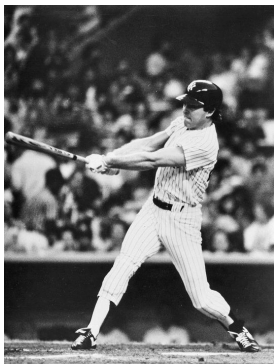


Sports Heroes: Dave Collins

Ian Frazer, ifrazer@argusleader.com 1:22 p.m. CDT September 27, 2016

Rapid City Stevens grad spent 16 years in the majors



(Photo: Submitted via S.D. Sports Hall of Fame)

Editor's Note: *This story appeared in the premium print section, South Dakota Sports Heroes.*

When Dave Collins was back in Rapid City playing for the city's prestigious American Legion Post 22 program, he asked Dave Ploof, the program's head coach, if he should go out for the track team at Rapid City Stevens High School.

"I said, 'Dave, running backwards, you're one of the fastest kids in South Dakota,'" Ploof said. "So running forwards, you're going to get all kinds of medals and you're not going to know what to do with them."

Baseball is a sport in which participants can excel without necessarily being great all-around athletes, but that was never a problem Collins had in his 16-year Major League Baseball career, during which he played for eight teams, stole 395 bases and, while playing for the Toronto Blue Jays in 1984, led the American League with 15 triples.

Back in high school, he played football and basketball in addition to baseball and track. The Raiders had a lethal backfield and ran the triple option with Collins at quarterback. With all the speed on their roster, the Raiders didn't take many chances throwing the ball.

"My senior year, I was all-state quarterback," Collins said. "And I thought I must be the only all-state quarterback that never threw the ball, because we hardly ever threw at all. If we threw five times in a game, that was a lot."

He went to Mesa Community College in Arizona in part because he had a chance to both play baseball and run track. He could also get in front of far more scouts than he would in South Dakota and potentially transfer to Arizona or Arizona State, two strong college baseball programs.

Collins only needed one year at Mesa to get an excellent shot at professional baseball, when the California Angels took him with the sixth overall pick of the 1972 draft. Three years later, Collins debuted in the majors at age 22, the first player from Post 22 to reach the highest level of baseball. Two more since him – Mark Ellis and Kelvin Torve – have reached the majors.



Dave Collins was a track star for Rapid City Stevens before he hit the pros in baseball. (Photo: Submitted via S.D. Sports Hall of Fame)

When Collins' playing career ended in 1990, he transitioned into coaching, holding positions with the St. Louis Cardinals, Cincinnati Reds, Milwaukee Brewers and most recently serving as the Florida Marlins' first base coach for part of the 2010 season.

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Dave Collins played Major League Baseball for 16 seasons, including seven seasons with Cincinnati during two stints. (Photo: Submitted)

Collins' career in baseball has certainly made him well-traveled, but he wishes it took him back to Rapid City more often. He's lived in the Cincinnati area since 1978 and currently resides in Taylor Mill, Ky., a close suburb. Collins hoped to go back to Rapid City to see Ploof during the final years of his career, but Ploof retired before Collins could do that.

"You've got to take care of the people that take care of you, and I really didn't take care of them like they took care of me," Collins said. "That's something I look back at and really have a lot of regret about."

As Collins looks back, though, he still sees Rapid City as the place where he built the groundwork for his career.

"I still think of that as home because that's where I grew up," Collins said. "That's where my roots are. That's where I got my start, those are the people that put in my foundation, that helped me not only professionally but personally as well."

About Dave Collins

Born: Oct. 20, 1952

Hometown: Rapid City (Stevens graduate)

Best known for: 16-year career in Major League Baseball and subsequent stints as a major league coach. Had 1,335 hits in his major league career and led the American League with trips in 1984 with 15.