

Royce Heath



By Al Doran, 2017

For most fastpitch softball fans at an ISC World Tournament, or more to the point, at an ISC Hall of Fame Induction Breakfast, thoughts about our friend Royce Heath would be as the guy who made the ISC Hall of Fame what it is today. And that thought would be well founded as that is exactly the indelible memory that Royce left behind. However, the involvement of Royce with the International Softball Congress and fastpitch goes back much further and deeper than just with his beloved ISC Hall of Fame. Royce had a full half century of involvement with the ISC and with the sport of fastpitch softball.

Royce was born in Venus, TX and was a real athlete. He graduated from Midlothian where he played “every sport they had” which included fastpitch softball, track and football. Royce often lamented he did not get to play basketball as the school did not have a gym. Royce graduated in 1943 and quickly found himself in the US Navy. He was a crewman on a mine sweeper and saw a lot of action in the South Pacific. After the war he returned to Texas and went to college. Royce came from an era when just about every town, large or small, in Texas had a team or indeed a league of its own involved in competitive fastpitch.

According to Heath family history, Royce had teamed up with older brother Marion “Son” Heath shortly after he got out of the service after World War II. The Heath brothers came by their love of the game honestly, since their dad Andy was a south-paw pitcher of renown for many years Royce’s fastpitch career took off in 1948 when he was a team member of the Arlington Merchants that captured an ASA Metro Regional Championship in what Royce remembers as his top thrill to this point in his softball career. This was also a turning point for Royce, as with only ten players and no manager, guess who had to manage the team!

Eventually Royce formed his own team, “Big Daddy’s”, sponsored by a liquor store that led to many years of great competition between their teams in Fort Worth, TX. Royce’s wife of over 50 years, Dixie, herself a former fastpitch player, used to quip that Royce was a much better manager than he was a player. She explained that as a first baseman Royce was always “a great fielder who could also hit the long ball but he just could not run fast enough.” Royce never disputed his wife’s analysis in this

regard. Royce's involvement with the ISC started when ISC Founder Carrol Forbes invited him to breakfast and encouraged him to form a tournament in his area.

The rest was history; by 1952 Heath was installed as a Commissioner. As former ISC Executive Directors, Milt Stark and Ken Hackmeister remember it, Royce set a bench mark that will not likely ever be duplicated – 50 years of service to the ISC. At the time of Royce's induction (1984) into the ISC Hall of Fame, no one came within 20 years of Royce's length of service. Milt regarded Royce's service and work ethic as the bench mark for all current and future ISC Commissioners. He noted that "as a true Texan, Royce takes time and thinks before he takes action. He stands up and states what he thinks and uses good common sense to solve problems".

What many of his friends may not know is that for a short period of time, Royce was also an umpire for about 20 years. He even called balls and strikes at an ISC World Tournament in Rock Island, IL one year. But let's face it, most or all of us knew Royce through his long-standing and exemplary involvement with and development of the ISC Hall of Fame. Royce firmly believed in a rigorous identification and selection process to recognize those individuals who have stood out within the ISC - players, managers, officials and developers. The process today is clearly defined and involves nominations, reviews, clearly defined rules and criteria.

Installed as the Chair of the ISC Hall of Fame Committee in 1978, Royce was at the helm for many years and made great progress. Under Royce's leadership and guidance, the short on-field induction process was transformed to today's refined and well-thought-out annual Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony and Breakfast. Royce passed away on Friday January 12, 2018 in Iredell, Texas, the community to which he and his wife Dixie (Kelly), who pre-deceased him on November 11, 2015, moved in 1996, and where Royce was elected as Mayor in 2003. Royce was a man of many talents and left a legacy for many to enjoy through the strength and quality of the ISC and its famous Hall of Fame.