

[Hall of Fame: Mel Watt Lives His Dream](#) (Roll Call - July 12, 2011)

By Seth Stern



Rep. Mel Watt ducks a fastball during the 45th Annual Roll Call Congressional Baseball Game at RFK Stadium.

Rep. [Mel Watt](#) (D) didn't get a chance to play baseball at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, which he attended at a time in the 1960s when few, if any, African-Americans played on Tar Heel teams.

So for **Watt**, who was the Democrats' starting pitcher for 11 consecutive years, the Roll Call Congressional Baseball Game was a way to "live out that dream."

He pitched at a time when the Republicans were ascendant on the field, racking up a 2-10 career record, but he was named most valuable player in 1995, 1996 and 2000.

Watt's best outing might have come in one of the games that he didn't win. He lost a 1998 pitchers' duel to then-Rep. Steve Largent (R-Okla.) in which **Watt** gave up four runs on nine hits in six innings, while walking two and striking out seven.

Watt said the friendships that he made with Republicans such as Largent and former Rep. [Zach Wamp](#) (Tenn.) were one of the best parts of playing the game. "You get to know guys you just don't have that opportunity to get to know in our institution anymore," **Watt** said.

His on-the-field friendship with Wamp survived the time in 2000 when he intentionally beamed his opponent. **Watt** admitted he was angry when Wamp purposely let a slow curveball hit him on the back.

Watt walked over to first base and warned Wamp that he was "going to have to pay" for that. Next time Wamp came up to bat, Watt threw straight at Wamp's head.

"It was all in fun," **Watt** said. Less enjoyable, **Watt** said, were the early morning practices. "I tried to get them to play cold turkey," which he thought would be better than getting sore while practicing. "I never could convince anybody else of that," he said.

Watt said he knew it was time to make room for another starting pitcher as "my fastball got slower and slower," but he hung on because the Democrats didn't have a ready successor. "If we had a viable alternative, I would love to move to the outfield," **Watt** told Roll Call in 2004.

He gave up 22 earned runs on 27 hits in his last two starts and recalled being "so sore for the next several weeks I could barely move."

He finally stepped aside in 2006 at age 60, although he still pitched two-thirds of an inning in relief of Rep. [Joe Baca](#) (D-Calif.).

Watt is the first Democrat to be inducted into the Roll Call Congressional Baseball Hall of Fame since former Minnesota Rep. Martin Sabo in 2006. He is the first African-American member in the Hall of Fame.

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