



LARRY HAYS

written by Ken Sickenger

It's fair to say that Larry Hays built most of his Hall of Fame resume outside of New Mexico's borders. His long coaching tenure includes hundreds of baseball and softball victories accented by a slew of championships, trophies, and career achievements — all of them amassed in bordering states.

But first and foremost, Larry is a New Mexican. Born in Elida, he grew up, found, and nurtured his love of sports on the state's Eastern Plains. Larry graduated from Dora High School, received his bachelor's and master's degrees at Eastern New Mexico University and parlayed his education to a remarkable coaching career that is still underway.

Larry is currently the head softball coach at Colorado Christian University — a position he accepted in 2018 as a 73-year-old. He has since led the Cougars to more than 250 wins, the program's first two Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference tournament titles and three straight NCAA Division II Regional appearances.

Not bad for a second career.

Larry came out of retirement to coach softball at Colorado Christian only after enjoying long stints as a successful baseball coach at Lubbock Christian and Texas Tech. He won 1,509 games combined at the two schools, which ranked among the top 10 in college baseball history when Larry stepped down.

Highlights? Larry led Lubbock Christian to an NAIA National Championship in 1983 and coached Texas Tech to four combined conference titles (Southwest Conference regular-season and tournament in 1995, Big 12 regular-season in 1997 and Big 12 Tournament in 1998).

Oh, and Larry spent six seasons coaching men's basketball and one coaching women's basketball at Lubbock Christian early in his "first"

career. He capped things off in 2010 by leading Lubbock Christian softball to a 51-7 record, a conference title, and a third-place finish at NAIA Nationals in his only season at the helm.

His has been a Hall of Fame coaching career by any measure and Larry has the hardware to prove it. In addition to having his number retired at Texas Tech, he's a member of the National College Baseball Hall of Fame (2015), the NAIA Hall of Fame (1991), Texas Baseball Hall of Fame (2001) and the Lubbock Christian University Hall of Fame (1991). The latter renamed its baseball facility Hays Field to honor Larry and his family.

Despite all that, Larry said he was surprised to be inducted into the New Mexico Sports Hall of Fame in 2024.

"I never dreamed of an honor like this," he said just prior to coaching Colorado Christian in a softball doubleheader this season. "I'm surprised, humbled and excited. It means a lot. My life was blessed to grow up in Dora, New Mexico, and attend Eastern New Mexico University."

Larry posted a few numbers as an athlete in New Mexico before turning his talents to coaching. He was an all-district basketball player at Dora High and went on to play for the men's teams at Lubbock Christian and ENMU — though it wasn't quite a Hall-of-Fame career.

"I've always liked to say when I was at Eastern, that I averaged 30 a game," Hays joked. "When I said that, people looked at me, and I would say '30 seconds, not 30 points.'"

But it's also fair to say the Hays family's coaching roots trace back to Eastern New Mexico — and it's become quite an impressive tree. Larry's sons Daren and Shanon are college softball head coaches, his grandson Hunter is an assistant coach, and his granddaughter Hampton (a former player) is a softball intern at Colorado Christian.