

# MORRELL WINS YAZ AWARD AGAIN

Shoreham-WR  
pitcher/shortstop  
2nd repeat winner

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Sal Mignano knows a baseball prospect when he sees one, especially a great one. The Shoreham-Wading River coach of 38 years knew Brian Morrell was a blue-chip talent five years ago, when he was a seventh-grader.

"I watched him thoroughly during the seventh-grade season and then in the fall of his eighth-grade season," said Mignano, who retired in 2015. "His ability was on another level and he played so hard. I put him right in at shortstop on our varsity."

Morrell's five-year high school baseball career blossomed from that eighth-grade spring. The shortstop/pitcher grew from young prodigy to team leader and led the Wildcats to five straight playoff appearances, including the Suffolk Class A championship this season.

His impact was felt in every facet of the program. He set numerous school records, including hits in a season with 44, career home runs (27) and career wins (29). He was a leader in the community and a role model for all the area Little League players, who waited after games for his autograph.

Morrell is a small-town star. He was the fourth junior to ever win the Yastrzemski Award given to Suffolk's top player in 2016. For an encore, he became only the second player in the 50 years of the Award to win it twice.

Morrell batted .500 with seven home runs and 39 RBIs and recorded a 10-1 pitching record with 93 strikeouts in 67<sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> innings this year. He was named the 50th recipient of the Yastrzemski Award last night at the Suffolk High School Baseball Coaches Association banquet at Villa Lombardi's in Holbrook.

Only one Yaz recipient had ever won back-to-back awards. East Islip first baseman Ron Witmeyer, who had a short career with the Oakland A's, won the award in 1984 and 1985.

"It's definitely select company," Morrell said. "It's an ex-



Brian Morrell displays the Yastrzemski Award as Suffolk's most outstanding player. He was 10-1 as a pitcher, and hit .500 with 39 RBIs.

## YASTRZEMSKI AWARD

treme honor to be mentioned with the juniors that won the Yaz. And to be selected again is unbelievable. I can only hope to someday have those same opportunities as those great players before me. I want to follow in the footsteps of Marcus Stroman and be a great college student and then play professionally."

The three juniors to win the award, Sachem's Neal Heaton in 1978, Patchogue-Medford's Stroman in 2008 and Witmeyer all played in the show. Stroman, who earned the MVP of this

year's World Baseball Classic, is currently 7-2 with Toronto.

He went on to credit his family, coaches and teammates for his incredible run. He also pointed to the winning tradition at Shoreham-Wading River and the mentoring of Mignano, the father of the Wildcats program.

"I'm surrounded by so many good people," he said. "And our teams were so good. I just love playing and that helps in being successful, loving what you do."

His mom, Toni-Jo Morrell, has been on an emotional roller coaster the past few weeks juggling the possibilities of the MLB Draft and her son's commitment

to play ball at Notre Dame.

"I can't tell him enough how proud we are of him," she said. "His dad and I know that we're blessed with a son who has a laserlike focus on his goals and is a wonderful person. He's sacrificed a lot of things over the years to be in this position."

Morrell's drive to be the best could be found in his work ethic all year-round. "I've had Brian since he was a young hitter and he's always been a super athlete," said Joe Francisco of the Hitting Academy at the Prospects Factory in Farmingdale. "He's a dynamic hitter with super explosive, fast hands. He's made small

adjustments to keep improving."

Kevin Willi, who coached Morrell for the past three years, said: "He was under a lot of pressure this year and he dealt with it pretty well. It was impressive how he steadily improved his statistics from year to year."

Mignano looks back on a talented seventh-grader and knows he made the right call. "It was a no-brainer for me," said Mignano, who led the Wildcats to eight Suffolk titles. "He was the best shortstop in the program as a 14-year-old. He was coming into a winning program, a perennial playoff contender. And he was a perfect fit."