In The Dugout With Dan DePaoli

He's a pitcher, part yacker and part Roth IRA, liberated from our obsessive life-style, deceptive (on the mound) and youngish (for 47).

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Hamilton College’s baseball team went 6-5 during its annual Spring Break trip to Florida.

And you can bet 47-year-old Dan DePaoli is loving every minute of it. He’s on the team.

DePaoli’s path back to the baseball diamond has been an adventure.

For most of the last quarter century he has been knee deep in taxes.

As managing director of Andersen Tax’s Greenwich, Conn., office, DePaoli also serves on the firm’s Board of Directors. He has decades of experience in providing tax consulting and compliance services to high net worth individuals and families.

In the Spring of 1990 he was a senior at Hamilton and a leader of men.

Along with Glenn Fusonie, DePaoli co-captained Hamilton’s baseball team during a season that broke records. In fact, the Continentals, led by its seven seniors, went 12-5 that year. DePaoli played center field and pitched for the Clinton, N.Y.-based Division III squad. He gave himself a nickname: the “Hawk.”

DePaoli graduated from the liberal arts school on May 20, 1990. But he likes to boast more about the baseball team’s winning percentage. It’s still the best in the 100-plus history of the program (.705). “Hamilton has won more games since,” he said, “but that’s only because it counts all the
wins in Florida. We didn’t 25 years ago.” The 1990 team also hit a school record 21 home runs and had a team slugging percentage of .492. Both are all-time records.

UNEXPECTED CORRESPONDENCE

Last summer DePaoli, who lives in Brewster, N.Y. with his wife, Eileen, and two daughters, Katie and Maggie, got a very unexpected and serendipitous letter from Hamilton.

Kristin M.T. Friedel from the college’s Office of the Registrar informed him that there had been a mistake on his Hamilton transcript. Officially, the college wrote that he was a credit short of graduation. He had earned only 32 units instead of the required 33.

“I was shocked,” DePaoli said. “Hamilton told me it no longer considered me an alumnus, but would let me take a class to complete the degree.”

Eileen, a former softball and basketball star who graduated from Hamilton in 1990, wasn’t surprised. That year Hamilton printed its diplomas in Latin, and made an embarrassing typographical error, listing the year incorrectly on the original document. This recent blunder just added to it.

“We were upset,” Eileen said. “Dan had hung his Hamilton diploma on his office wall all these years.”

In 1990 DePaoli earned his third varsity letter in baseball competing for head coach Mike Davis and pitching coach Dick Hunt. He didn’t try out as a freshman, thinking his skills were better suited to basketball.
The letter from the registrar sat on DePaoli’s desk for a couple months until he had an epiphany.

“I thought why not go back this year, earn that fourth letter, take a class and get my degree?” DePaoli said. “It made sense. I love what I do, but it was one more tax season or another crack at competitive baseball. It was a no-brainer and I wanted to show my girls what the old man could do on the mound.”

Katie, a teenager, agreed. “I’ve heard him reminisce about his time at Hamilton my whole life,” she said. “I was excited for him.”

So last fall DePaoli called Jon Hind, Hamilton’s athletic director, who ran the idea by Tim Byrnes, the head baseball coach. “I was intrigued,” Byrnes said. “Jamie Moyer pitched in the big leagues until he was 49. Will Ferrell, who is 47, recently tried out for 10 MLB teams in one day in Arizona. Maybe this guy could bring some of the mojo from that 1990 team to our current squad. Plus, I heard he was a vocal leader. We were missing that.”

Hind got approval from the NCAA for DePaoli to use his last year of eligibility. DePaoli took a leave of absence from his job in December and enrolled at Hamilton this semester, taking an upper level English class. “I needed a break from crunching numbers,” he said.

Before Dan traveled from Brewster back to Clinton, he attended the 2015 Mets Fantasy Camp in Port St. Lucie, Fla., which was held in January.

Joe Yurman, Founder and Managing Partner at 12/21 Capital Investment, was a third baseman and clean up hitter on the 1990 team. He paid DePaoli’s fee for the Mets Fantasy Camp. “I believe in him,” Yurman said. “He needed to get in shape so he wouldn’t embarrass himself back at Clinton. Plus, he really likes the Mets for some reason.”

DePaoli relished the experience, meeting Met greats Dwight Gooden, Tim Teufel, Lance Johnson, Doug Flynn, Ron Swoboda, Todd Pratt and Mackey Sasser. “That was always a big goal for Dan,” said Joe Kremer, another Hamilton friend who lives in Pomfret, Conn., where he works at the Pomfret School. “Putting on the Mets uniform was as good as it got for Hawk. His friends and family supported it and his return to Hamilton, no matter how absurd it seemed.”

DePaoli worked out exclusively as a pitcher. He knew he wouldn’t crack the Continentals line up or play center field. Joe Jensen, Hamilton’s heralded lead off hitter and center fielder, was named the top prospect in Division III by Baseball America this year. He batted .525 in 11 games during the Florida swing.
But DePaoli left the camp five pounds lighter and two inches taller. He fastball, according to Mets General Manager Sandy Alderson, was clocked at 51 MPH with little movement. “He’s deceptively slow,” Alderson said.

“We stretched a lot,” DePaoli said. “I sweated a ton. My favorite Met player back in high school was Sidd Finch (who was in Spring Training for New York in 1985). Working out with guys like Gooden made the Hamilton tryout seem pretty easy.”

Back on campus, DePaoli lifted weights and ran the treadmill at the Blood Fitness Center. After Byrnes announced the 2015 team, he noticed DePaoli adopt a leadership role. “It was like he never left,” Byrnes said. “He was telling the other players to call him “Hawk” and his high-pitched voice reverberated in the field house.”

Byrnes lists DePaoli as a 6-4, 205-pound freshman on the Continentals roster even though he was 6-2 in 1990.

He wears No. 25 instead of No. 13, his old number. “Some sophomore named Andrew Haser has 13,” DePaoli said. “We’ll work something out.”

How does Byrnes explain DePaoli’s newfound height? “Our pitching staff was thin,” Byrnes said. “We needed a taller pitcher with minimal velocity to disrupt timing. We weren’t expecting much from him anyway except to lead the cheers on the bench.”

On March 17 at Chain O’ Lakes Field in Winter Haven, Florida, DePaoli pitched in a college baseball game for the first time in 25 years.

He entered the contest, a 12-5 Hamilton win over SUNY Fredonia, in the top of the seventh as a reliever for Cole Dreyfuss, the starter. In two thirds of an inning DePaoli gave up three hits, but also struck out two. He wasn’t eligible for a save.
Four days later Dan took the loss against Wisconsin-Oshkosh.

He pitched four innings, but gave up only two earned runs in a 13-2 defeat. In the team’s 11th and final game of the trip, DePaoli pitched the final inning. He struck out two, but the Continentals lost to Colby College to finish 6-5. “Because Hawk barely hits the speed limit with his fastball, teams tend to get frustrated,” Byrnes said. “They look at him and think he might have some velocity, but it’s just the opposite.”

Still, a remarkable overall performance for a middle-aged tax consultant.

Gibsonia, Penn.,-based Peter Wymard, VP, Major Accounts at The Network, was the top pitcher on Hamilton’s 1990 team and still holds Hamilton’s career ERA record at 3.86. When Wymard heard that his old friend had experienced both success and struggle on the bump, he wasn’t surprised. “I remember he contributed most as a defender and a leader,” Wymard said. “He could run down any ball in the outfield, like a Hawk I guess. I’m not sure how he struck out anyone in Florida. They must have been staring at his paunch.”

Jensen is one of several current teammates who is impressed with DePaoli’s comeback. “Mr. DePaoli….Danny…I mean…Hawk…still has a very young face for a middle-aged man,” Jensen said. “He’s brought a certain spark to our team. I’m sure his old teammates are proud of him.”

DePaoli, who would like to pitch in as many games as possible before “officially” earning his Hamilton degree in May, plans to stay in Clinton until June when his classmates return for their 25th reunion.

“I love baseball,” DePaoli said. “I’m glad the college screwed up and allowed me to return and play the game again. It brings back a lot of great memories. But no Hamilton team will ever break our team’s record from 1990.”