

Nova Scotia Senior Baseball League - Top Players: 1977 to 2007

Chosen to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Nova Scotia Senior Baseball League, the players listed below represent the best at their respective position since the NSSBL was founded in 1977. The list was compiled by NSSBL statistician and sport historian Burton Russell of Kentville. Russell is the long standing statistician for the NSSBL and has authored ten books detailing the history of baseball, hockey and golf in Nova Scotia.

CATCHER – DOUG SIMUNIC, MONCTON/SYDNEY MINES

An outstanding catcher with a very strong throwing arm, Simunic enjoyed tremendous success while splitting his NSSBL career between Moncton and Sydney Mines from 1986 to 1990.

In 1986, in the company of such Moncton Mets stalwarts as Bill (Spaceman) Lee, Ralph Chambers, Rheal Cormier and Donnie Cormier, Simunic finished fourth in the league's batting race while leading the loop in runs scored with 41. He was second in hits with 45, tied for the league lead in doubles with 10 and was second with nine home runs, and was named a league all-star that year.

In 1990, with the Sydney Mines Ramblers, Simunic led the NSSBL with a .531 batting average (a league record that stood until 1994), almost 100 points higher than the second-place finisher. He topped the league in hits (51), home runs (10), and RBI (54). Simunic once again cracked the all-star squad, and was runner-up in MVP voting.

FIRST BASE – CRAIG HIGGINS, TRURO

A star at various positions for 13 seasons with the Truro Bearcats, Higgins lands a spot on the team at first base.

He is a three-team NSSBL all-star at shortstop, and the league's all-star first baseman in 1999, 2006 and 2007. Higgins is a four-time league batting champion (1996 -- .504 BA, 1999 -- .462 BA, 2002 -- .476 BA, and 2006 -- .488 BA), and a four-time league most valuable player (1998, 1999 co-MVP, 2000 and 2006). A stalwart on the mound, Higgins was voted the NSSBL's top right-handed pitcher in 1999 and 2005.

Further adding to his credentials, Higgins received the Gary MacDonald/Rawlings Gold Glove-Gold Bat Award for most game MVP votes during the regular season in 2001 and 2006. Higgins was an integral part of Truro's NSSBL championship team in 2002, and won a national title as a pick-up with the Dartmouth Moosehead Dry in 2004.

SECOND BASE – SANDY VAN BLARCOM, KENTVILLE

From 1977 to 1990, Van Blarcom was the heart and soul of the Annapolis Valley club that captured NSSBL titles in 1980 and 1981, and which hosted and won the national championship in 1985.

A versatile player who saw duty in the outfield and at catcher as well as in the infield, Van Blarcom is among the Wildcats' career leaders in plate appearances, runs scored, walks, RBI and stolen bases. He led the league in runs scored three times, and his 62 runs scored in 1982 remains a NSSBL record. That season, Van Blarcom posted a .381 batting average and .521 on-base percentage. He led the league in stolen bases in 1978 (9) and 1982 (20).

SHORTSTOP – IAN LOCKHART, KENTVILLE

An outstanding player on offence and defence, Lockhart first came into prominence during the 2000 season, when he placed 10th in the NSSBL with a .371 batting average.

He was selected the NSSBL's all-star shortstop every year from 2001 to 2007, having been a co-winner of the award in 2005. He has constantly placed among the league's top hitters during that span, winning the batting title in 2004 (.468 BA) and 2007 (.426 BA). Lockhart is a two-time league MVP as voted by the member teams, in 2002 and 2004.

Lockhart has also enjoyed success on the national stage, winning Canadian championships with the Dartmouth Moosehead Dry in 2004, and the Nova Scotia senior all-stars in 2005. He was named the top defensive player at the 2004 national tournament.

THIRD BASE – JIM PELHAM, HALIFAX

Jim burst on to the scene prior to the formation of the NSSBL, having been named a provincial all-star with the Halifax Orioles in 1970 and the provincial senior champion Halifax Pelham Electric in 1975.

From 1977 to the mid-1990s, Pelham was a perennial contender for the league's all-star nomination at third base, having been a first-team all-star nine times and a second-team all-star once. He was a member of the NSSBL champion Halifax Capitals in 1985 and 1986, and the Halifax Pelham Electric Blues in 1992, and led the NSSBL in RBI in 1985, with 39. Pelham also spent the 1990 and 1991 seasons with the Sydney Sooners, and won a silver medal as a pick-up with Sydney at nationals in 1983. Having moved into the coaching ranks, he was named coach of the year in 2008, leading the Pelham Canadians to their first provincial title since 1992.

OUTFIELDER – JOEL IRVINE, DARTMOUTH

As complete a player that has graced an NSSBL lineup, Irvine has been a dominant force in the league for 18 seasons (17 with Dartmouth and one with Truro).

Irvine is a three-time NSSBL MVP (1997, 2003 and 2007) and a 13-time member of the NSSBL all-star team. He holds single-season records for batting average (.547) and hits (75), both established in 1997, and has the longest consecutive-games hitting streak in league history, at 35 games. He shared the league lead in home runs twice (14 in 1997 and seven in 2007), topped the league in RBI with 34 in 2007, and has stolen more bases than anyone in league history (295). He has led the league in stolen bases a record nine times, with his 37 thefts in 2000 standing as a single-season benchmark until 2007.

A 1991 draft pick of the New York Yankees, Irvine is a two-time national champion (1998 and 2004 with Dartmouth).

OUTFIELDER – KEVIN UMLAH, HALIFAX

One of the best hitters in league history, Umlah excelled in the NSSBL from 1977 to 1988, having played at the semi-pro level after being signed by the Montreal Expos in 1973.

Umlah is the only player in league history to win three consecutive batting titles, hitting .459 in 1980, .391 in 1981 and .518 in 1982 – the .518 average was a league record that stood until 1990. He added a fourth batting crown in 1988 with a .500 average. When league play was suspended in 1984, Umlah was the Mainland Senior League batting champion with a .456 average. In his 12-year career, Umlah was a first-team league all-star eight times and a second-team all-star once, a member of NSSBL championship teams in 1985 and 1986, and the 1980 NSSBL MVP. He also topped the NSSBL in runs scored in 1977, 1980 and 1985.

OUTFIELDER – KEVIN MATHESON, TRURO

As in the case with other selections, Matheson makes the team as an outfielder though having been valuable at other positions during his 15-year career. He debuted in 1992 by finishing among the league's top 10 hitters with a .392 average, and was among the league leaders in most offensive categories annually.

Matheson is a three-time NSSBL batting champion, hitting .483 in 1995, .434 in 1998 and .450 in 2000, and led the league in stolen bases in 1994 (14). He has also led the league in runs scored twice (49 in 1995 and 41 in 1998) and was the 2000 league leader in doubles, with 18. His 10th-inning home run clinched Truro's first NSSBL championship in 2002. On several occasions during his career, Matheson served as a player-coach, and received the league's coach of the year award in 1997.

DESIGNATED HITTER – DARREN DOUCETTE, DARTMOUTH

Perhaps the most feared slugger in league history, Doucette has clubbed 126 home runs during his 11 years in the league, a feat that might never be duplicated or surpassed.

He led the league in home runs in his rookie year in 1991 before departing for a pro career, having been drafted by the St. Louis Cardinals in 1992. Upon returning to the NSSBL in 1999, Doucette recorded double-digit home run totals from 1999-2006. Doucette was the league's triple crown winner in 2001 and 2005, with a .451 batting average, 14 home runs and 50 RBI in 2001, and a .469 average, 13 homers and 46 RBI in 2005. He has led the league in RBI six times. Doucette has been named an NSSBL all-star eight times, the league playoff MVP in 2006, and coach of the year in 2003 and 2004. He captured national titles in 2004 and 2005 with Dartmouth and the NSSBL all-stars, respectively.

RIGHT-HANDED PITCHER – TREVOR ZWAAN, DARTMOUTH

A U.S. college champion and a 1994 draft pick of the Houston Astros, Zwaan was a member of eight NSSBL championship teams with Dartmouth from 1994 to 2006, compiling a regular-season record of 66-11 with 512 strikeouts, seven saves and an earned-run average of 2.92.

Zwaan is a four-time NSSBL all-star (1997, 1998, 2002 and 2004), and led the league in strikeouts in 2004, with 70. He was also a member of national championship teams with Dartmouth in 1998 and 2004, and the NSSBL all-stars in 2005. On Sept. 19, 2001, Zwaan became the first Dartmouth Moosehead Dry pitcher to throw a no-hitter.

LEFT-HANDED PITCHER – JASON BAILEY, DARTMOUTH

One of the best big-game pitchers in NSSBL history, Bailey has amassed 71 wins against only 14 defeats in a 12-year career that began in 1996, with 724 strikeouts in 727 innings of work during the regular season.

Bailey is a nine-time NSSBL champion with the Dartmouth Moosehead Dry, and a member of Canadian championship clubs in 1998, 2004 and 2005. He has been voted the league's top left-hander six times (2001, 2003-07), the NSSBL most valuable player in 2005 and playoff MVP in 2007, and the top pitcher at the 2004 and 2005 national championships. He was named Canadian amateur baseball player of the year in 1996