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*Honoring and Preserving the Sports History of Chautauqua County*

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## Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

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15 West Third Street - Jamestown, NY 14701

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June 2013

### Baseball's Greatest Sacrifice

Remembering a Jamestown Falcons baseball player who made the ultimate sacrifice for his country.



#### Ernie Hrovatic

“He was one of the most popular players in a Falcon uniform and died in an infantryman's uniform in a bigger league.”

*Dunkirk Evening Observer*  
*February 15, 1945*

Ernest Hrovatic (born Ernest Hrovatic) was born in the mining community of Rambletown, Michigan. His father Joseph worked in the copper mines at nearby Calumet, but in 1923—a year after Ernie was born—the family moved to Ohio and settled in the Highlandtown area of Columbian County. Joseph worked the coal mines in Ohio, and his sons followed as soon

as they were old enough. It was a good but hard life. The Hrovatic children attended Salem High School and were well known for their athletic abilities. “In the '30s his family was known as a baseball family,” recalled Barbara Hrovatic, wife of Ernie’s youngest brother, James. “They all played and they had a team just in the family, even the girls and his mother would play with her children. They did not always have bats and a ball, but a good stick and a stone worked.”

In 1942, 20-year-old Ernie Hrovatic was signed by the Owensboro Oilers of the Class D Kitty League but released after seven games. He then signed a contract with the St. Louis Cardinals and was assigned to the Washington Redbirds of the Class D Penn State Association. Playing right field, he batted .261 in 80 games with five home runs and 42 runs batted in. In June, his manager, Moose Fralick, told Joe Szafran, Oil City Blizzard sports editor, that he believed Hrovatic to be a sure bet to make the big leagues in two or three years. In the Penn State Association playoffs, despite finishing in last place during the regular season, Washington swept three games from Oil City to face the Butler Yankees in the Governors' Cup. Butler won the first contest, 8–6, and Washington responded with an 8–3 win in the second game. A three-run homer in the seventh inning by Hrovatic broke a 2–2 tie with Butler in the third game to help the Redbirds to a 5–2 win and take a two games to one lead. But Butler bounced back and took the next two games to claim the Governors' Cup.



In 1943, the Cardinals assigned Hrovatic to the Jamestown Falcons of the Class D PONY League, where he earned the nickname “Solid Folks.” In a sensational season, he finished second in the batting race with a .336 average, and led the circuit with a .443 on-base percentage and .519 slugging percentage. He also led the league with 37 doubles, 12 triples and 96 RBIs. His 215 total bases for the year put him in an elite group in the PONY League, and he was a unanimous decision among the league writers and managers as an all-star selection.

The Cardinals were going to assign Hrovatic to the Sacramento Solons of the Class AA Pacific Coast League for the 1944 season, but military service called on December 4, 1943. He had been rejected the first time he was called up, because of high blood pressure, and this time he was told he could go home or he could serve, it was his choice. The 21-year-old chose to serve. On December 29, 1943, Hrovatic went to Fort Hays, Ohio, for basic training; then from January 10, 1944, to May 6, he was at Camp Blanding, Florida, at the Infantry Replacement Training Center.

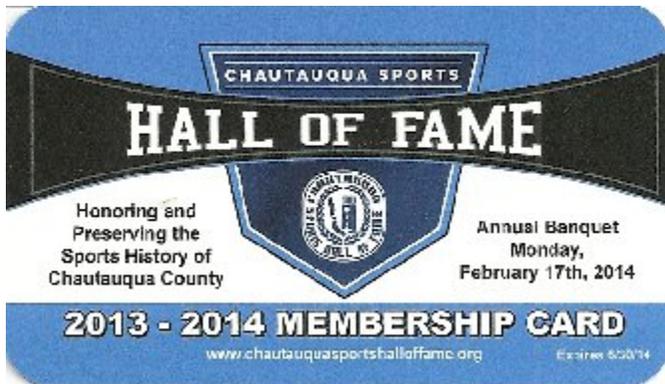
In June 1944, Private First Class Hrovatic was sent to Europe and assigned as a replacement with the 36th Armored Infantry Regiment of the 3rd Armored “Spearhead” Division. The division went into combat in July 1944, and led the U. S. First Army’s drive through Normandy. By August, the division had crossed the Seine River and slugged its way across France, reaching Belgium in September 1944, and taking part in the Battle of Hurtgen Forest. The 3rd Armored Division continued fighting during the Battle of Bulge, far north of the deepest German penetration. Countering German attacks, it severed an important highway leading to Saint-Vith. It was around this time that Hrovatic was killed in action, near Ottre, Belgium, on January 14, 1945.

“He was the idol of Jamestown PONY League baseball fans two seasons ago,” declared the Dunkirk Evening Observer, “He was one of the most popular players in a Falcon uniform and died in an infantryman’s uniform in a bigger league. His death brought the war home with tragic emphasis to baseball fans for he was the first player in a Falcon uniform to pay the supreme sacrifice.”

Hrovatic was buried at Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery in Belgium. Ernie’s younger brother Carl played five seasons as an outfielder in the minor leagues between 1949 and 1955. In 1954, he batted .370 in 122 games for the Lawton Braves of the Sooner State League.

Baseball's Greatest Sacrifice is associated with [Baseball Almanac](#)

## June is the Time to Renew



For persons like you and I who are interested in preserving the history of sports in Chautauqua County and honoring the outstanding individuals who have created our cherished sports memories, it’s time to renew our memberships in the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame for July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014.

In addition to helping the CSHOF carry out its twin objectives of maintaining a Hall of Honor and an exhibit hall, members will receive several value-added benefits for their membership fee.

- ✓ CSHOF refrigerator magnet
- ✓ \$5 off 2014 induction banquet ticket
- ✓ Monthly newsletter
- ✓ Acknowledgement of membership on the CSHOF website
- ✓ Membership card with discounts at selected sports-minded marketing partners:

Jock Shop  
Honest John’s  
Pinehurst Golf Club  
Hometown Grille  
Miley’s Old Inn  
Hollyloft Ski and Bike

Jamestown Jammers  
Jamestown Savings Bank Arena  
Gametime Sports Bar & Grille  
Ashville General Store  
Lakewood Golf Center  
Wing City Grille

One year memberships are only \$30 for individuals and \$100 for businesses. Business members will receive 4 discount cards and corresponding benefits.

Please join me in purchasing a 2013-2014 membership in the only organization solely dedicated to preserving and honoring the wonderful history of athletics in Chautauqua County.

## CSHOF Website

Since its inception five years ago, the number of visitors to the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame website and the number of pages viewed by those visitors continues to grow. For 2012 the number of unique views increased by 42% to over 10,000 while the number of page views exceeded 33,000, an increase of 23%.

The CSHOF Board of Directors thanks our webmaster, Doug Hoisington, [www.earthspark.com](http://www.earthspark.com), for the care and feeding of our website.

YEAR	UNIQUE VIEWS	PAGE VIEWS
2008	2,054	6,455
2009	4,422	23,344
2010	6,478	25,721
2011	7,224	26,879
2012	10,251	33,112

## Jamestown Jammers Open June 20th



Opening Day is right around the corner for the Jamestown Jammers. June 20th will kick off the 2013 season and the new affiliation with the Pittsburgh Pirates at Diethrick Park.

With Opening Day approaching, now is the perfect time to purchase season tickets. Season

tickets offer a great per game price for the Jammers 38 home games. Take advantage of this great pricing and catch the fun all summer long. The CSHOF has been a loyal season ticket buyer for many years. We'll see you at the ballpark!