

A Life in Baseball:

Terry Helget's legacy as player, umpire earn him HOF nod



Photo courtesy of Terry Helget

Terry Helget takes a swing during an amateur baseball game as part of the Essig Bluejays.

By Jake Calhoun
Journal Sports Writer

SLEEPY EYE — Terry Helget lives, sleeps and breathes baseball.

The 48-year-old Sleepy Eye resident has spent pretty much his entire life around the ballpark — from his days as the bat boy for the famous Stark Longhorns amateur baseball team to his All-Conference years at New Ulm Cathedral and his time playing Division III baseball at the University of St. Thomas.

Upon returning to the New Ulm/Sleepy Eye area, Helget played an illustrious 28-year career with the Essig Bluejays amateur baseball team and has made a name for himself as one of the best umpires in the state — he has been umpiring Division I baseball games for the Big Ten Conference, Summit League and Horizon League since 2007 as well as Division II and Division III national tournaments. Helget also played a key role in the effort to bring lights to the Essig Ballpark, which came to fruition in 2015.

For his lengthy résumé and contributions to the sport of baseball, Helget earned the nod for the Minnesota Amateur Baseball Hall of Fame and will be inducted in September.

The Minnesota Amateur Baseball Association was sent a compilation of 68 recommendation letters endorsing Helget's candidacy as a deserving individual for induction, which led to its decision to enshrine him in its hall of fame.

Bryce Pack, the activities director at Red Rock Central High School and the commissioner of amateur baseball's Region 2C, wrote in his recommendation letter that

Hall of Fame induction banquet

When: Saturday, Sept. 16
Where: River's Edge Convention Center, St. Cloud
Tickets: \$30, must be purchased by Sept. 8
Contact Tammy Helget at 507-276-9134 for any questions or if you are interested in taking the pre-arranged coach bus to St. Cloud
Go to <http://www.mnamateurbaseballhof.com/annualbanquet.asp> for order forms



Photo courtesy of Maddy Helget
Terry Helget works the bases as an official at an MSHSL baseball state championship game at Target Field in Minneapolis.

As a kid, Helget was always throwing, whether it was rocks or small apples he found on the ground or tattered baseballs against the walls of barns or shade on the

Helget always played the game the way it should be played.

"He was very competitive but played hard and always by the rules," Pack wrote. "When I was an umpire working behind him when he caught I knew it would be an enjoyable game to work. He very seldom questioned calls but when he did he was very professional about it, never showing you up or causing a scene."

Dan Wolfe, who is currently the head assistant women's basketball coach at Gustavus Adolphus College, taught Helget in middle school within the New Ulm Area Catholic Schools and later coached him on the boys' basketball team at Cathedral. Wolfe wrote that Helget is a man of strong moral character.

"Terry does things for the right reason and without falling to the pressures of being politically correct," Wolfe wrote. "Rules need to be followed by everyone no matter what their status is. He does not discriminate when it comes to doing the right thing and following the code of conduct as



Terry Helget poses with his family. Front row from left: son Jay, wife Tammy, daughter Mallory. Back row: Terry, daughter Maddy.

a student, athlete or official."

Legendary New Ulm baseball coach James Senske began his recommendation letter by stating that Helget is "almost overly qualified" to be inducted into the hall of fame. Senske wrote that Helget was always a highly sought-after umpire for postseason tournaments and as the Section 3AAA coordinator, Senske had difficulty hiring him because of his previous commitments to other section tournaments.

"Quite frankly, he was the best umpire you could hire," Senske wrote of Helget. "His mechanics, game control, and professionalism were impeccable."

Legendary Waseca baseball coach Tink Larson echoed Senske's sentiment in writ-

ing that Helget was one of the best umpires in the state.

"The only thing that could hold him back would be if he were a jackass, and he's the exact opposite," wrote Steve Kloeckl, manager/player for the Searles Grizzlies amateur baseball team.

Influential members within the local baseball community such as Bruce Weitars, Bob Weier, Bob Fink, Verne Radloff, Bob Sturm, Alberta Marth and even the National Coordinator of Baseball Umpires for the NCAA George Drouches — all had immensely positive things to say about Helget's commitment to baseball and what he has meant to the sport as a player, manager, umpire and exemplary figure.

Humble bat boy-turned-ballplayer

Terry Helget's ties with Essig are strong, but his origin in the sport dates to his days as a bat boy for the Stark Longhorns teams that consisted almost entirely of Helgets.

"I always kind of figured I would eventually play for Stark and so did everybody else because that's where my dad [Marlin] and everybody else played," Helget said. "He was one of seven boys in his family — no sisters — and they all played baseball for Stark and they had four cousins that were as good or better as they were... At one time, there was probably a dozen Helgets on the roster at any given time."

When he was young, Helget chased foul balls and memorized which helmet and bat belonged to which player as the bat boy for the Longhorns.

"That was the transition from wood bats to aluminum back in the late 70s — now we've gone to the other side again," Helget said. "So I knew which guys had aluminum bats and which ones had the wood bats — Jackie Robinson's was my dad's style, for instance."

against the walls of yards or sheds on the farm.

"Baseball was definitely my love from an early age," he said. "It just kept growing, I guess."

Helget went on to play varsity as a freshman at New Ulm Cathedral, working his way to a starting spot at catcher as a sophomore and eventually earning All-Conference honors as a junior and senior. He was also part of the New Ulm Legion team that qualified for the 1985 American Legion World Series in Kokomo, Indiana.

With all his success behind and at the plate, Helget went on to play at St. Thomas. However, he found he was somewhat at a disadvantage from the get-go.

"In Division III you don't have scholarships, but up there if you went to Cretin-Derham Hall or Hill-Murray, you had a little bit of an advantage because those were their breeding grounds, so to speak," Helget said. "I didn't know that at the time. I just came in there figuring I'm an All-Conference guy from Cathedral. I'll make my mark up there no problem. Well, I made the team no problem, but I found out that I was behind two other catchers who were both All-State."

Because of this, Helget ended up playing more at first base than behind the plate as catcher.

"I caught a lot of bullpen," Helget said with a chuckle. "I would say my time there, I maybe played a third of the games. I was not a standout by any stretch. I was a hard worker, did anything the coaches asked. I basically used those four years to get a lot more reps and get in the weight room and get stronger and that helped me for an amateur ball."

During his first summer off from college, Helget signed on to play amateur ball for the Essig Bluejays, beginning a career that spanned from 1988 to 2015.

In 800 games played, Helget notched 902 hits and had a .311 batting average. On the mound, Helget pitched 904 innings and amassed 871 strikeouts with a 2.96 career ERA. He made the All-Tournament team at

Helget

Continued on page 4C



Amateur baseball is a family affair for the Helget family. Terry Helget poses with his family. From left: brother Kyle, Terry, son Jay, father Marlin.