

## Local Catches at Roy Hobbs World Series

Written by Ruthann Carr, Correspondent

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Former Board of Supervisor member Tom Payne never thought he'd play baseball again let alone catch in a World Series game.

But that is how Payne, 70, spent part of his November – at Jet Blue Stadium in Fort Meyers, Fla. catching for the Tri-Cities team in the Roy Hobbs World Series. Hobbs is adult amateur recreation baseball with teams across the United States.

Payne played in the “Timeless” league, for those 70 and over.

“I’m still pretty quick,” said Payne who walks daily and works out at Health Nutz once or twice a week.

Payne, a 1961 graduate of Fluvanna High School, played on his high school team. After graduation, Payne played in Sunday leagues. He served as a supervisor from 1978-1995. He was chairman for eight years.

“Back then, if you wanted to find anyone on a Sunday afternoon, you’d go to the ballpark,” he said.

As he aged, Payne switched to fast-pitch softball and now plays slow-pitch softball for the Richmond Classics.

They play against teams from all over the U.S. It was while playing for that team last spring that a guy from Tennessee approached Payne.

“He said he could tell by my batting stance I played baseball,” said Payne, who got up to demonstrate his crouched stance and step into the pitch.

Just a few days before leaving for Florida, Payne fell off a ladder and cut his arm below his elbow. He didn’t want to go to the hospital because he knew doctors would put in stitches and advise him not to play.

“The next morning I woke up and it was still bleeding, so I went to the hospital for stitches,” Payne said. “They wouldn’t put any in because I waited too long.”

Fluid built up in his arm making catching and throwing difficult. He and his wife, Windy Payne, drove to Florida anyway.

Payne said in the hotel the night before the first game, he prayed “God, you’ve got to get rid of this fluid because I can’t play with this.”

The next morning all the fluid had drained out.

At 6-feet-3-inches, Payne is tall for both a catcher and a pitcher, but he plays both positions. He borrowed his catcher’s equipment from the Fluvanna High School baseball team.

It was a good thing he had it because he took his licks during the six games.

One of the most dangerous things about playing catcher is when a runner tries to bowl over the catcher protecting home plate.

“They weren’t supposed to do that in the senior league, but one guy came at me anyway and I stood my ground,” Payne said. “He took the brunt of it because he bounced off of me.”

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In another game, a batter missed badly, swinging 360 degrees around. His bat caught Payne just below his helmet in the back of his neck. He went down and while everyone in the worried about him, he said his wife just said, "Don't worry he'll get up."

"And I did," Payne said. "I played the rest of the game. That night I had a little bit of a headache, but I was fine."

Payne's team ended up with a 3 and 3 record; fourth place out of nine teams. Payne finished with a .435 batting average.

Payne said during one game in Florida, the umpire asked him if he knew he was catching with a former Major League catcher. Randy Hundley, from Martinsville, Va. was a Golden Glove Award winner for catchers when he played for the Chicago Cubs.

Payne told the umpire all he knew was he was catching and so was Hundley.

After the games, Payne said everyone would stand around and ask other players where they're from. When Hundley heard Payne was from Virginia, he said, "Well, so am I."

Payne said he knew Hundley was from Martinsville. After talking awhile, Payne said he asked Hundley for a favor.

"Why don't you sign this old ball for me?" Payne said, handing Hundley the game ball.

Hundley obliged.

Payne said the best part was playing in state-of-the-art ball fields where the Boston Red Sox hold Spring training. But his favorite memory is of the first game.

It was on Veteran's Day and they let veterans in for free.

"I'll never forget standing lined up on that field as they played the National Anthem and seeing all those veterans with their hats off, hands over their hearts." he said.

So Payne came back home to Fluvanna with a game ball autographed by a former Major Leaguer, a few bumps and bruises and a lot of memories.

They've already asked him to play this November. He can't wait to go back.