

# Tom Staack played the game the right way

Dan Owen tried to test Tom Staack's limits, and he failed on a spring day almost a half-century ago.

Owen and Staack attended Waterloo West. They were good friends, and teammates. By the spring of 1964, Staack had become a multi-sport star for the Wahawks, excelling in football, basketball and baseball.



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As the two teenagers walked by West's track, Owen looked at the high jump area, and decided to needle his buddy.

Finally, there's something you can't do, he said to Staack, who did not compete in track and field even though head coach Dick Dotson wanted him on the squad.

They had just left baseball practice. So Staack handed Owen a glove and some spikes.

He approached the bar. Owen wasn't sure, but he guessed it had been set at about six feet.

Staack ran. He leaped. He used the scissor kick; that's how it was done in 1964, before Dick Fosbury introduced the Fosbury Flop.

Staack cleared the bar.

"It was almost like he walked over," said Owen. "Guys that were around there saw it and said, 'Oh, cripes. There's something else he can do.'"

That was the 1960s.

That was Tom Staack.

Before cancer claimed him Monday at the age of 65, Staack lived far beyond the white lines. He was a highly respected attorney, active in the community, devoted to family.

# SULLY

Athletic feats just a fraction of Staack story

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"He was just a good man," said Russ Barney, a longtime friend of Staack and a West High basketball teammate. "Tom always cared about walking with the Lord and he always treated people well."

He also coached, earning a spot in the Waterloo Optimist Softball Hall of Fame. Once upon a time, before the law and family and the community, Tom Staack was something else — an extraordinary athlete, one of the best to wear Wahawk colors.

He's in West's Hall of Fame.

"Sports were a very important part of his life in high school," said Barney. "It was for all of us."

As a senior, he helped West reach the 1964 state basketball tournament in Glen Strobridge's final season as head coach. For a time, Staack held the Wahawks' career scoring record.

Staack tried a little basketball at Iowa, but his best game was baseball. After an all-state career at West, he pitched for the Hawkeyes, throwing a no-hitter against Coe and a one-hitter to beat Michigan State.

The Minnesota Twins expressed interest in Sta-

ack, drafting him in 1966. He never got to the big leagues as a baseball player. According to Owen, Staack hurt his arm at Iowa.

But, as time went on, a future attorney accepted his fate.

"He said later to me it was upsetting at the time," said Owen. "But then he really concentrated on the law. That's what he really wanted. He felt that if he'd gone into baseball, he never would have gotten to finish up the law."

Staack was not a man who talked much about the high school glory days. For his friends and teammates, though, the memories tell the story. They bring back a

kid who matured quickly as an athlete and rose early to the varsity ranks.

From his school days at Immanuel Lutheran through his senior year at West, people sensed that Tom Staack had something special.

"He was unbelievable in eighth grade," said Bill Kahler, who played with Staack on the 1964 state tournament team that lost to Dubuque Wahlert in the opening round.

"He was probably the same height (about 6-1) that he was as a senior. I never saw a kid that age back then who could shoot a jump shot from 20 feet like you were supposed to, rather than a set shot. He was really talented."

Said Owen, "You could even tell by the way Tom walked. He was like a big cat. I remember just the way he went about his business in basketball and baseball. He had that aura; everybody knew it, too. He was quite popular among his teammates. He was obviously very successful."

Staack, as a prep athlete, was also very competitive.

That part of his personality made the move to an adult life.

"He was like a bulldog," said Owen. "He had that tenacity, competitive spirit, even when he coached his daughters, things like that."

"All good athletes have to have that. I thought that

served him in good stead being a defense lawyer. He carried over a lot of that personality. I don't know — he was just someone you were attracted to. You wanted to be around him. It just kind of rubbed off on you."

In the 21st century America, we spend hours discussing people who make a difference. Tom Staack, in his 65 years, did just that. Staack made a difference as an adult — and by clearing a bar as a high school kid, just for fun. He gave his friends his time, and a history to be treasured.

"No matter what he did, you knew he was going to be successful," said Russ Barney.