

Denny Bruckert - HoF - 2008



Denny started playing softball in the small town of Shipman, Illinois between his Junior and Senior years of high school in 1961. He excelled in both basketball and baseball at Bunker Hill High School, being named an All-State Basketball player in both 1961 and 1962. After playing one additional season in Gillespie, Illinois, he was asked to play for the very strong Alt-Wood Merchants team of Alton and Wood River, Illinois. This is where Denny really learned the game of fastpitch softball from a very top notch group of experience players.

The first year Denny played with the Alt-Wood Merchant team, they were the Illinois State Major Fastpitch champions (1963). After playing another year with the Alt-Wood team, Bruckert entered the U.S. Navy during the Viet Nam conflict and he was in Viet Nam from 1965 to 1969. After being discharged from the service in 1969, Denny signed with the Wood River Chiefs-- the primary rival of his former team the Alt-Wood Merchants. That was a special season during which both the Alt-Wood Merchants and the Wood River Chiefs ended up playing in the Illinois State

That was a special season during which both the Alt-Wood Merchants and the Wood River Chiefs ended up playing in the Illinois State Championship with the Chiefs winning in the bottom of the 7th when Bruckert hit a double off the right center field wall, driving in three runs. Denny's playing career included stints with both Alton, Illinois teams, the Decatur A's and the Bloomington Hearts and ran from 1961 through 1982. Rather hanging up his cleats, Denny then turned to the managerial side of fastpitch softball.

Bruckert's first ISC experience was with the Budweiser Kings team of St. Louis, Missouri. In 1983, Denny co-managed the Kings with his good friend the late Russell Boice. They coached that team to a second place finish in the ISC World Tournament in Bakersfield, California getting beat by the Chameleons of Lancaster California and the great Kevin Herlihy in the "if" game of the tournament.

There were a couple of years – 1984 to 1986 – when Denny did suspend his fastpitch career to build his first car dealership that he purchased in late 1984. As you might guess, Denny couldn't stay away from fastpitch too long and he resumed his fastpitch career in 1987.

That's when Denny's good friends Norb Thurmer and the late Bob Welby contacted him mid-season 1987 and asked him to come out of retirement and manage the United Van Lines team out of St. Louis. How could he refuse an offer like that? Bruckert succeeded in getting St. Louis to a 12th place finish in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan with a 5-2 record.

After managing teams in the St. Louis, Missouri area for six seasons, Denny was asked in 1993 to manage the powerful Decatur Pride of Decatur, Illinois. It was Denny's biggest break in fastpitch since previously he was always involved with low budget teams and now he went on to manage one of the best organizations in fastpitch softball. He will always be indebted to his great friend Jim Nicol for bringing him into the Decatur softball family.

After winning one ISC World Title and three ASA National Championships, the Decatur Pride disbanded due to health problems of some of the major Decatur organizers. Denny again was very fortunate to be asked by Rodney Gray and Grover Musser to take over the management of the Frontier Casino team out of St. Joseph, Missouri in 2002.

After two seasons in St. Joe and winning another ISC World Championship and one ASA National Championship, the casino was sold and the sponsorship of the fastpitch team in St. Joe was dropped by the new owners.

Again, good fortune came for Bruckert when long time, great sponsor Darren Derricks invited Denny to manage his Circle Tap team out of Denmark, Wisconsin in 2004. After two plus years with Circle Tap and one ASA Championship, along with a third and a fourth place ISC finish, Bruckert aligned himself with his good friend Bob Nydick to field a new team out of Ontario, Canada called the Riversharks.

All in all, the 40+ years playing and managing has gone by very fast. Denny always says he never knew when to quit because of his love of the game of fastpitch softball, the ISC and for his many, many friends in the fastpitch world. Working with the younger players as he does today makes it tough to walk away from the game he loves so much. Denny enjoys

helping them develop their game, and, more importantly, watch as these men turn out to be great husbands, dads and coaches themselves.

He is particularly proud of players like Shawn Rychcik, Ehren Earleywine, and Russell Cooper who are now working full time as college softball coaches. Although Denny's fastpitch softball career is drawing to a close, his legacy will live on and to quote Denny himself, "it's been a helluva ride!"

Career Managing Accomplishments

2 ISC World Championships

1 ISC Second Place Finish

4 ISC Third Place Finishes

3 ISC Fourth Place Finishes

4 ISC Other Top Ten Finishes

6 ASA Major National Championships

2 ASA Second Place Finishes

1996 Assistant Coach of the USA National Team

1999 Head Coach of the Pan American USA National Team – Silver Medal Finish

ISC World Coaching Record 97 - 41