

Transcription of Podcast Episode 397: Hank Bierman, South Course Golf Starter

SPEAKERS

Hank Bierman, Bob Firing

Note: This transcription was computer-generated and may contain typographical errors.

Bob Firing 00:00

Good afternoon Shadow Hills. Well, I always say that everyone here has got a story, an interesting story. And I have learned that that is true and you don't, it's not necessarily true for all the residents. My guest today is probably knows more residents than any other one person at Shadow Hills. He's Hank Bierman. And he is the golf starter on the South Course. Hank, welcome to the podcast.

Hank Bierman 00:32

Thank you. This is new to me.

Bob Firing 00:33

Well, well, well, I'm going to try to make it as painless as possible. So let's, we'll just tell your story. Let's take you back 90 years to St. Louis, Missouri. And what was life like, in St. Louis?

Hank Bierman 00:54

Totally different. St. Louis, in my opinion is shared by many is the number one baseball town in the country. Boston is number two, and probably New York would be number three. I'm not certain of that. But in my upbringing, that's all I did. They had public parks, public stadiums. And my family. I was raised by my grandmother, my mother passed away when I was five. And I was raised by my grandmother and they had to come get me every night because I'd be out somewhere playing ball. And you don't see that anymore. When's the last time you saw kids playing on the street here?

Bob Firing 01:31

So it was sandlot ball that was not organized. It was just you and your

Hank Bierman 01:36

Initially, yes.

Bob Firing 01:39

And this was something that you were good at from the beginning.

Hank Bierman 01:45

Pretty much so yeah, I remember the fact it's in that video I sent you. The first time I ever played ball. It was in the back alley. They don't have alleys here. It was in the back alley. My father's threw the ball to me. I hit it hit it hard. But I went right through a garage window. And I was all excited. I was five or six years old on your home run home run. And my brother who was six years older than me, he was there

and he y'all know it's run home run home. It's not. And he was right, you know? So yeah. And from there. They have municipal ball, which I played. They have high school, an American Legion, of course. And then they have Khoury League ball. And Khoury, I don't know if it's out here. I don't think it is. But it's amateur baseball at all grade levels. And the Khoury team George Khoury, he wasn't he didn't stand that tall. He put it all together. And the team I was on we won the city championship three years in a row. Every single member of that team, including those that weren't first string, ended up playing professional baseball. And as I've said, you know, if you've got a team made up all of future professionals, it's got to be a pretty good chain for sure.

Bob Firing 03:02

So how old were you with this when you were playing in this Khoury League.

Hank Bierman 03:05

High School.

Bob Firing 03:06

High School. So High School in between high school and the Khoury League. You're pretty much plan all the time.

Hank Bierman 03:13

That's all I did.

Bob Firing 03:14

And you are getting recognized for that.

Hank Bierman 03:17

Yeah, I was on several different All Star teams. And I mean, my whole life was baseball. That's I've never had a hobby. I don't do painting or woodwork. But baseball was what I did, even in the winter. In St. Louis, when you the you have a sidewalk. Then you have a patch of grass that's maybe this wide. And then you have the street. Right during the snow. I used to run and slide on that patch of grass to practice sliding. But if you watch ballplayers today, they slide and they come up and they can start running. I never knew how you did that. Until I was sliding, practicing. And there was a tree there. And I was sliding faster than I thought and I jammed my foot down so that I wouldn't hit the truck. I bounced up. That's how I learned that's how they do it. If you watch them, they'll jam their foot down and are up and running.

Bob Firing 04:08

So you graduated from high school. What was their college baseball in those days or?

Hank Bierman 04:14

There was but I was going professional and if you play professional, I graduated from Washington University. But I couldn't play there because I was a professional.

Bob Firing 04:23

So when were you signed and by whom?

Hank Bierman 04:26

I was signed by the St. Louis Browns in 1950. I couldn't play in 50 because I had a year of American Legion eligibility. And if you were still eligible for American Legion, you couldn't play professional.

Bob Firing 04:41

So, eventually you did and what at what level were you?

Hank Bierman 04:46

I started at C ball playing in Wisconsin. I played two years at Fort Leonard Wood was where the best two years of baseball ever played. And then I played in Class B baseball in Texas at the end. And each one was an experience. And you know, I probably we're not going to do it, obviously. But I probably could have stories about every single city that I have.

Bob Firing 05:12

Of course, yeah. So you got as a is good as you are. And you know, we're going to get to your being in the St. Louis Hall of Fame. But is that the highest you got was in B, in the minor leagues? Yes, sir. So the levels above that are A, AA, AAA, and then the big leagues. So. So you were good. But you weren't good enough...at one point, did you realize that your future was probably not baseball, and you needed to find another career?

Hank Bierman 05:58

Well, last year that I played professionally, was 1955. And I was married already. And I wasn't making enough money in baseball. So I that's when I decided I had to go to college. And I had to find a way to take care of my wife. We've been married 66 years now. And so that was that was kind of

Bob Firing 06:26

That must have been a difficult decision? How old were you then?

Hank Bierman 06:32

Well, 1955, I would have been 22. Yeah, yeah. I was born in 1933.

Bob Firing 06:38

And, and so you must have been quite had quite a reputation in the St. Louis area. And I mean, I didn't even know that they had local Hall of Fames. Tell us about the Hall of Fame, and how you happen to be inducted into it?

Hank Bierman 06:55

Well, it's really kind of funny, because it started here at the golf course at the South Course. I went home. And my wife was out in the driveway with a telephone. And which is not unusual. She could be talking to a neighbor, she can be talking to you. And I was trying to get the car in the garage. She said, No, you got to take this phone call. And I said, Well, why right? When I put the car in the garage, I'll take the know you got to do it now. Well, I've been married a long time. So I listened. And when I got

out, it was a gentleman named Mike Stewart. And he said, he's with the St. Louis, you know, Baseball Hall of Fame. And he wanted me to know I'm being inducted. And I was totally shocked. I had no clue. I'm very pleased and very happy about it. A lot of good things have happened since then. But it was it came out of the blue.

Bob Firing 07:47

How many years ago did that happen?

Hank Bierman 07:50

Two years ago.

Bob Firing 07:51

Two years ago. So you left St. Louis, lived your life in California, you're still living, but they've remembered you. From 50 years ago.

Hank Bierman 08:04

It was kind of a shock. I, when they had me at the induction. There were nine players being inducted. There were a lot of players that I had played with and or against. And they're all they've all passed away. There's only one other and myself that's still alive to my knowledge. And I have no idea where they got all the information. They knew more of my statistics than I knew. But you know, somewhere they dug them up.

Bob Firing 08:32

Well, as you say that that would prove why St. Louis is the best baseball town.

Hank Bierman 08:38

It blew me away. I mean, it really did the entire operation from the time they called me. I flew to St. Louis for the induction ceremony. And till the time I came back, what I had hoped is on that team that we were on the one that city championship three years, I had really hoped that those players would be there because they're almost, I think seven of them are also in the hall. But they've all passed away. You know, so it's kind of a thing. I've had a lot of phone calls. I've had people all over the country contacting me. And it's kind of exciting. I'm proud of it.

Bob Firing 09:16

I should say, I shouldn't say. So. You're 90 years old.

Hank Bierman 09:23

For three more months.

Bob Firing 09:24

You're gonna be 91. You look great. What's the secret to your longevity.

Hank Bierman 09:31

My wife, one. And I've just I haven't. I've gone through a period of leukemia, and I'm in remission. And that oncologist I think is the world of him. He's out of Eisenhower. And he has provided instead of just the chemo is provided medication, prescriptions, and I take those and I keep doing it and I have to tell you, it's kind of an sideline story. He told me about, I'm gonna say six, eight weeks ago that there is going to be a seminar for all the oncologists and Eisenhower, he's in charge of it. And I'm the subject of it. And I said, What do you want me to be there? He says, not necessary. And I forgot about in all honesty, but then when I saw him on a following trip, he says, I want you to know that the seminar went very well. And I said, Oh, my God, I forgot all about it. I said, you know, how do you mean I was at a seminar go very well. He said, The only question they brought up the a pill that I have to take every night at dinner, it's one of these 1000s of dollars per pill thing. Thank God, somebody's writing it, covering it. They question the wisdom of giving a 90 year old man, that pill because it's a very, very potent pill. And he says, Well, you're right. He's 90 years old, but he looks like he's 75. And he acts like he's 75. So from now on, Bob, I'm 75. I just reduced for me 15. But I thought that was clever.

Bob Firing 11:11

Okay, so in our time we have left, tell us your best baseball story.

Hank Bierman 11:17

Best story? Well, I almost have to think it would be Fort Leonard Wood. Because I played there two years. The battalion commander had my name under a glass desktop, saying this man cannot be transferred. And the reason for that was he bet a case of scotch on every game we played. And in the two years I was there, he never lost. And I also on my team, there was Jerry Lumpe. He was the future shortstop of the Yankees. I played shortstop, Jerry played second base. And then a fellow that I'd also played in the minor leagues with Bob Schmidt, who ended up catching for both the Giants and the Yankees, you know, at various times. And Bob and I were in a home run contest. And the last time I was at bat in the army, we I had hit two home runs in that game, Bob hit one. So we were so tired. So my last at bat, and then I hit a home run, so I beat him. And it's almost like that was the only reason I was playing there. You know, if I can meet Bob, he had the strongest throwing arm I have ever seen. And I used to go bowling with him periodically. And you know, a big bowling ball. The ball never hit the alley. So it was damn near at the pins, excuse my language till it was at the pins. Because that's the way he threw it. He would loft it almost all the way down. What a great arm. Oh, unbelievable. I swear he could throw a baseball through that wall right now. Not right now. He could strongest I've ever seen.

Bob Firing 12:55

Well, thank you for coming in and telling us your story for the audience. Hank brought some memorabilia in. And so we are will display that, links to that along with this interview. And say hi to Hank, the next time you're out there on the South Course.

Hank Bierman 13:13

Thank you. This chair I'm in is not electrical. So I'm happy about that. And I had no idea what this was going to be you made me very comfortable. So I appreciate it.

Hank Bierman 13:23

Oh, thank you for coming in. And for the audience. Thank you for your attention, bye-bye.