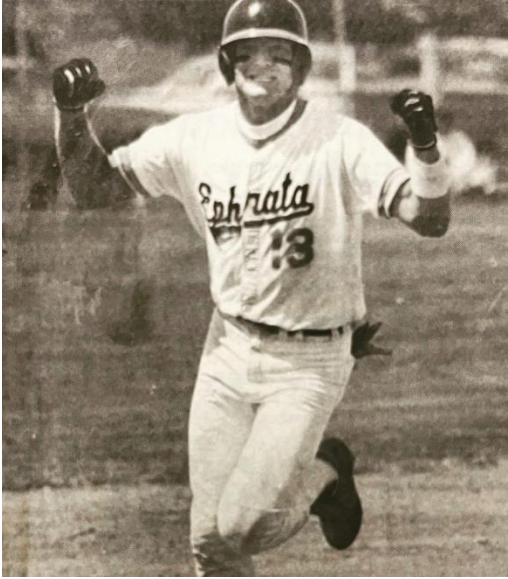


Zerb enters the EHS Athletic Hall of Fame

**BY RICHARD BYRD
of the Journal**

EPHRATA — Troy Zerb doesn't necessarily like doing these sorts of things.



The 1987 Ephrata High School graduate and 2022 Ephrata Athletic Hall of Fame inductee isn't the type of person that likes to go on and on about himself when a newspaper reporter asks about his athletic accomplishments.

With a boisterous and outgoing personality, Zerb certainly isn't a shy guy either, but when it comes to detailing his days as an Ephrata Tiger, he prefers to keep the focus on his teammates and coaches rather than himself.

“Being inducted into the Hall of Fame means a lot, but I am not one to talk about myself by any means. For me it was and still is about the team rather than myself,” said Zerb. “I can't tell you any stats from my playing days. We didn't care about stats. It was all about the team and winning.”

Zerb is about Ephrata as they come. Having been raised in the area, it was a foregone conclusion that he would one day attend Ephrata High School. What wasn't set in stone was Zerb playing sports however, as he says athletics weren't necessarily a big thing in his house growing up.

Interestingly enough, he says he didn't really have any professional athletes that he idolized either. But as he grew older and sports sparked more of an interest in the young Zerb, he started paying a little bit more attention to Ephrata's athletes.

“And then I got to play football in the ninth grade finally. We didn't even know how to put our pads on yet, it was pretty crazy,” he joked.

Zerb played running back and a little defense his freshman and sophomore years, but his junior year is when he started to see more significant playing time, especially on offense.

Things were different in Zerb's junior year however, as Bill Betcher — a 2021 Ephrata Athletic Hall of Fame inductee — took over as head coach for Ephrata football.

“Learning the new offense was crazy because we didn't understand it. I remember the first couple of

practices, us running backs were just running into each other,” Zerb recalled. “It was a wishbone offense, so we didn't throw much at all.”

As running back Zerb was an important piece of the Tigers' new run-heavy offensive approach. Sure, there was a bigger burden placed on his shoulders, but Zerb was blessed with a stout offensive line that made things a lot easier for him running the ball.

“I remember we had a game and after it the Grant County Journal wanted to talk to me and I said ‘go talk to the linemen. Those guys deserve the credit.’ I just got the accolades, but they did the dirty work,” he said. “We lost a couple games my junior year and then my senior year (1986) we just ran the table and won the state title in the King Dome (against Lynden Christian).”

“I remember the first play of the game we did a little trick play and Gary Hagy threw me a touchdown. That kind of set the tone there for the rest of the game.”

That senior year was something special for Zerb, as he led the state in touchdowns with 30. As good and successful as he was on the gridiron, it was on the baseball diamond where Zerb really shined.

In middle school he developed his skills at the TBI (Total Baseball Instruction) Baseball Camps in Ephrata and looked up to stars at EHS like Jeff Plew — a 2019 Ephrata Athletic Hall of Fame inductee.

He made the EHS junior varsity team as a freshman and enjoyed success right off the bat, with the team going undefeated that season. Call it luck, coincidence or part of a grand plan, Zerb's high school baseball career happened to fall during a run of unprecedented success for EHS baseball.

Legendary coach Dave Johnson was at the helm of the program in those days and had already led Ephrata to state titles in 1981, 1982 and 1983. Zerb got to play second base for Johnson his sophomore year when he was bumped-up to the varsity team. The next three seasons were magical for Zerb and the Tigers.

Ephrata captured the state title in 1985, just missed the title game in 1986, finishing third, and won another title in 1987. When Zerb's Ephrata baseball career came to a close he had achieved a .400+ batting average and amassed 45 extra base hits and 62 stolen bases.

Sure, the memories of touchdowns, homeruns and championships are long-lasting and worth remembering, but for Zerb the most important things he remembers to this very day from his high school experience are the lessons he learned from his coaches.

“There were three coaches who influenced me; coach Marty O'Brien, coach Dave Johnson and coach Bill

Betcher. What I took from them more than anything else was the concept of hard work,” he said.

That hard work paid-off for Zerb after he turned his tassel in 1987, as he was drafted in the 21st-round by the Philadelphia Phillies in the 1987 Major League Baseball Draft. Being drafted was an all-around wake-up call for the 18-year-old who had never been on a plane before.

“Once you get to that level you realize that everybody can play. It was a job, and it wasn’t a job before and was fun. It was still fun, but it was also a job,” he said.

Zerb played for three different teams — the Bend Phillies, Utica Blue Sox and Batavia Clippers —over two seasons in the minors before he was released. When asked if he found any success while in the minors, Zerb smiled and exclaimed “no, absolutely not.”

Zerb’s athletic career didn’t stop there however. After he was released, he went on to play football at Yakima Valley College, where he played running back and returned kicks and punts. A big hit that injured his shoulder in a game against Wenatchee Valley College brought his football career to an unfortunate and unexpected end however.

After the injury it was back to the real world. Zerb worked at a lumber yard for a bit, all the while taking night courses in welding at Big Bend Community College (BBCC).

He says he was a welder for about two years before a City of Ephrata job caught his eye. He got the job in 1996 and started out dumping garbage on the back of a garbage truck. Zerb rose through the ranks over the years and today is the manager of Ephrata’s Water Reclamation Facility.

After the shoulder injury his playing days were over, but the world of athletics wasn’t quite done with him. Zerb had a three-year stint as coach for BBCC’s baseball team, which he says was an amazing experience due to him not being too much older than the kids he was coaching.

“It was awesome because I could still play at the time. They would say things like ‘I can’t do it’ or ‘it’s impossible’ and I would go out there and show them what to do,” he said. “They saw me play, so they respected me and we got along good.”

Zerb was exhausted though. He would get off work in Ephrata, then head over to Moses Lake for practice and finally head home around 7 p.m. each night. The schedule took its toll after three years, but Zerb still wasn’t done with baseball.

In the proceeding years he helped coach infielders for the Columbia Basin RiverDogs and at EHS and even ran his own summer camps for infielders. He left the coaching game for good two years ago. Today, while not working, Zerb dedicates his free time to boating and fishing.

His EHS playing days still factor into his everyday life however and he maintains close friendships with a number of the guys he played with in the 1980s.

“Even all these years later, that camaraderie is still there and I don’t think it will go away anytime soon,” he stated.