

## HALL OF FAME TEAM AWARD



Carl DeCaspers scores the winning run in a 1-0 victory over Louisville in the 1957 NABF championship game, triggering a celebration at the Cricket Field.

# '57 NABF team part of Altoona lore

## ■ Second Ward entry delivered national title

By John Hartsock  
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**B**ack in the 1950s, Altoona was a booming railroad mecca that featured a bustling downtown and also boasted one of the finest amateur baseball teams in the country.

Altoona's entry in the 1957 National Amateur Baseball Federation Tournament won the national title amidst that backdrop, capturing a 1-0, 10-inning victory over a talented Louisville team in the tournament championship game August 24 before an overflow crowd at the old Cricket Field.

Comprised of 18-year-olds from Altoona and other parts of Blair County, the Altoona squad won the 16-team, double-elimination 1957 tournament by posting a 6-1-1 record.

Carl DeCaspers, the center fielder on Altoona's championship team, remembers the scene vividly — 50 years later.

"I can remember walking down to the Cricket Field from the (Altoona) YMCA that final

afternoon for the Louisville game, and the stands were packed that day, with (spectators) lined up on both sides of the field, five or 10 deep," said DeCaspers, who lives in Hollidaysburg. "Every business in town was closed that day; everybody was at the game."

Altoona's 1957 NABF championship team will become the third team ever to be inducted into the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame.

Along with DeCaspers, members of the 1957 team included: Marlin Berry, Francis Damico, Dave Forr, Charlie Hess, Galen Hall, Ed Hoover, Bill Ingram, Bob Irwin, Bill Julius, Bob Kelley, Jim Lane, Tom Lane, Eldin Lower, Dick Ramey, Dick Rupert, Larry Stoltenberg, Carmen Varlotta, and Fritz Wiederkehr. Coaches were Bob Burchfield, Bill Burchfield, Joe Carrieri, and Milt Neuman.

DeCaspers scored the winning run in the championship game, reaching base on a walk and racing home from second base on what should have been a double-play grounder to

end the 10th inning.

DeCaspers credits Irwin, who was on first base when the double-play grounder was hit to shortstop, for making a hard-nosed slide into second base that forced an errant Louisville throw and broke up the double play.

"(Louisville's) second baseman made a bad throw on the relay, and it was because of Bobby Irwin's slide into second," said DeCaspers, who is now employed as the public relations director at the New Pig Corporation in Tipton. "Milt Neuman was coaching third, he was waving me home, and I was going full speed for the plate. But if Bobby doesn't make that slide into second and they get the double play, the inning is over, and my run doesn't count."

Irwin maintained that he was simply doing what he had been taught to do by his coaches in making the heads-up slide into second base.

"It's definitely what you're taught to do as a player in a situation like that," said Irwin, who retired as an auditor from the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese and still lives in Altoona. "It wasn't the prettiest of slides, but it worked. That's the main thing."

DeCaspers realizes that he was part of a very special unit on that Altoona team, which was made up of some players from the George B. Kelley Federation's Second Ward squad and several pickup players from other teams in the league.

"We were a very fundamentally sound team which did all the things you need to do in order to win," said DeCaspers, who would later serve tenures as the boys varsity basketball coach at both Hollidaysburg and Bellwood-Antis. "We knew how to run the bases, we played sound defense, we had timely hitting, and our pitching



**Second Ward was Altoona's entry in the 1957 National Amateur Baseball Federation Tournament and won the NABF title before crowd of 7,000 plus at the old Cricket Field. Team members included, front row, from left: Jim Lane, Dick Ramey, Charlie Hess, Dave Forr, Bill Julius, Carmen Varlotta, Galen Hall, Fritz Wiederkehr. Second row: Tom Lane, Marlin Berry, Ed Hoover, Bob Irwin, Francis Damico, Dick Rupert, Carl DeCaspers. Back row: manager Bob Burchfield, Larry Stoltenberg, Eldin Lower, coaches Bill Burchfield and Milt Neuman. Bill Ingram, the tournament's most valuable player, was absent when the photo was taken.**

was phenomenal."

Indeed, Stoltenberg pitched nine shutout innings in that championship game against Louisville, and Ingram — an imposing 6-foot-8 righthander who would go on to play collegiate basketball — worked a scoreless 10th inning to cement his selection as the tournament's most valuable player.

The Altoona team played eight games in four days, defeating Springfield, Mass. to advance to the championship game against Louisville later the same day.

"When you play eight nine-inning games in four days, you're about half-delirious," DeCaspers said. "The weather was very hot, and it was an amazing, amazing tournament. Sometimes, I wonder how we did it."

Several team members left their marks on the area sports scene. Hall went onto an outstanding college football coaching career, at Oklahoma, Florida and Penn State -- in addition to winning

a title in NFL Europe.

DeCaspers and Tom Lane were successful basketball coaches, and Jim Lane enjoyed a distinguished career as sports editor of the Altoona Mirror for many years.

The team will be the third to be inducted into the Hall of Fame, following the world champion Cobras softball team, inducted in 2004, and the 1988 Altoona Area High School girls basketball team, which captured the PIAA championship and USA Today mythical national title and was recognized by the Hall of Fame in 2006.

"The 1957 NABF national championship team was a big part of baseball history here, and we're pleased to be able to honor them," Hall of Fame president David Andrews said.

"They achieved the Hall of Fame's first criteria -- national recognition -- and they clearly deserve to be recognized."