

Historical Society Hosts Sports Exhibition



Olympic Gold Medalist Figure Skater Dorothy Hamill Does and Airborne Split, 1976, Historical Society

Greenwich Historical Society will host a dynamic exhibition on the history of local sporting culture, showcasing how athletes in Greenwich and surrounding communities broke boundaries, tested their limits, and found common ground through athletic achievement. Sports! More Than Just a Game will be on view at the Greenwich Historical Society from March 8 through September 3, 2023.

The exhibition features exclusive memorabilia, historic sporting equipment and apparel, and personal effects from some of America's most celebrated athletes who made their homes in Greenwich, including Olympic gold medalists Dorothy Hamill and Donna de Varona, baseball great Tom Seaver, and football legend Steve Young.

"Athletics and organized sports have been uniting our Greenwich community, instilling core values of teamwork, and inspiring local pride for generations," says Maggie Dimock, Greenwich Historical Society's Curator of Exhibitions and Collections. "Through this exhibition, we hope to provide an inclusive and thoughtful story of the many athletes and community figures who distinguished themselves through sporting achievement, and how competitive and professional sports shaped the town's unique history."

The exhibition themes include sporting history in pre-Colonial America, baseball's Connecticut roots and continued legacy, women carving out a place in American sports, breaking the color barrier, football in Connecticut, and a Greenwich great, elite sports in Greenwich, and the country club movement, and racquetball, a Greenwich sport.

Athletic competitions were an essential aspect of ceremonial life for many Native Americans. The modern sport of lacrosse evolved from the Creator's Game, which held religious and cultural significance for the Haudenosaunee people of New York and Canada. Visitors can view a 19th-century handmade lacrosse stick, on loan from the Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center.

Baseball has roots in a popular 18th- and 19th-century ball-and-bat sport called "wicket," which was sometimes referred to as "the Connecticut Game" owing to its local popularity. Visitors will view a 19th-century wicket bat and ball and illustrations of game play, and contemporary baseball artifacts commemorating great moments in modern baseball history, including a jersey signed by Yankees pitcher David Cone, famous for his 1999 perfect game, and one of three Cy Young Awards presented to legendary Mets pitcher Tom Seaver.

Athletic activities like cycling and basketball paved the way for American women to enter the realm of competitive sports in the 19th century. Visitors will view trophies and Olympic medals awarded to 20th-century female athletes with local Greenwich stories, including celebrated diver Helen Meany, who won gold at the 1928 Olympics, and swimmer, broadcaster, and women's sports activist Donna de Varona, who earned two Olympic gold medals in 1964.

In the early 20th century, many Black American athletes faced racial discrimination in professional and amateur sports, leading to the formation of segregated leagues. In Greenwich, the "Colored Rangers" baseball team, consisting of Black players, were active throughout the 1930s. The legendary baseball player Jackie Robinson, who became the first Black player to break into the professional leagues when he joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, settled in Stamford after he and his family faced discrimination in neighboring towns, including Greenwich.

Greenwich was also a proving ground for basketball player Worthy Patterson, a Greenwich High School student in the 1940s who later played guard for the UConn Huskies and became one of the first Black players to enter the NBA when he was initially drafted by the Boston Celtics but then went on to play for the St. Louis Hawks.

American football, now a staple of American high school and college athletics, has deep Connecticut roots, with the influential Yale football coach Walter Camp often credited as the "Father of American Football."

Young's NFL career, from his Greenwich upbringing through to NFL stardom, will also be celebrated with memorabilia from his life and career. Young graduated from Greenwich High School in 1980 and went on to have an illustrious NFL career as quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, guiding the team to Super Bowl victory over the San Diego Chargers in 1994 and was voted NFL MVP in 1992 and 1994.

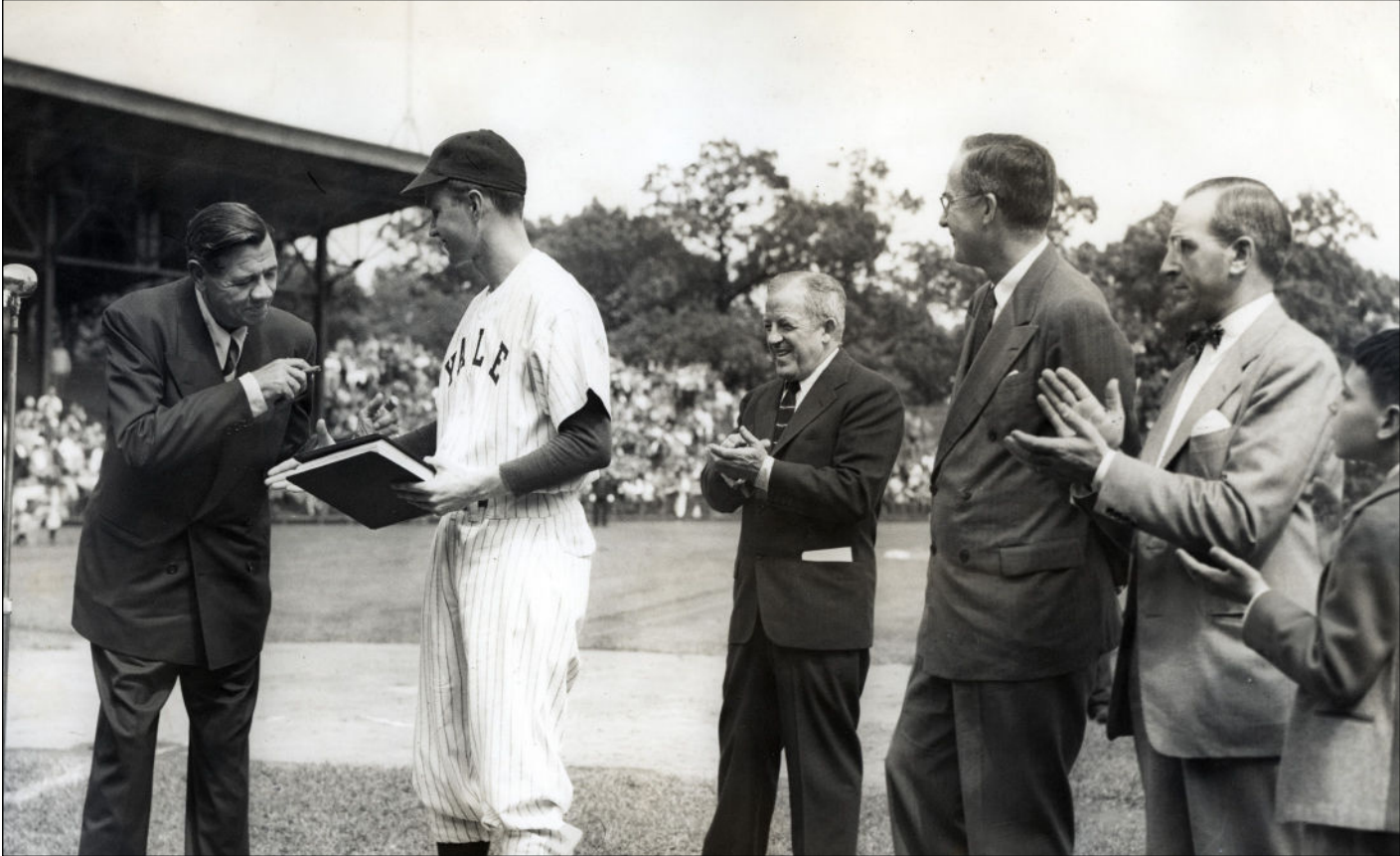
The exhibition will also highlight the history of elite sports in Greenwich and the country club movement, which attracted wealthy Americans seeking escape from congested cities. The Greenwich Country Club, founded in 1892, is the fourth-oldest country club in the United States.

Equestrian sports were especially popular, with organizations like the Greenwich Riding and Trails Association organizing hunts and the annual Greenwich Horse Show. The exhibition will showcase photographs, artifacts, and riding equipment, including a saddle belonging to local riding legend Theodore "Teddy" Wahl, the owner and riding master at Round Hill Stables for decades.

In addition, the exhibition will celebrate racquetball as a Greenwich sport, invented by Joseph Sobek, a former professional tennis and handball player, who began teaching and popularizing the new indoor

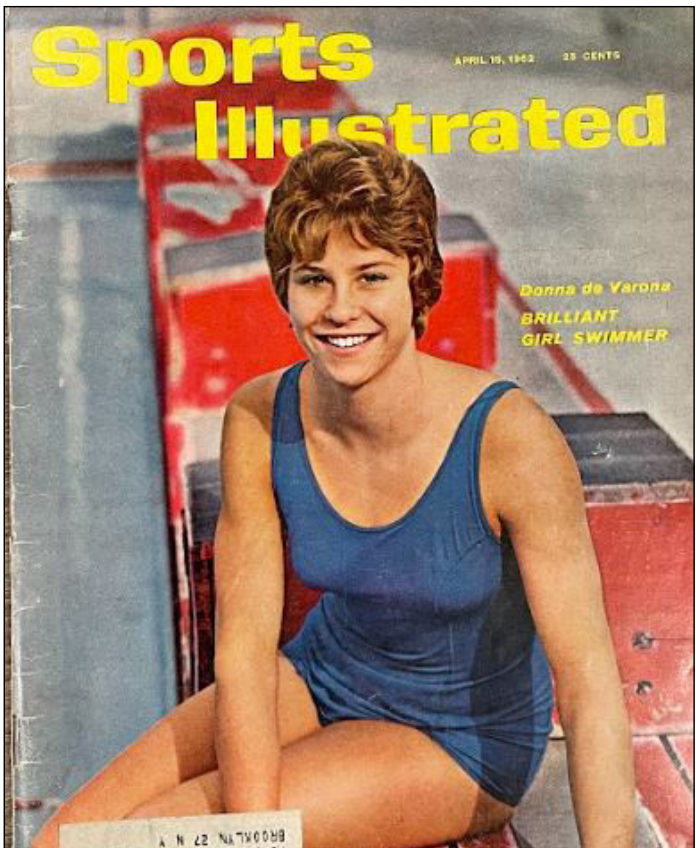


Helen Meany in Competition, ca. 1930, Greenwich Historical Society

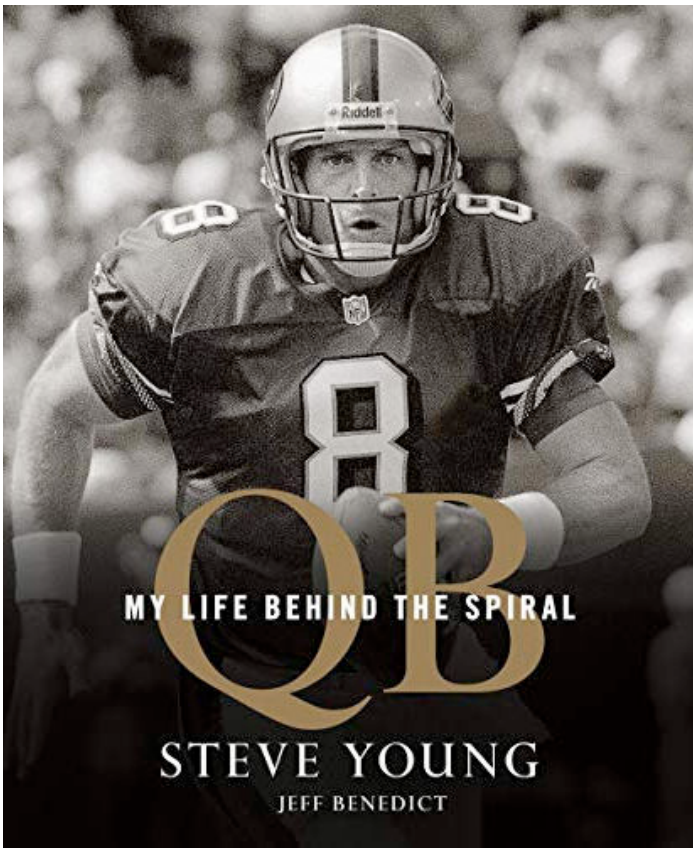


George H.W. Bush, Yale Baseball Team Captain, Greets Babe Ruth, 1948, Courtesy of the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum

*The Greenwich Historical Society invites you to view our exhibition **SPORTS! More Than Just a Game**. A dynamic exhibition on the local history of sporting culture, fandom and celebrity that explores how Greenwich and surrounding communities broke boundaries, tested their limits and found common ground through athletic achievement.*



Sports Illustrated Magazine Featuring Cover of Donna DeVarona, April 16, 1962, Courtesy of Donna de Varona



Greenwich native Steve Young will be celebrated with memorabilia from his life and career.



Jackie Robinson and his family at their Stamford home, 1956, Arthur Rothstein, photographer; Library of Congress



Greenwich Horse Show Poster, 1947, Greenwich Historical Society, Gift of Hedda Windisch von Goeben

racquet sport at the Greenwich YMCA in 1949.

To add additional context and entertainment, the exhibition will host a series of events, including lectures, panel discussions, sporting demonstrations, and movies on related themes. The exhibition is curated by Kathleen Craughwell-Varda, an independent curator and museum consultant and the director of Conservation Connection, a training and granting program for cultural heritage organizations.

The gallery is open Wednesday through Sunday from 12:00 – 4:00 p.m. with museum admission. Adults will pay \$10, seniors and students \$8, and admission is free to all members and children under 18. Group tours are available on request. For more information and to RSVP for events, visit the Greenwich Historical Society website.



Worthy Patterson on the Court with UConn Huskies Men's Basketball Team, ca. 1951, Courtesy of Ronnie Forchheimer