



Historically Speaking

*With Town Historian
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Frank Bianco and the start of Little League 1941-1953

In 1942 the most popular sport in America and thereby probably the most popular sport in Eastchester was baseball.

That same year saw the young men of the town, many of them athletes, go off to fight in World War II. One of those young boys who answered the call to duty was a recent Eastchester High School graduate named Frank Bianco. Fourteen years later Frank and a group of his friends, many of them veterans from the war, were responsible for the start of Little League baseball in Eastchester.

Baseball was the only team sport that had been continuously played in the Town of Eastchester since before the turn of the 20th century. Before World War I, the big team was the Waverly A.A. Games were played every Sunday at the Rye Lot, a ball field off Lime Kiln Spur near the Conlin Quarry in Tuckahoe.

Big crowds of local people gathered to watch games and betting was heavy. Important ringers were brought in, even some

major leaguers. Later, the Tuckahoe Robbins became a well-known semi-pro team that played its games at Parkway Oval.

Who was Frank Bianco? Frank was born in 1922 and moved with his family to Tuckahoe when he was six months old. It was a time when Italians were discriminated against

and his dad was unable to get a decent job. In 1928, Jack Bianco translated his name to White (*bianco* means White in Italian). Frank never changed his name.

Frank was a very good athlete at Eastchester High School who played next to greatness. His favorite sport was football. He was a small but fast running guard who went both ways. He played on the line next to Washington Serini, who went on to play professional football and win all NFL honors for the Chicago Bears after World War II.

In the backfield was Eddie Heizenger who might have been the greatest athlete to ever graduate from Eastchester if he hadn't perished when the USS Juneau was sunk in 1942. Frank was also an outfielder in baseball and played some basketball. Frank believes his size prevented him from excelling in that sport.

Frank graduated from high school in 1942 - six months after Pearl Harbor was attacked. Six months after graduation, Frank and 60 others from town were inducted into the U.S. Army. Frank and his brother, Phil White, tell a moving story about their recollection of that event.

In 1942, all the families of the inductees gathered in Waverly Square and walked with their sons to Depot Square to bid them farewell. Frank's father, mother, and siblings were there that day. On that day, he saw his dad as never before. His father had always been stern but on the way to the station he looked at his dad and saw tears in his eyes. In all his life he had never seen his father cry.

Frank served honorably in the war and upon his return became heavily involved in veterans' affairs. But now Frank had a new love in life: Baseball.

His favorite teams were the New York Yankees and the Brooklyn Dodgers. But when the two teams faced each other, he always rooted for the Yankees. Frank loved to

play the game, talk about the game, study it, and most importantly coach young boys in how to play the game.

One night in 1953, he invited a group of his friends over to the basement of his family home that he still lives in today on Hillside Place, just off Town Center. These men, most of them veterans of World War II, loved sports and wanted to pass that love onto the young boys in the town.

The group that they called the Eastchester Men's Social Club had learned from one of their members, Mike Hughes, that parents in Valhalla had started a Little League and invited one its founders to address the group. They decided to do the same in town. Jack Vecciarelli, one of Frank's closest friends and owner of the nearby Oakridge Grill, was elected president. The founding members of the Eastchester Little League beside the people already mentioned were Jack DiRubba, Anthony Ludovicci, Andy Kuczma, Mike Hughes, Jack Iacofano, Bob Allen, and John Cardi.

Frank and his friends would work tirelessly to make sure that all boys in the town had the opportunity to play the game he loves so much. Frank had only one regret about the countless hours he devoted to youth baseball in the town. He dated two very attractive young ladies but baseball was his first love. Today he would love to have a family of his own with grandchildren, but he considers the boys he coached and took to championships like his own.

The next article will tell about the actual start of Little League.

Special thanks goes to John Arrigo for the book he compiled entitled "The Story of Frank Bianco and the Start of the Little League in the Town of Eastchester, New York" from which much of the information for this article was obtained and to Phil White and Frank Bianco for their insights.



(L-R): Coaches Mike Hughes and Ray Cusick, and Manager Frank Bianco of the 1956 Little League Team that went to the World Series in Williamsburg, Pa.