

Hall Of Fame Report

Richard Gold going into KM Hall of Fame

(EDITOR'S NOTE - Richard Gold will be inducted into the Kings Mountain Chamber of Commerce Sports Hall of Fame on Monday, March 29 at 7 p.m. at the Community Center. Also to be inducted are Coman Falls, Freddy Smith and the 1945 KMHS boys basketball team. Tickets are \$10 each and available at the Chamber of Commerce or from any member of the Hall of Fame Committee).

By GARY STEWART
Editor of the Herald

When the game was on the line, coaches and fans always wanted to see the ball or bat in Richard Gold's hands.

Gold, one of Kings Mountain High's all-time best athletes, thrived on competition. Throughout his high school and collegiate career, he was the guy the team went to when the game was on the line.

Gold started in baseball, basketball and football at KMHS from 1962-65. He made All-Conference three times in baseball, twice in basketball and once in football, and helped lead the Mountaineers to at least one conference championship in each of the three major sports.

From Kings Mountain he moved on to Florida State University for a brilliant baseball career which saw him set nine career records and become a first team All-American second baseman. Gold is the only KMHS athlete to ever make first team All-American on the major college level.

Gold was a natural athlete. Playing sports came easy to him. During his younger years in Grover his neighbors knew he would become an athlete because his parents, John and Lois Gold, had been great athletes in their time and because Richard always had a baseball or basketball in his hand.

Gold credits his father for helping him achieve his athletic success. "He's thrown me a lot of balls in the back yard," he said. "We'd throw to each other, and I'd hit balls for hours. He always showed an interest in me and he liked me just as good if I did good or didn't do good. He always attended the practices and all the games, too."

Gold's father also coached him in American Legion baseball at Kings Mountain in 1963, '64 and '65 and Gold capped his brilliant high school and legion career by hitting a career high .479 in '65.

At KMHS, Gold earned 10 letters during a time when double-participation was not allowed. He lettered in baseball four years and in football and basketball three years each. Had double participation been allowed in the sixties, he also could have been outstanding in golf, tennis, track and other sports.

He broke into the baseball lineup early in his freshman year of 1962, the first year of school consolidation. The first time he came to bat he got a triple off Lincolnton ace Steve Herman, who was one of the top pitchers in the area at that time. After that he was a permanent fixture at shortstop.

His sophomore year, Gold helped lead the Mountaineers of Coach Fred Withers to the Southwestern 3-A Conference title.

Gold was one of the most versatile football players to come out of Kings Mountain. The Mountaineers had one of the state's best quarterbacks during that time in Pat Murphy, who broke all of the school passing records, but had Gold not been so valuable at other positions he could have been just as great a quarterback. In fact, both Murphy and Gold completed over 50 percent of their passes their junior and senior years, leading the Mountaineers to the SWC title both years.

Gold also played halfback and end on offense and as a defensive back was one of the team's leaders. He was so versatile that he was voted the team's Most Valuable Player. In a game against Shelby his senior year, Gold caught six straight passes from Murphy and



Dick Gold was not only one of Florida State's batting leaders throughout his three-year varsity career, but was also a stellar defensive performer at second base.

scored two touchdowns to lead the Mountaineers to a 19-7 victory en route to a perfect 10-0 regular season.

In basketball, Gold led the Mountaineers in scoring his sophomore, junior and senior years and was the school's all-time leading scorer until George Adams came along in the late sixties. Gold led Coach Don Parker's Mountaineers to the SWC title in 1964-65.

As a youngster, Gold spent countless hours dribbling and shooting basketballs in the Grover High School gym. Baseball was always his first love, but basketball ran a close second.

It was rather ironic, though, that during his prep career all the colleges wanted Gold as a football player. He was an All-State selection his senior year and received many full scholarship offers. College coaches couldn't understand why he turned them down.

"I said when I got out of high school that I would never put on a football uniform again," he said. "I was lucky I didn't get crippled up."

Gold was determined to play college baseball, and was close to going to Wake Forest which wanted him to play baseball and basketball but told him he would have to make the traveling squad of both teams to get a scholarship.

Former pro baseball player George Wilson of Kings Mountain knew Florida State coach Fred Hatfield from their professional days. Wilson called Hatfield and told him Gold was interested in playing baseball at Florida State. Hatfield told Gold if he would come to FSU he would get him all the help he could his first year, and if he made the team he could work into a full scholarship.

Gold applied in July - a month after applications were supposed to be in - and was accepted but his name had not appeared on any records when he arrived on campus.

"Dad said one of the hardest things he ever did was take me down there and put me out and drive off," Gold remembered. "I didn't know anybody. I wasn't even registered, didn't have a room assignment or any other kind of papers that students are supposed to have when they get to school."

Gold started at shortstop on the freshman team. After several games, he hurt his arm and was moved to second base.

His sophomore year, he was not supposed to start. But the day before the first game, FSU's regular first baseman became ill. The third baseman was moved to first and Gold started at third base. He went 4-for-4 with four runs batted in against Miami's 6-foot-4 Oren Bogle, who was one of the best left-hand pitchers in the southeast. Gold started every game for the rest of his career.

"But, I was not a third baseman," Gold admitted. "My throw wasn't that bad but I never could get into a place where I was comfortable catching the ball. I was just not a third baseman."

But Gold was a hitter, especially in clutch situations, and Coach Hatfield wasn't about to take his bat out of the lineup. So, he moved Gold to second base.

During Gold's three-year varsity career, the Seminoles qualified for the District III tournament twice. At that time, the District Tournament was played in Gastonia and only one at-large team was invited to compete against the champions of the ACC, Southern and Southeastern Conferences.

"We didn't get to go my senior year, even though it was our best team," he recalled. "We had changed coaches and I don't think Jack Stallings really gave us the opportunity to go. He was playing with players who were already there. They were not people that he brought in, and I don't think he tried to work for us to go to the tournament that year."

Georgia Tech was the at-large pick that year, and the Seminoles won more games (40) than the Yellow Jackets played.

"Now, they pick so many teams for district tournaments all over the country," Gold noted. "At that time there was only one regional tournament for the southeast and it was tough for all the independent teams to pick one out of all of those. My mom said I was born



Dick Gold, right, was featured on the cover of the 1969 Florida State University Baseball Handbook. Also pictured are Jeff Hogan, kneeling, Mike Easom, back row left, and coach Jack Stallings, back row center. Gold, Easom and Hogan were all All-District III performers and Gold was first team All-American.



Richard Gold, All-American second baseman for Florida State's Seminoles in 1969, will be inducted into the Kings Mountain Chamber of Commerce Sports Hall of Fame March 29 at 7 p.m. at the Kings Mountain Community Center.

20 years too soon. Now, they've got everything on television. My parents used to drive forever to see me play, unless we played at Clemson or South Carolina. Now Florida State's on television all the time, and if you have a half-way decent team you to go the tournament."

At that time, Gold owned nine Florida State career records, including most games, most times at bat, runs scored, runs batted in, doubles, triples and most games hitting streak (21). Since freshmen now play varsity ball and the seasons are also longer, most of his records except for the 21-game hitting streak have been broken.

Gold hit .279 his sophomore season when the Seminoles lost to N.C. State in the championship game of the District III Tournament. FSU fell to East Carolina 2-1 in 13 innings in the opening game and had to battle their way back through the loser's bracket. They beat N.C. State in the first game but the Wolfpack came back behind future major league pitcher Mike Caldwell to win the title game 4-1.

His junior year, when the Seminoles went 35-6, Gold hit .295 and made the All-District III team. The Seminoles were ranked #1 in the nation most of the year but made an early exit from the District event, which was won by Auburn over Clemson.

His senior season, Gold hit .317 and led the team in triples with nine, hits with 63, and runs batted in with 50. He was home in Grover when he learned of being named first team All-American.

"I was really surprised," he said, "because we didn't get to go to the tournament. Back then most players were picked from teams that went to the tournament because they got more national exposure."

Gold was drafted by the Cubs, and really wanted to play pro baseball, but the Cubs wanted to assign him to a Rookie League team and he felt like he could play on the Double-A level.

"I had talked to the Yankees and Pittsburgh, and Pittsburgh really wanted to sign me," he recalled. "But I was drafted by the Cubs and they had only talked to me twice. I left Florida and came back home and a different scout than the one that talked to me tried to sign me. He wanted me to go to a Rookie League in Idaho. We had played Double-A teams in Florida, and I knew I could play Double-A. I felt like all I would be as a teacher for the 18-year-olds."

"Nowadays, when you come out of college it counts as something," he added. "The players get put in Double-A or Triple-A, and some even in the big leagues. They didn't count college as anything back then. They thought the minor league system was the only way to go."

Pittsburgh tried to make a trade for Gold, but it didn't work out, and he spent the next several years playing semi-pro ball for the Valdosta, Ga., Red Sox, who went to the national tournament two years in a row.

Gold returned to Cleveland County in 1972 and became a cattleman. He is now a partner with Arlan Bush in Gold n Bush Farm in Shelby. They own 240 registered Longhorns and Gold also is President of the Mid-Atlantic Texas Longhorn Association and co-manager of Dedmon's Livestock Yard. Because of the time involved, his profession ended his athletic career.

Returning to Kings Mountain for a night with family, friends and former teammates will be a great thrill, he says.

"Not many towns the size of Kings Mountain have anything like this, and it's good to be recognized for something you did a long time ago," he said. "I heard and read about a lot of great athletes when I came along, and to be able to see them and talk to them will be a thrill."

"A lot of people helped me along the way. Fred Hatfield was a player's coach. As long as you were doing good he wouldn't speak to you. If he ever came to tell you anything it was something to help you. He never fussed about errors because they were a part of the game."

"Bill Bates, Don Parker and Fred Withers gave me the opportunity to play sports," he added. "When we consolidated I was in the ninth grade. They didn't know me and I didn't know them, but I have always been thankful that they thought enough of me to give me the opportunity to play."

Gold's coaches had to have an eye for great talent, because he admitted he was not a good practice player. But, like in his first high school game against Lincolnton when he ripped a Steve Herman fast ball for a triple, and in his first Florida State varsity game when he went 4-for-4 against a strong Miami team, he made the best of his opportunities.