



*“Hey Dick, what do you want to be when you grow up?”
said a young Kenny Combs to his pitcher.
“I dunno. A ballplayer, maybe” answered Dick
Fitzgerald.*

This is just a small part of the *Legend of Dick Fitzgerald*. Despite the rumor that he was born in a log cabin that he helped his father build, Richard Edward Fitzgerald entered this world in the city of Philadelphia on June 16th, 1935. If you count the number of times our planet has circled the sun since then, that number in 2021 has marked its eighty-sixth revolution. But if you were to reference age the way mothers of young children refer to with their offspring, you could say that Mr. Fitzgerald is 1,037 months old. Personally, I like the way a seven-year-old would reference his age as eighty-six and a half. Somewhere around age ten, your age defers to whole numbers, and we're stuck with that reference for the rest of our lives. Even with today's modern technology (and a call to Dick's "close and personal friend," Albert Einstein), nobody has been able to document the incredible number of pitches thrown by Mr. Fitzgerald's left arm. According to the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR), that number is well over a million, and that might be at the low end of the spectrum. And if it is only one million pitches, at 60'6" per throw, that would come to 11,458 miles of pitches! That doesn't include warm-ups and long-tossing, and as all of us know, Fitz is far from done!

Dick Fitzgerald will begin his day by swimming laps in the pool, eating a healthy breakfast, taking a yoga class, and then going out to pitch an hour or two of batting practice to some youngsters who are lucky to have him as a coach and mentor. To know Dick Fitzgerald is to appreciate what he is all about. Many point to his longevity in baseball, and

those feats are well documented. There are also rumors that his body is partially bionic. (Does his knee replacement back in 2005 count in that sense?) But to really know Dick is to appreciate the other human qualities that go with the package. You would need to include many of his anecdotes and fun stories, which include his wonderful and witty sense of humor. Some may view him as overly modest and even self-deprecating as he describes many of those events in his past, but as good as he was as an athlete, a business professional, and as a human being, those of us who truly know Mr. Fitzgerald already know this. If anyone thinks I'm off base with my assessment of Dick, I suggest that they take the time to sit down with him for an hour and chat. That hour will turn into two, or three, or four . . .

The Thirty-Fourth MSBL World Series, Phoenix, AZ

The MSBL World Series is held each year in the greater Phoenix, Arizona area. As the name implies, the second letter stands for "senior," even though there are divisions that include players as young as eighteen. The mantra of the MSBL has always been: "Don't go soft, play hardball," but as those of us who have personally



experienced over seventy journeys around the sun can attest, playing baseball even over sixty is both difficult and

challenging. Perhaps the term “hard” is a true play on words invoking a double meaning, and in this case “hard” means “difficult.”

When the mind is willing and the body isn't, failure is imminent. If what a person attempts to do is determined to be too complicated or difficult, many will simply give up and not do it! It is easier to walk away than to attempt something and fail. Motivational speakers make their living showing others how to encourage their minds and bodies to do what they want them to do. This includes self-improvement topics such as weight loss, self-control, staying in shape, and even making the most of teamwork to get what you want. But there are times when you evaluate the situation, weigh all the options available, and make the decision to do it yourself. That's exactly what Dick Fitzgerald decided to do.

October 30, 2021

If you were to rank the 73+ Division teams in the 2021 MSBL World Series, the Arizona Scorpions would fall somewhere in the middle of the pack. On a good day, and if everything went right, we could give even the top teams a battle. There were holes on defense, and our hitters rarely exceeded expectations. Making the playoffs with a two and three record in pool play was a recipe for disaster. It meant drawing either a number one or a number two seed. Heads – Sacramento, tails San Antonio. Tails it was!



The San Antonio Broncos had a good week. They had not lost a game in pool play and had given up only nine runs in five previous games.

The Saturday morning playoff elimination game at the Maryvale Complex was set under warm weather and clear skies. As third baseman Geoff Jacobs stated, “This was a battle between David and Goliath,” and if we were to repeat ancient history, our “David” better have his slingshot loaded!

When you face the best, you “throw” your best.

I’ve learned that when Dick Fitzgerald is scheduled to pitch, he undergoes a strict routine that is both physical and mental. Gone is his usual fun-loving sense of humor. He replaces his easy-going demeanor with an intense focus that tells you “This man means business!” His eyes are focused and rarely blink. It almost makes you afraid to cross their path for fear of getting a laser burn. But that’s the way Dick has always prepared for a big game.

From my perspective as the team’s center fielder, I had a vantage point that was shared by only two other players on

the field – Dick Fitzgerald, our pitcher, and Ken Combs behind the plate. Early on I could see the magic of the day begin to unfold. The fastball had zip. The curve ball had an extra degree of “snap,” and Fitz’s control was magnificent. As the contest progressed and we got deeper into the game, the powerful San Antonio offense failed to mount a threat against Mr. Fitzgerald. Between innings, Dick sat alone at the end of the bench . . . in his zone. He looked exhausted, but there was no doubt that he was in control. While some of us worried that he would run out of gas, nobody in their right mind would even suggest giving him a rest. This was Dick’s moment, and he was going to finish it his way!

As we approached the last inning, everyone on the Arizona Scorpions knew we were a part of something special. This was “vintage” Dick Fitzgerald. With two outs and a four to three lead, it was fitting that the last out came via a strikeout. It was a masterful curveball that seemed to break about four feet that did the trick.

Then it was over.

We were believers!

As I jogged in from center field towards Dick, I had to wait in a longer than usual line to congratulate him. During those brief moments, I had a chance to listen to the sincere words from both our team and the San Antonio Broncos. Everyone on the field as well as the growing number of

spectators in the stands knew they had just witnessed something special!



*“Hey Kenny, what do you want to be when you grow up?”
said Dick Fitzgerald to his catcher.*

“I dunno. A ballplayer, maybe” answered Ken Combs.