



Reflections of a River Rat:

Perhaps the most dedicated athlete
in history of Section X

Tony Youngs has been a legend for 40 years. It wasn't because he signed a pro contract like Lyle Woodcock of Morristown or played 12 seasons in the major leagues like Jim Deshaies of Massena. But for one shining moment, Youngs became a hero.

It's a sports tale that is superseded by Youngs' indomitable spirit, a commitment to a game he loved, and a mental toughness that few, if any, could surpass.



Tony Youngs 2022

You know this scene. Some gray-haired old-timers gather over a beverage or two, recall their nerdy high school days, remember the girls that ignored them, complain about referees and calls in crucial moments, and try to one-up each other with the funniest lines. Then someone brings up Tony Youngs. His story is astounding.

His life today is unremarkable. He'll tell you he has been a chef for 27 years at Buster's Restaurant in Ogdensburg, and you can imagine he is the guy who shows up every day for work, does his job, and doesn't complain. He has been a working man since he graduated from Morristown in 1983.

But one Saturday morning still resonates among the old-timers. Youngs loved baseball, deeply respected his coach, and was dedicated to his teammates. Morristown was scheduled to play a road game and Youngs knew he had to meet the team bus.

Had it been a midweek game, no problem. Take the bus to school; catch the players' bus home.

But this was a Saturday. There was no transportation. Youngs was the son of Lafayette and Barbara Youngs, working people with a strong work ethic.



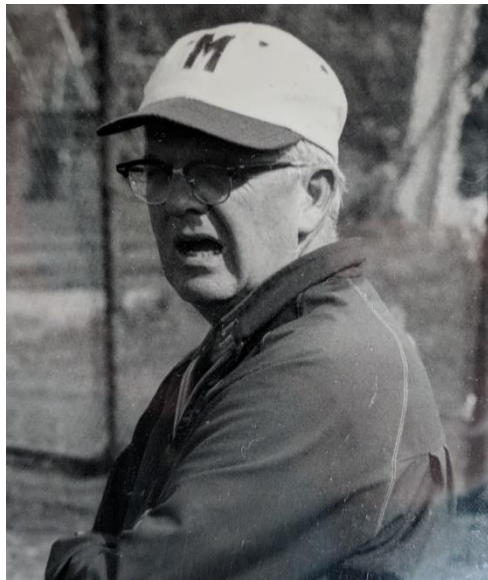
Tony Youngs 1982

“My dad always told me,” Youngs recalled, “if you want to play sports, you’ll find a way to get there.”

On this day, Youngs ran out of options. So out the front door he went and started down Mitchell Road near Black Lake. He was running. He crossed the bridge near Edwardsville and started up the hill. Surely, he stopped to walk for a stretch or two, but he kept jogging over the hill that led north along Route 58. He was wearing his baseball spikes. And he kept going, past the Black Lake Fish and Game Club, past cornfields and hay meadows, over a couple of ridges, before reaching the outskirts of Morristown.

Still, he had to surmount two more hills, then climb the steepest one -- up Mercer Street -- and reach the parking lot behind school. When he stopped at the back side of the school, he had covered about 7 miles.

“My dad was teaching me a lesson,” Youngs said. “If you want something, you go get it. You work for it.”



Tony’s former teammate, Dan Spilman, recalled that Youngs had grabbed a rake and was grooming the diamond when his coach, Fran Holleran, arrived at school. He broke the news that the game was at OFA.

“He was like a father to me,” Youngs said. “I listened to every word he said. I learned the basics from him, and I wanted to do well for him.”

Youngs made himself valuable by his versatility. He played second base, centerfield and third base.

“Tony was just a hard-working kid that never gave up and just wanted to participate and work hard,” Spilman said. “Tony was a kid that everyone would get along with and be happy to be around. He was one of the few kids that paid no attention to cliques, or concerned himself with anything other than being dedicated.”

If Youngs' determination became a legend, the Section X Class D championship a few weeks later became his Disney ending.



Tony Youngs leaps into a mob of Green Rockets after his walkoff single won the 1982 Section X Class D baseball championship at Clarkson's Snell Field.

Morristown was matched with Harrisville and built a 4-0 lead through four innings at Clarkson's Snell Field when a rainstorm descended on Potsdam and washed out the game. A call was made to the state athletic association, which decided the game could not be suspended, but must be replayed in its entirety.

So the two teams returned the next night, June 2, 1982. The Pirates had the upper hand this night and held a 2-1 lead. Youngs,

playing third base, had delivered the Green Rockets' lone run with a sacrifice fly in the third inning.

The situation was dire in the bottom of the seventh inning when Richie Marshall singled, Spilman reached on an error, and Youngs came to the plate with two outs. The Green Rockets were down to their last strike when Youngs lined a 2-2 pitch into centerfield, scoring the tying and winning runs.

Youngs said he was elated when he turned around first base and spotted an approaching mob wearing green uniforms and baseball spikes. Morristown had won its seventh sectional championship in eight seasons.

“I felt so happy and I jumped so high,” Youngs remembered. “My knees landed on another guy’s shoulder.”

His euphoria was dashed within five days. Coach Holleran died from a heart attack at A. Barton Hepburn Hospital. A championship team and a school district were devastated.

Spilman said the team gathered for a somber athletic banquet a couple of weeks later, where Eileen Holleran presented Youngs with a plaque – the first Coach Holleran Award.

“She was so impressed ... I would have to look up what the statement is on the award plaque ... but his dedication and sportsmanship would be hard to match at any school or level. It was quite an emotional presentation when Eileen told the story of his getting to that Saturday game on foot.”

Jim Holleran, a Morristown native, is a retired teacher and registrar for the Rochester City School District, and former sports editor of the Democrat and Chronicle. Reach him at jimholleran29@gmail.com or view past columns under “Reflections of River Rat” at <https://hollerangetsitwrite.com/blog/>