



**JON ROTH  
GRAND ISLAND  
GIRLS' REPRESENTATIVE-NIAGARA FRONTIER LEAGUE**



L-R: Jimmy Neville and Julie, wife Jean, Jon, Andrea and Jeff

There's a land mass to the north of Section VI surrounded, and therefore protected by water. Vikings inhabit the island and for decades, they forced visitors to pay a tax just to drive over its bridges. The House of Niagara Falls borders directly to the north and the House of Tonawanda to the south.

In the eyes of the other great leaders who have taken their squads and battled the Vikings for nearly half a century, this territory has been known as the House of Roth. For 47 years, Jon Roth has led the Vikings of the North.

He has been a fixture on Grand Island since 1973, as a physical education teacher, coach and for the last 27 years as Director of Athletics. The Tonawanda graduate of 1967, Jon interviewed for a teaching position at both his alma mater and Grand Island but the original King of the North, H. David Myers-the original GI AD-called first and offered Roth a job.

Roth excelled for the Tonawanda Warriors in soccer, basketball and baseball. In his senior campaign, he attended a tryout camp and was offered a professional baseball contract with the Pittsburgh Pirates, which he declined. He was enshrined in his school's Athletic Hall of Fame in 2002. His next

stop was Niagara County Community College (NCCC), where he was All-Region in both basketball and baseball, entering their Athletic Hall of Fame in 1993.

The southpaw pitcher went on to the University of Buffalo (UB) in 1969 where he played baseball. That same year, Roth was drafted by two entities simultaneously. Both the Washington Senators (7<sup>th</sup> Round pick) and his country required his services. He entered the Air Force Reserves, returning to UB in 1972 to finish his Bachelor of Science in Physical Education and complete his collegiate baseball career. That same spring Pirate scout, Sal Maglie tried for a third time to get Roth's signature on a contract offering him a spot on Pittsburgh's AA affiliate. Instead, Roth earned his Master's in Education at Niagara University.

Over his legendary teaching/coaching career, Jon coached football, basketball and tennis for Grand Island. He won over 200 basketball games and 150 girl's tennis matches as a head coach. He feels blessed to have coached both Jeff and Julie at GIHS. In the fall, he assisted the iconic Gene Masters on the gridiron. He also coached NCCC baseball for eight years, never having a losing season. In 1992, he entered into yet another Hall of Fame, this time the Western New York Softball HOF and followed that up in 1998 by being inducted into the WNY Baseball HOF. Three of the best baseball teams he competed for are also represented in the Hall. That makes seven HOF inductions for the big leftie who his oldest friends and family members refer to as, 'Spahn' because his pitching mechanics reminded them of Warren Spahn. Spahn, a Buffalo native and South Park alum won 363 games in the majors and was a first ballot HOF.

Jon and his wife of 48 years, Jean raised two exceptional children. Both played multiple sports in high school and competed in Division 1 tennis together at Xavier University. Jeff, who serves on the Athletic Council, is the outstanding Athletic Director at Wilson. Daughter Julie passed away at the young age of 40, after a battle with an aggressive form of cancer. Thousands lined up for Julie's wake and several hundred made their way to St. Stephen's Catholic Church for her service.

Julie was a beloved elementary school teacher who had coached basketball and tennis at Grand Island. Julie and her husband Jimmy, had four active boys, Jonny (12), Jayden (10), Jameson (7) and Jaxson (6). If they did not already know, the Roth's found out just how much they mean to Grand Island, other communities in the Niagara Frontier League and throughout Section VI. Several events were scheduled around the basketball season to honor Julie, Jimmy and their boys and, ultimately the entire Roth family.

Jon enjoys being involved on a daily basis with the four J's and Jeff's two children, Addison Jane and Jayce. Six young grandchildren, each extremely active and blessed to have Jon and Jean so deeply woven in their lives. The community has wrapped its collective arms around the boys. Someday we will be able to tell each of them how much their grandparents loved them and how dedicated to them they were.

The former co-chair of the Section's Boys Basketball Committee, Roth enjoys golf and attending Bill's games with his son and son-in-law. Not surprisingly, he considers baseball movies, *The Natural* and '42' classics but he gets a laugh out of *Old School* and a thrill from any Tom Cruise film.

So, the next time your band of heathens approaches the pass to enter the territory known as the House of Roth, know that for half a century one person has ruled over its vast and very successful

athletic program. Know that a man, who fought the tides and made it onto the Island in 1973, has never disembarked. Know that his family and Grand Island are inter-connected as one. Acknowledge the loyalty, longevity, commitment and true dedication of this humble icon. You may even consider bending the knee to the King of the North.