed Next Level Sports, which aids in College Recruitment.

In the summer of 2012 they did just that; travel and have colleges see their players. The 17U team went on a thirty-five day road trip by bus with coaches Shaun Manning, Ciro Ambrosio and Vincent Cola-suonno. The trip started in East Cobb, Georgia where they competed in both the 17U and 18U Perfect Game National Championships. They then got on a bus and traveled to Fort Meyers, Florida where they played in the BCS Finals. At the conclusion of that series they went to Raleigh, North Carolina to play in the 17U Impact

“Mike has a love for competition and breaking barriers. He’s got passion for the game and his players. He has given me opportunities to play this game against great competition in the states and outside of the country. The opportunity to play against Cuba, Canada, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico was great. To then be given a once in a lifetime trip to play in Italy, to not only play baseball, but see the country was something I will never forget. He gave me, a man with a dream to play this game at a higher level, the opportunity to show that I belonged. I’m sincerely grateful for all he has done.”

- Hector Duprey

Baseball World Series and finished their road trip in Greenville, North Carolina at the Canes Baseball 17U Dynamic World Series. The 16U team was afforded the same opportunities as the 17U players, as they played up and down the east coast from July 1st to October 17th, and then ended their journey by flying out to Arizona from October 23-25, to participate in the Arizona Junior World Showcase in Peoria. Back at home on Long Island the 13U team made it to the Boys of Summer Finals, 15U won the Boys of Summer

Championship and the 18U team played for the LIBA Championship.

When this interview took place back in 2010, this is what Mike had to say about the program he started and the people that work with him. “The Storm Baseball Academy has many people helping it become one of the most successful programs in the tri-state area. Nick Clark and Mike Antoniato run the day to day operations at the academy in West Hempstead. We are on the phone everyday making sure everything runs smoothly. Mike Antoniato is my savior. Between setting up lessons, keeping up with the teams, and the overall organization, he’s able to keep everything on track. Everyone within the organization does an amazing job,” said Leiderman.

Mike’s story is one that makes you shake your head in awe. With 43 national tournament wins and 11 national titles you can only tip your hat to a man that put together a program that has attained amazing success. As of 2012, the overall record for Leiderman’s team is 1,387 wins, 315 losses and 37 ties, giving him an incredible .797 winning percentage. With the accomplishments of this team and the early success for the Storm Travel Organization, Leiderman could have retired from baseball and feel as if his goals were accomplished, but anyone that knew him, knew that wasn’t going to happen anytime soon. For years, if you drove past Farmingdale State College and saw the lights on at the field you could have bet that Mike Leiderman wasn’t very far away.

A few short years after being able to sit down with Mike, he was diagnosed with ALS, a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects the nerve cells and the spinal cord. His family was by his side each step of the way helping him fight this battle. On November 18th, 2018, Mike Leiderman passed away, but left behind a baseball legacy that will live on through the young players that step on the baseball field each day, both near and far.