

## Thomas Kraus

This week we are happy to name Thomas Kraus as the 148th inductee in Marshfield's 150: Heroes and Leaders, Past and Present register. Thomas Kraus was nominated by his granddaughter, Madison Kraus.

It was a warm, misty Monday morning on June 7, 1948. The weather wouldn't stop two brothers from Rozellville on their first of many daily, nine-mile hitchhikes into Marshfield to play peewee baseball. This is where Tommy Kraus, age 12, and his older brother Jerry, fell in love with the game.



The younger Kraus boy would turn this into his life-long passion. Tommy quickly excelled at every level that he would play. Beginning at the age of 16, his summers would include playing in the local adult Yellow River Baseball League. His talents immediately drew the attention of many central Wisconsin baseball clubs and there rarely was a weekend that he wasn't playing ball.

In 1954, he enlisted in the United States Air Force. His training as an airborne radar specialist took him to Otis AFB in Massachusetts. While visiting the base gym and tossing the baseball, Kraus drew the attention of a "fullbird" Colonel, who happened to be the base's baseball coach. Kraus was immediately invited to the team's practice that evening. From there, his pitching talent became his ticket to, not only being a member of the squad, but also garnered him the MVP award at the end of his first season.

Otis AFB was a member of the semi-professional Cape Cod League (CCL). The CCL was known then, as well as today, as being the best summer college baseball league in the country. Kraus was selected to play in the CCL All-Star Game at Fenway Park in Boston against the Red Sox minor league All-Stars. He is still one of only a couple dozen pitchers in CCL history to throw a complete game no-hitter. In 1956, he pitched for New Bedford in the CCL and helped them qualify for the National Baseball Congress (NBC) Tournament in Wichita, Kansas. In 1957, he pitched for Stewart AFB who eventually lost to Andrews AFB in the Regional Air Force Tournament championship game. Andrews qualified for the Air Force Worldwide Baseball Tournament, adding him as one of three allowed pick-up players for further play. Andrews went on to win the tournament with Kraus pitching in two games.

While making a name for himself in the New England area, he drew heavy attention from both the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox farm directors. After receiving offers

from both organizations, Kraus signed a contract with the Red Sox in the spring of 1958. His professional career began with spring training in Ocala, Florida that year. Kraus pitched for three years in the Red Sox organization before an arm injury in 1959 cut his season short. Boston then released him in the fall of '59.

In 1960, Kraus came back to the Marshfield area and rehabilitated his throwing arm. He was picked up to pitch for Greenwood in the summer of 1960. Kraus led the smalltown team to the NBC State Championship game before losing. He was selected as the 1960 State Tournament Most Valuable Player. This attracted the Washington Senators organization, which then signed him to a new contract. His time with the Senators ended mid-season due to a second arm injury, this time requiring surgery and ultimately ending his professional baseball career.

Kraus and his family moved to Janesville in 1970. There, he pitched for the city's semi-professional baseball team. In 1972, he became the team's player/manager. He did this for three years, one of which his team took third place in the State NBC Tournament. In 1974, he took the helm of the Beloit Blues semi-professional team, which he held for two years. Both Janesville's and Beloit's teams consisted of several former professional players.

In 1976, his family moved back to the Marshfield area. A year later, he took over the head coaching duties for the Marshfield Post 54 American Legion Baseball team which he did for three years. One of his most proud accomplishments was giving a small in stature, sophomore 2nd baseman a chance to compete with the older ball players on the team. This player, Gary Varsho, or known by Kraus as "Little Andrew," possessed attributes that his coach picked up on the first time he showed up at practice – fierce commitment and a willingness to learn. These took Varsho to a Major League career.

In 1982, Kraus initiated and organized the newly formed Marshfield Baseball Club, later to be the Marshfield Chaparrals. Kraus took Marshfield's semi-pro baseball to a level it had never seen before, including winning a 1991 Wisconsin State League championship. Along with local talent, Kraus recruited players from across the country and internationally to be a Chapparral. Players from places like New York, Florida, Hawaii, and Australia were products of his recruiting and collegiate contacts. Nine of his players signed professional contracts.

His desire to help players achieve their highest level of play drove him to more than two decades of Marshfield baseball involvement. During that time, the Milwaukee Brewers brought Kraus on as an associate scout and a pitching coach during their tryout camps. He brought tryout camps, youth baseball clinics, and an influx of Major League scouts to the Marshfield area.

Kraus's contributions and achievements were driving factors in his induction into both the Central Wisconsin Baseball, and the Marshfield Area Baseball and Softball Halls of Fame. During his acceptance speeches, Kraus paid great appreciation to his wife and lifetime

partner Margaret, for her unending support and selflessness while raising eight children so that he could live out his passion.

A close friend and Los Angeles Dodgers scout Dale McReynolds referred to Kraus on several occasions as “Marshfield’s Mr. Baseball.” Terry Ryan, a former player of Kraus’s and Minnesota Twins General Manager, called his former coach “a great example for young pitchers, and baseball players as a whole,” emphasizing the importance of respecting the game.

Thomas “Tommy” Kraus died in 2021. Marshfield baseball is better because of him. Love you Grandpa.