

## LEGENDS OF THE GAMES

# Lazzaro's Law: The defense never rests

by John A. Montgomery

**A**T 52, SAM LAZZARO HAS entered a new profession. He has become an attorney.

"That's a surprise," you say. "I didn't know he went to law school."

He didn't. He read for the law, passing the bar exam last fall on his first try.

Now he's a practicing lawyer, sharing office space in Salem with **Richard Padgett**, under whose expert guidance Lazzaro read for more than three years. Lazzaro is concentrating in such areas as sports law, employment law, personal injury, family law, wills and trusts.

How rare is it to pass the Virginia state bar without going to law school?

Consider that among the nearly 1,400 would-be attorneys who took the grueling two-day test with Lazzaro at the Roanoke Civic Center a year ago, eight had not attended law school. Among those eight, precisely two passed. Lazzaro overcame long odds, something he has done routinely throughout his life.

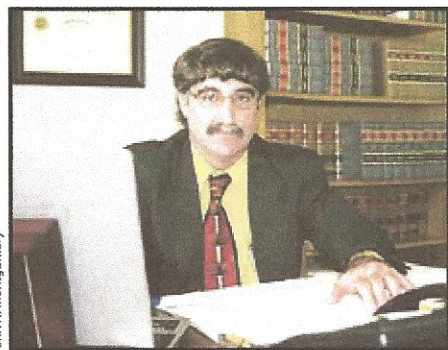
People who know Lazzaro understand that he has the intelligence, discipline and fortitude to make a dramatic career leap. After all, over the past 35 years, he has been a grocer (during his school days), a broadcaster, a baseball executive, an author, and a media sales representative — in the fields of print and broadcast.

In the fall of 2004, Lazzaro helped found this very publication you're holding, *Play by Play*. He also was a founder of the *Roanoke Valley Sports Journal*, the lo-

cal sports monthly that preceded *Play by Play* and was produced from 1997-2004. Lazzaro's area sports contacts, primarily developed during his 11-season stint as general manager of the Salem professional baseball team (1986 through 1996), have helped him procure the necessary advertising to launch two sports magazines. (Even while practicing law, Lazzaro continues to be involved with *Play by Play* on a part-time basis.)

Not one of Lazzaro's career jumps has been an automatic move, and yet all of them would have to be considered successful.

Lazzaro believes he developed his competitive spirit in the sports arena, where he was the starting shortstop on his Oswego, N.Y. high



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Sam Lazzaro hopes one day to be a sports agent

school baseball team. He was an energetic leadoff batter, a switch-hitter who displayed speed on the base paths. He was a slick fielder, fundamentally sound.

But Lazzaro's high school baseball career ended when he quit school and hitch-hiked to California. "I was a young, impulsive, 16-year-old," he says. Lazzaro talked with his parents before he left home, and although they were not

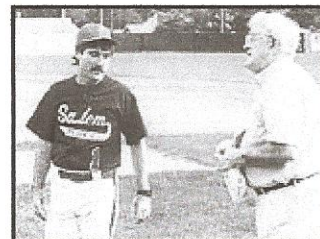
in favor of his trip, "they knew that when I set my mind that I was going to do something, they weren't going to change it." That sounds familiar.

Lazzaro made the cross-country jaunt with a friend, encountering some unforgettable situations along the way, but ultimately, when they reached the Pacific Ocean, Lazzaro turned around in more ways than one. Lazzaro came home and eventually became a model student. He also patched up the differences with his parents.

It was some time later before he returned to high school (thanks to an assist from a guidance counselor who convinced the principal to begrudgingly readmit him), but

Lazzaro then pursued his studies with a passion. In three years, he never missed a day of class, graduated with honors, earned acceptance to several colleges (including Syracuse and Duke universities) and won an academic scholarship to the State University of New York-Oswego, where he ultimately earned a communications degree, specializing in broadcasting. Lazzaro broadcast Oswego State hockey games for three years.

Lazzaro became sports director and sales manager for WSGO, before he was hired by a Utica, N.Y. resident who was moving his hockey team to Salem. Lazzaro began working with the Salem Raiders in the fall of 1980, but when the hockey team folded after a year, he went back to New York to work in



Lazzaro helped Posey Oyler start the local baseball hall of fame

radio advertising, never expecting to return to the Roanoke Valley. Lazzaro found that he missed working in sports, however, and by answering a blind ad in the *Sporting News* for a sports executive, he became the general manager of a minor league baseball team in Elmira, N.Y. After three successful years in Elmira, Lazzaro met **Kelvin Bowles** at the 1986 winter baseball meetings, and Bowles hired Lazzaro to take the helm of his newly acquired Salem baseball franchise.

Salem's club enjoyed many consecutive years of increasing attendance before Bowles and Lazzaro parted company. The split came soon after the team became a Colorado Rockies affiliate, acquired the Avalanche nickname, and moved into its new stadium, changes in which Lazzaro played a major role. Lazzaro published a book, *More Than a Ballgame — An Inside Look at Minor League Baseball*, shortly after he left the club and about the time he came to work as an advertising rep at the *Blue Ridge Business Journal*, the company that launched the *Sports Journal*.

Lazzaro has been married to his high school sweetheart, **Sue**,

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