

2018 Canadian Baseball History Conference

Presentation Abstracts

Special Presentation: Radio Recreation of the Championship Game of the 1877 International Association

On October 2, 1877, the London Tecumsehs hosted the Alleghenys of Pittsburgh at Tecumseh Park in a match to decide the International Association pennant, as Fred Goldsmith faced off against Alleghenys ace Pud Galvin. Join us for all the action as Jim Van Horne calls the play-by-play. Colour commentator Bill Humber provides historical context, on-field reporter Chip Martin local insight, and host Andrew North post-game analysis.

Bob Barney: For Argument's Sake: The Case for London's Labatt Park Against Its Challengers for the Distinction of Being the World's Oldest, Continuously Operated Ballpark in Baseball History

In the late spring of 1877 the London Tecumseh Baseball Club inaugurated its newly developed baseball grounds in London's Kensington neighborhood. The ballpark was then known to all as Tecumseh Park. Today, as we peer out the windows of this lecture venue, we see that ancient ancestor's most modern progeny, Labatt Park, as it was in 1877, situated in the exact place as its origin, surrounded by a board fence, charging admission fees for contests, indeed, a steadfast home to the city's premier diamond aggregation, in this case, the London Majors. The only essential difference between the original Tecumseh Park and today's Labatt Park is that home plate now faces southeast rather than southwest and there are team dugouts rather than simple benches. When it comes to distinguishing the "first," or "oldest" of anything, there is sense of history involved, as it was in 2012 for Major League Baseball's 100th Year Anniversary celebration of its oldest venue, Fenway Park in Boston. But, can Labatt Park legitimately claim the distinction of being the world's oldest, continuously operated ballpark in baseball history? There are two challengers that perennially come to mind when debating the London distinction. Both are located in Massachusetts. One is the claim of the outer-Boston suburb of Clinton,

the other of the western Massachusetts town of Pittsfield. This essay attempts to examine the claim of each community (London, Clinton, Pittsfield) for the distinction sought. The study is based on a physical examination of each of the three physical sites and their historical legacies embedded in their respective communities, all placed against a set of criteria for identifying the qualities necessary in answering the question: “what, indeed, is a ballpark?”

Tim Blaker: *The (Batting) Order of Canada: Canadians in MLB Batting Orders From 1930 To Present Day*

From 1930 through 2017, Canadians (defined here as a player who was born in Canada) have taken a spot in the batting order at the start of a game (that is, have been one of the first nine batters) in MLB on 20005 occasions. This presentation will examine how the distribution of Canadian-born players throughout the nine spots in the order at the start of the game has changed over the years, from batting cleanup only twice in the 1950s to 1467 times in the 2000s. And everything in between, including the game in 1974 where starting pitcher Ferguson Jenkins was used as a hitter instead of a DH being used, one of six times that the starting pitcher has been used instead of a DH. This study is an offshoot of a larger project to study batting-order composition and optimization via the use of transition-state-change-mediated simulation ... or, Kevin Pillar for lead-off!

Warren Campbell: *Mascots in Canadian Baseball*

If a wedding DJ suggests we do the Macarena, I will key their car. But when an anthropomorphized bear in a baseball jersey wants me to do the chicken dance in the seventh-inning stretch, I'm up and flappin' quicker than you can say 'crackerjack'! - Katie-Ellen Humphries, BC-based comedian.

Mascots in sports have a sordid beginning. The original Toronto Baseball Club in 1886 had a "small coloured boy" named Willie Hume whom they picked up on a road trip to Syracuse as a good luck charm. Willie would dress in costumes and cavort with the fans to distract the opposition. The Hamilton Hams in 1889 hired a man they called "Man Morton, the Zulu Giant", dressing him in war paint. The most famous Major League mascot, The Famous Chicken from San Diego grew up in the city that's the hosting this year's Canadian Baseball History Conference. In fact he used to operate the scoreboard for the Intercounty London Pontiacs for 25 cents a game. When major league Baseball came to Canada mascots were part of

the story: Souki and Youppi in Montreal and BJ Birdy, Ace, Diamond and Junior in Toronto. Minor league professional Baseball had mascots such as Homer in Edmonton with the Trappers, and Larry the Lynx and Skcratch in Ottawa. We'll learn more about the history of Mascots in professional Canadian Baseball through pictures, funny anecdotes and the general behind the scenes world of our now furry friends that rile up crowds and create grief for umpires. But not everybody loves mascots and we'll talk about that as well.

A mascot is just a clown with a criminal record. - Sean Lecomber, Alberta-based comedian.

Stephen Dame: **A Second Strike: Baseball and the Canadian Armed Forces During World War Two**

When Canadian boys set sail for a second global conflict in as many decades, they embarked with their baseballs, bats and gloves close at hand. From the moment they arrived in Britain until the day they forced the Nazis from Holland, Canadian soldiers played baseball in every theatre of war. From England to India, they played against fellow soldiers, civilians and their superior officers. Baseball kept them fit, maintained morale and served as a necessary salve against the horrors of war. On the home front, baseball games helped fund the fight, a Canadian woman who became "Rosie the Riveter" stepped up to the plate, Maple Leaf Stadium became home to an exiled air force and a Canadian baseball team, interned by ignorance, played on. The story of Canadian baseball during World War Two is second to none.

Jon Dunkle: **The Ontario League of 1930: How a bunch of semi-pro ballplayers from Pennsylvania became a professional league in Canada**

In 1930, professional baseball returned to Ontario, Canada in grand fashion. After not having had any teams in the province since the Michigan-Ontario League folded in 1925, Ontario was suddenly home to six professional baseball franchises that comprised the newly formed Ontario League. Teams were encouraged to sign native Canadian players but in a strange series of events, much of the league was comprised of former semi-pro ballplayers from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania in the United States.

Although there was much excitement about the league when it started, economic conditions made it difficult for the teams to draw an adequate number of fans. The number of non-Canadian players didn't help matters, either for the league or for the economy, and the league began to crumble after just a couple of months, eventually folding before the league schedule could be completed.

This presentation will discuss the Ontario League, how it became a haven for ballplayers from a town in Pennsylvania some 400 miles away, the collapse of the league and the strange concluding playoff series which saw a team with a losing record claim the league championship.

Gary Gillette: **How Good Was the Fabled ManDak League?**

Hundreds of minor leagues populated the U.S. and Canadian landscape before 1960—not to mention uncounted numbers of semi-pro leagues that thrived when baseball was king. Yet the modest Manitoba-Dakota League of the northern prairies made an impact in its seven years of operation that has outlasted most of the others. Taking advantage of a surfeit of available African American talent after the re-integration of baseball—when short-sighted big-league owners refused to sign black players who were supposedly too old—the ManDak League punched well above its weight in the 1950s. The ManDak's place in baseball history is secure, and its legend has grown in the 21st century because of painstaking work of devoted researchers like Barry Swanton, Jay-Del Mah, and Gary Fink. They and others have opined that the ManDak's quality of play was as good as the high minors, but evaluating the competitiveness of independent leagues is a difficult task. My presentation would take a detailed look at all club rosters for every ManDak season, showing where their players came from, where they played afterward and, most importantly, how well they performed in the ManDak as compared to in other leagues.

Stephen Harding and Stephanie Radu: **What is Archived is Not Lost: Researching Baseball in London, Ontario**

This collaborative talk outlines a variety of resources that baseball enthusiasts and scholars can work from in London, Ontario. It explores the ways that researchers

can utilize aerial photographs, geodetic survey maps, business directories and fire insurance plans to uncover stories about players, teams, ballparks and sports facilities. It pinpoints serial newspapers and archival resources at Western University and the London Public Library that pertain to regional baseball leagues and equipment manufacturers. In so doing, it examines the development of Labatt Park, tracking its physical expansion and redesigns. It introduces oral histories that document former industrial softball leagues in London, and highlights a London-based bat manufacturer. Ultimately, it demonstrates how baseball research is inspired by drawing stakeholders to appropriate resources, and bolstering the love of the game.

Bill Humber: **Changing the Narrative**

Baseball's creation story is premised on American know-how taking a variety of children's bat, ball and base games from England and Europe and turning them into today's modern sport. Canadians while recognized as early participants in the game's adoption were seen as recipients of another country's national game. Not so! At every stage of baseball's modernization there was Canadian content from its early folk roots, to its continuity of play, to experiments with a unique regional variant, to its off-the-field organization and perhaps most significantly in the model provided by cricket. Canadians also had access to a direct royal lineage. Though largely symbolic their annual 4 June celebrations placed them in a direct passage from the game's Garden of Eden moment.

Heidi Jacobs: **Jack Calder: Documentarian of the 1934 Chatham Coloured All-Stars**

With the recent launch of the digital project, "Breaking the Colour Barrier: Wilfred "Boomer" Harding & the Chatham Coloured All-Stars 1934-1939", the story of this remarkable team is becoming better known. While the Harding family scrapbooks were the original source of the reclamation work done with this team's story, the vividness of their barrier-breaking story is due, in part, to the journalism of the *Chatham Daily News*' sports columnist Jack Calder. In this presentation, I will consider Calder's season-long documentation of the first Black team to win the OBAA championship. While Calder was a man of his time, I argue that his skilled journalism and evocative, reflective, and nuanced documentation of the Chatham

Coloured All-Stars can be seen as working toward breaking down racial barriers within Canadian sports.

Maxwell Kates: **Birth of the Blue Jays**

Major League Baseball to be played in Downsview. Labatt to sponsor the broadcasts for a baseball team owned by someone else. The San Francisco Giants to move to Toronto. Each of these nearly took place in Toronto's decade-long pursuit of a major league team from 1967 to 1977. Through primary and secondary source research, along with a series of interviews, *Birth of the Blue Jays* will chronicle how Toronto's baseball dream became a reality. The paper is to be included in a forthcoming book on expansion teams whose working title is "Time for Expansion Baseball."

David Matchett: **From a Researcher's Notebook**

Baseball researcher David Matchett will present a lightning round of eight 3-minute presentations related to the history of baseball in Canada. Who was involved in the first all-Canadian battery? Were Eric Gagne and Russell Martin the first French-speaking battery? What were the circumstances of Dick Fowler's no-hitter, the first by a Canadian until James Paxton's earlier this year. Who was Alison Gordon's "favorite" player? Inspired by ESPN's *Pardon the Interruption*, David will be on the clock to power through this material in the allotted time.

David Schulz: **History of Baseball as Depicted in Postage Stamps**

One of the more popular "topicals" in the world of postage stamp collections is that of baseball. There are thousands of commemorative stamps from countries all around the world that tell the story of baseball teams, players, events, art, film, stadiums, women, little leagues, the World Series as well as many world and regional championships. This presentation will not focus on the hobby of stamp collecting, but rather share stories of how, why and when some of the baseball stamps were created. Why did Ajman create a stamp for George Sisler in 1969? What baseball event was honoured in the Czech Republic? What's with Marty Cordova's face on a 1999 Rwanda issue? Was Liberia celebrating Norman Rockwell or baseball (or both) in their 2005 stamp? And why SO many stamps from Guinea, Guyana, Nicaragua and St. Vincent? Canada, of course, has also enjoyed a handful of commemorative stamps that both directly and indirectly

recognize baseball history. Each of these stamps will be presented with their stories.

Dennis Thiessen: **James “Tip” O’Neill, the Woodstock Wonder**

Although better known as a champion batsman for the St. Louis Browns in the 1880s, James “Tip” O’Neill spent the first eight years of his career as a pitcher (1877–84). Tip was a dominant amateur pitcher with the Woodstock Actives (1877–81) and a promising professional pitcher with three teams in the United States: the New York Metropolitans, an independent team in the League Alliance (1882), the New York Gothams in the National League (1883), and the St. Louis Browns in the American Association (1884). After a brief introduction to Tip’s formative years (1860–76), the presentation will explore Tip’s rise to fame as an amateur pitcher. It then will examine his struggles to sustain the promise that he showed in each of his three years as a professional pitcher. After 13 starts in his first season with the Browns (1884) and a chronic sore arm, Tip was no longer able to return to the pitcher’s box. Tip moved to left field to begin the transition from hard thrower to heavy batsman.

Fred Toulch: **Montreal Royals Vignettes II**

This presentation focuses on Royals players and events during the period 1947 through 1957. The 1946 season could easily constitute a session by itself, with Jackie Robinson and the Junior World Series championship, while the 1958 to 1960 period saw the handwriting on the wall, as Montreal was all but ignored once the Dodgers moved to Los Angeles.

The players of this decade (but for Robinson with the Royals a year earlier, and Sandy Koufax) represent the very best to have ever played for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Two Hall-of-Fame Dodger managers were also with the Royals at that time. Don Newcombe pitched a no-hitter for the Royals in 1947. Stars of varying magnitude included Chuck Connors, Sandy Amoros, Al Gianfriddo, Ed Roebuck, Carl Erskine, and Jim Gilliam, in addition to Hall-of-Famers Duke Snider, Don Drysdale and Roy Campanella.