

Schulte has worn many hats in IVL

Written by Jim Ecker
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Justin Schulte has been a prominent member of the Iowa Valley League for nearly four decades as a player, coach and umpire, but it actually began when he was a young kid in Norway.

Schulte was one of the boys who chased foul balls into the corn field and front yards that surround the famed Norway baseball field. Now 46 years old, he figures he got started when he was about 7.

You still see kids chasing those foul balls and returning them for a quarter at Norway.

"It was probably a dime back then," he said Sunday after umpiring a pair of IVL games at Mount Mercy. "Inflation got it up to a quarter."

You'd need a family tree to unravel all the Schulte brothers and cousins who have played ball in Norway. If you grew up in Norway, you played as soon as you quit wearing cloth diapers.

"I don't know if it's pre-ordained, but there are a heck of a lot of Schultes that played baseball," said one of the best. "A lot of families."

"Probably the highlight of my career was playing with all three of my brothers in the Iowa Valley League, to be honest with you. It's one of the highlights of my baseball career."

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Vance Schulte graduated from Norway High School in 1983, Chad in 1986, Justin in 1990 and Vaughn in 1994. They all played high school ball for the Norway Tigers -- "I think we have 10 state titles in our family," Justin said proudly -- and they all played in the IVL for the Norway Bandits.

Norway High School has fallen by the wayside and the Norway kids now attend Benton Community High School, but the Bandits are still a lynch-pin in the Iowa Valley League, although the number of town products on the roster has shrunk.

"I'll tell you, I look back on what we grew up in and I think I'm one of the most fortunate people in the world," said Justin. "It was a culture. You just embraced it. The expectations were really high. We expected to win. And we expected to do it the right way. You look back on it now and you take it for granted."

All four of the Schulte brothers won at least one of their state titles under legendary Norway coach Jim Van Scoyoc.

Justin Schulte played baseball at the University of Iowa for two years and is currently the head coach at Southeastern Community College in West Burlington. He's been a head coach for 20 years, including seven at Mount Mercy and 13 at SCC, and he's never had a losing season in all that time. His career record is 795-383 and he's captured four state junior college titles at Southeastern.

He still draws from the lessons he learned in Norway.

"We played all the time. Every day. We always played," he said. "If it was 1 o'clock in the afternoon, we were playing baseball or whiffle ball as little kids until it got dark.

"By the time you got to high school you expected to win, whether you were overblown with talent or you were a little short on talent. The expectations never changed.

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"That's what I try to create as a coach, where I'm at now. It's the same expectations every year."

Schulte chased foul balls as a kid and hung around the ballpark, soaking in the atmosphere. "I didn't want to miss a game when my brothers were playing," he said.

He finally got a chance to play and they nearly had to rip the uniform off his back many years later. "I played in the Iowa Valley League until I was 35, because I loved the team and I loved playing when I coached. It made me a better coach."

Schulte and his wife, Tara, are the parents of two daughters, Kenadi and Kaylor, and their son Kooper. They live in southeast Iowa, but Justin likes to return on Sundays during the summer to work as an umpire in the Iowa Valley League to make a few dollars and stay close to his roots.

"I enjoy being around the guys, especially guys that played for me," he said.