

THE LEGEND OF TOMMY KARAKALOS

PART 2

By MATT LOVE

Ever since I started watching high school baseball games at Ernie Aiken Field in Astoria, I wondered: Who was the last hitter to smash a pitch 500 feet down the right field line and into Youngs Bay? Surely if some batter pulled off this prodigious feat of slugging, it would have to be a local legend.

I asked my question around town, investigating a legend, and a name kept coming up: Tommy Karakalos.

Not too long ago, I sat down with Tommy Karakalos at his home in Astoria and interviewed him. After hearing him recount the fabled home run — actually two! — I left thinking I might have just heard the greatest story in the history of Oregon high school baseball.

It was the summer of 1962 and an American Legion team from Portland traveled to Astoria for a game. After the left-handed-hitting Tommy belted a pitch with his Mickey Mantle Louisville Slugger into Youngs Bay off a right-handed hurler, “He just stood on the mound and shook his head,” said Tommy.

The pitcher’s name was Rick Wise, and Wise later went on to pitch 18 years in the Major Leagues, won 188 games and was a two-time All-Star. He also threw a no-hitter.

Wise told current Astoria High School baseball coach Dave Gasser that Tommy’s homer was the hardest he’d ever been hit, and Wise faced the likes of Willie Mayes and Hank Aaron.



PHOTO BY MATT LOVE

Above: Tommy Karakalos stands near Ernie Aiken Field in Astoria, where he never misses an Astoria High School baseball game. When he was in high school in the 1960s, Tommy hit two home runs into Youngs Bay.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Left: In this photo from Astoria High School’s 1963 yearbook, Tommy Karakalos plays baseball at Ernie Aiken Field.

announcer asked him if that was the hardest he’d ever been hit. No, Twitchell responded, that happened back in high school in Astoria, Oregon.

In other words, former Astoria High School baseball player Tommy Karakalos’ only home runs that splashed down in Youngs Bay came off two future Major League Baseball players who both said it was the hardest they were ever hit.

And as far as anyone knows, no one ever hit one into the bay

before or after Tommy.

That’s what’s called a legend. “I’d love to see someone do it again,” said Tommy, and if it does happen, he’d witness the splashdown himself because he never misses an Astoria High School baseball game at Ernie Aiken Field.

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The next summer, Tommy smashed another one into the bay off another right-handed Portland high school pitcher during an American Legion game.

“He threw me a fastball. I hit it on the sweet spot, and it took off,” Tommy recalls.

The pitcher’s name was Wayne Twitchell, and Twitchell later went on to pitch 10 years in the Major Leagues and was an All-Star in 1973.

After a professional game where a player crushed one of Twitchell’s pitches into the upper deck of a stadium, a television