

# Congressman Stupak Reunites With College Coach Pellerito

**By Sean Ely**

Thirty five years ago, Pete Pellerito tipped his cap, put his finger on his nose, ran his hand across his chest, tipped his cap again, clapped his hands, and yelled, "Come on Stupak! Let's get it done out there!"

That was when he was coaching at Northwestern Michigan College in 1972, and his baseball team was ranked 16th in the nation among community colleges.

Last weekend, Mr. Pellerito was still flashing baseball signals to his former centerfielder and relief pitcher Bart Stupak, during a vintage base ball game behind Fort Mackinac. Mr. Pellerito was coaching the Mackinac island Never Sweats against the Rochester Grangers.

It was the bottom of the 8th inning and the score was tied, 3-3. Mr. Stupak, now a U.S. Congressman, stood on first base after he reached on a fielder's choice. Former Detroit Tigers relief pitcher John Hiller dug his shoes into the dirt at home plate awaiting the pitch. The ball hung in the air and Mr. Hiller sent the ball on a rope to left field, advancing Mr. Stupak to second base. Clay Fuller, who was on deck, took one final practice swing and lined up in the batter's box.

As Mr. Fuller dangled his bat in the air, Mr. Pellerito gave the steal sign to Mr. Stupak at second base. The pitch was sent to home plate, and Mr. Stupak shot toward third. The ball floated over the top-half of the strike zone as Mr. Fuller laced it up the middle to center field and Mr. Stupak rounded third to score the go-ahead run.

It was the fourth run, and the final, game-winning run, snapping the Never Sweats' two-year losing streak to the Grangers. The crowd roared and the rest of the team yelled "Huzzah!" as Mr. Stupak grabbed the bell at the scorer's table and rang it louder than anyone had all day. This was a tradition of the Fort Mackinac soldiers who played in the 1880s.

"When I was on second, he gave me the steal sign and I never stopped," Mr. Stupak said. "He said to go on it with one out, so I had to go, and I did. When I left college we were undefeated, and now that he's coached here, we're undefeated. It's great and a lot of fun."

Mr. Stupak, who represents Michigan's First Congressional District in Washington, D.C., plays on a couple of other teams, including a con-



**Pete Pellerito (left) and Congressman Bart Stupak on the base ball field outside Fort Mackinac Saturday, July 21. Mr. Pellerito was the fielding coach during the vintage game, a role that he played for Mr. Stupak more than 30 years ago when he was his coach at Northwestern Michigan College. Mr. Stupak played center field and relief pitcher at the college. The two met again on Mackinac Island as the Mackinac Island Never Sweats, who edged the Rochester Grangers 4-3 in nine innings.**

gressional baseball team "We call him Stretch because he can run, and obviously he can catch it, and he

## For the Record...

In the July 21 article, "Mackinac Island Planners Say No to Cutsinger Weekly Rentals," the Planning Commission recommended to city council to deny a rezoning request from David Cutsinger. The issue did not come before city council at its July 18 meeting. The council has not yet discussed the recommendation.

stretches out for that ball," Mr. Pellerito said. "We never used him at first base before, when he played for me in college, because he was always a centerfielder and a relief pitcher, but we probably should have used him a little bit more at first base, because he's got that long reach."

He characterized Mr. Stupak as a good all-around player, and "not bad for a U.P. boy" who has to contend with more snow and shorter ball seasons.

"He is one of the few people around who is still very coachable at both hitting and fielding, even after more than 30 years," Mr. Pellerito said.

"He's just always a great guy to see. I'm very happy that we are on a winning team again."

The blowout loss of 25-14 last year hurt the Never Sweats, so coming back the following year and playing bang-bang defense was something that the team was proud of, Mr. Pellerito said. They all had their minds set on changing their fortunes out on the field, and they went out and did it.

The intense competition, however, is not the only reason the vintage base ball outing is so enjoyable for the players, he noted.

"It's the relationships with the other players and all the local folks that really matters," Mr. Pellerito said. "I don't care how old you are, it's important to be a part of a team, playing something you feel you are decent at, and I know that everyone has that attitude. To me, that's important. Winning and losing is great, but the most important is the camaraderie that forms between everyone. We laugh and make fun of each other, but we are supportive when the game is on."

Playing the game feels like part of their childhood, he said, a chance to reach back into their youth and enjoy the game once a year.

"I played it in high school and college and I coached it as well, but it is still a thrill to be out there and to play a game that so many of us love," Mr. Pellerito said.

The Never Sweats look to make it two in a row against the Grangers next summer.

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