

2019 Canadian Baseball History Conference

Presentation Abstracts

Bob Barney and Riley Nowokowski: **Labatt Memorial Park: History's Oldest Baseball Grounds and the Great Floods of 1883 and 1937**

At this Conference last year I reported on the May 1877 historical establishment of Tecumseh Park, now Labatt Memorial Park, and argued its longevity pathway towards becoming, beyond all debate, the oldest, still functioning baseball grounds in the diamond sport's lengthy history. A challenge persistently put forward by debaters of such distinction, most notably from Clinton, Massachusetts, argued that disastrous floods in the Park's history "removed" the original grounds from its original location to a new site, thus negating the record of continuous operation in one specific place. Inferred, too, was the charge that the floods necessitated lengthy periods of inactivity, thus compromising the "continuous use" claim relevant to the Park's systematic sustained status. With this challenge in front of me, I endeavored to pursue, to my knowledge, the first study yet undertaken to examine the "disastrous" flood periods surrounding the Park's history. As a co-investigator I enlisted the services of a new doctorate student studying under my supervision at Western, an unrelentingly thorough student of the research mission, Riley Nowokowski. Riley has accomplished most of the more painstaking newspaper review associated with this project.

Thus, from the pages of the *London Advertiser* of the 1890s and the *London Free Press* of the 1930s comes the primary record that supports beyond all argument the record that preserves the heritage distinction which the hallowed venue has rightfully earned. A thorough examination of the two floods in question proves beyond a shadow of doubt that in both cases, Tecumseh Park (1883) and Labatt Memorial Park (1937) were rapidly renovated following their destructive inundations, interrupting scheduled activities for no longer than a scant three weeks. Then, too, following each flood the location of the Park's ball diamond home plate was changed from its original northeast corner location (1877), to the southwest corner (1883), and finally, from the southwest corner to its present northwest corner location (1937). This study puts to rest the

argument that the storied baseball park “moved” locations, and demonstrates that it but briefly suspended activity. Such findings provide further evidence undergirding the genuine heritage distinction the Park enjoys.

Warren Campbell: **Beer, Lights, Hotels, Gas, Trains, Effigies & Orchids**

A look at five men who built Canadian baseball through promotions and creating teams and leagues across Canada. As well we'll learn about a couple of Canadian owners who had varying influence on baseball in Boston and Seattle. It'll be a fast-paced ride through the history of baseball off the field, including information on four Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame inductees.

Anne Chamberlain: **The Intercounty Baseball League - Part of Ontario's Baseball Landscape Since 1919**

Fergie Jenkins, Jesse Orosco, Gord Bradshaw, Ron Stead, Russ Evon, Arden Eddie, Wilmer Fields, Vern "Tex" Kaiser, Lester B. Pearson - these names all have one thing in common. That one thing is they all played in the Intercounty Baseball League (IBL). The IBL has been part of Ontario baseball since 1919. While it is technically known as an amateur league, it has been considered semi-pro at various times throughout its history. There have been three levels of play: senior, intermediate and junior. The main focus of this paper will be the senior level. From colourful characters such as Don Gallinger (former Boston Bruins player expelled from the NHL for betting) to Toronto's Jack Dominico (owner of the IBL's Toronto Maple Leafs since the team came into the league in 1969), to the league "kicking" out a team for poor play, to the infamous jogging incident during the league finals one year - this presentation will tell some of the stories that make up the league's history.

Stephen Dame: **First Base Among Equals: Canada's Prime Ministers and her Original National Game**

From the earliest years after Confederation until at least the First World War, baseball was referred to as Canada's 'national game.' Our nation's leaders have been no stranger to the sport, throwing ceremonial first pitches, using teams as political props, building better soldiers along the base-paths and even playing the game semi-professionally. From John A. to Lester B., from Pierre to Justin and many in between, there are a surprising number of links between our Heads of Government and the game we love.

Larry Gerlach: **Bob Emslie: Umpire Unmasked**

Although Robert D. "Bob" Emslie is enshrined in the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame, precious little is known about his long and distinguished baseball career, first as a player, then as an umpire. From 1880 to 1924 he experienced first-hand the development of both the modern game of baseball and the umpiring profession. This presentation is a "life-and-times" portrait that examines aspects of his brilliant, albeit short-lived, pitching career, but focuses on how Canada's first major league umpire survived the rough-and-tumble decades of the 1890s and the Dead Ball Era to become one of the most famous and respected arbiters in history.

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 not straightforward. My presentation would take a detailed look at each ManDak club roster for every season, showing where their players came from, where they played afterward and, most importantly, how well they performed in the ManDak

compared to when playing in other leagues. The analysis will also track the decline of the Negro American League in the 1950s, showing how the waning fortunes of the sole remaining Negro League contributed to the success of the ManDak.

Maxwell Kates: **Wayne, Shuster and Baseball**

For nearly half a century, Johnny Wayne and Frank Shuster fronted one of the most successful comedy acts in Canadian history. Though neither man professed to be a baseball fan, the popular Canadian summer pastime proved to be an integral component in their unique brand of literary humour. Their parodies and sketches alluded to baseball references as diverse as Yogi Berra, Astroturf, and Prohibition Stadium. The presentation will include a video broadcast of "Shakespearean Baseball" and will conclude with a sing-along of "Well I See By The Clock On The Wall." Well if it didn't, where's the sketch?

Martin Lacoste: **The Sleeman Collection**

George Sleeman, brewer, politician, and sportsman, was inducted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame in 1999. As president and manager of the Guelph Maple Leafs, Sleeman would form the Canadian Association in 1876, the first professional Canadian baseball league. Also instrumental in the formation of the International Association, Sleeman cemented his reputation as an important figure in Canadian baseball.

The University of Guelph houses a "diverse group of material representing the colourful history of the Sleeman Family" (UG website). Among this collection is a plethora of letters, telegrams, photographs and other miscellanea relating to Sleeman's time with the Maple Leafs, giving us a rare glimpse behind the scenes of how an independent (and later, minor league) team operated in the early days of organized baseball. And through letters from the players themselves (including several future major leaguers), we get insight into how a young athlete would pursue his dream of playing baseball. An overview of the baseball-related contents of the Sleeman Collection (spanning primarily 1875-1884) will be

presented, along with how this collection enriches our knowledge of early Canadian baseball history.

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 last 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 McDonald: **Hub Kids Bid Fans Anew: The Red Stockings Take Canada**

Over three summers, between 1872 and 1874, the Boston Red Stockings, featuring future Hall of Famers Harry and George Wright, Al Spalding, Deacon White and Jim O'Rourke, played a dozen exhibition games in cities in Ontario and Quebec. The American pros won them all—by a combined score of 545 to 59. The opportunity for players and fans to gauge the standard of local play against the best team in the world had a major impact on the development of baseball in Canada, most notably in advancing professionalism in the game and in helping to fuel an explosion in its popularity.

Nancy Payne: **Canada's Greatest All-American**

It's easy to dismiss the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League as an amusing sideshow, but for the sixty-four Canadians who played in the AAGPBL, it was a glorious opportunity to earn money playing the sport they loved. Regina's Mary "Bonnie" Baker was among the best in league history. An all-star catcher, strong hitter and skilled base-runner with the South Bend Blue Sox and Kalamazoo Lassies, she also appeared on the cover of *LIFE* magazine in 1945 as the face of the league. Her wide-ranging skills helped her become the first female

manager in professional sports...until the league quickly barred women from managerial positions. A popular and respected player, Baker, like the other women of the AAGPBL, had to conform to the league's rigid rules on feminine dress and conduct. That didn't mean she was any less gritty a competitor; she even played for a season after giving birth. When her playing days ended, she went on to become the first female sports broadcaster in Canada. Although Bonnie Baker has been inducted into several halls of fame, her story deserves to be more widely known.

Benno Rosinke: The 1911 Berlin Green Sox

In March of 1911, four former major league players, a future Canadian Baseball Hall of Famer, a future Hockey Hall of Famer, and a baseball crazy music star were instrumental in forming the Canadian Baseball League. One of the teams was the Berlin Green Sox, a team made up of players ranging from 16 to 37 years of age with diverse baseball backgrounds. This is their story. A city council that first was ambivalent then jumped on the bandwagon. A penny-pinching Parks Board, greedy team owners, and a disillusioned and betrayed fan base became part of that story. The players meshed as a team and became a powerhouse, overwhelming opponents and drawing interest from major league scouts. Most players had career years, dominating in every area. 1911 was their season of glory. They were Canada's first great team. They won the pennant, but their season ended with a whimper and without fanfare. The players moved on, and the team moved out of town. However their story deserves to be remembered.

Matt Rothenberg: Of Royals and Montreal Hockey Royalty

I propose to look at the individuals who were involved in ownership or administration of the Montreal Royals minor league baseball team, as well as in ownership, administration, or playing for one of the major league hockey clubs within Montreal, whether it be the Canadiens, Maroons, or the Wanderers. Focus will be on the following:

- Sam Lichtenheim, a Montreal sports promoter who entered a partnership to purchase the Montreal Royals in January 1908. He remained with the ballclub through the 1917 season. During the same time, Lichtenheim also

owned Montreal's Jubilee Arena and the ill-fated Montreal Wanderers hockey club.

- J. Ernest Savard and Louis-Athanase David, who partnered in 1928 to revive the Montreal Royals franchise. Both men were involved with the operation of the Montreal Canadiens hockey club during the 1930s.
- Emile "Butch" Bouchard, a defenseman for the Canadiens who transitioned into the role of President of the Montreal Royals following his hockey retirement.

I include a brief discussion of Cecil Hart, whose father, David, donated the Hart Memorial Trophy to the National Hockey League. Cecil Hart also served as general manager and head coach of the Canadiens and as head coach of the Montreal Maroons. Incidentally, he also was the vice president and treasurer of the Quebec, Ontario, and Vermont Baseball League, which lasted one season (1924) and included a Montreal franchise, as well as a franchise in Outremont, then its own municipality but now part of the city of Montreal.

David Simmons: **Harry Simmons: His Contributions to Canadian Baseball**

Harry Simmons was active as a baseball historian during the 1930s and 1940s. He authored the popular "So You Think You Know Baseball" column, which ran in the *Saturday Evening Post* from 1949 to 1961, as well as the book of the same name, first published in 1960. He wrote the entry for "Baseball" in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, was the schedule maker for the Major Leagues from 1952 to 1982, and served as a baseball executive, first for the International League and for then for the Commissioner's office, from 1946 to 1982.

Simmons lived in Montreal from 1953 to 1995. His son, David, will talk about his father's contributions to the development of baseball in Canada, especially to the establishment of the Montreal Expos in 1969. He will also relate a few stories about the characters and events that he and his father witnessed behind the scenes in the 1950s and 1960s which never made it into the press. He will discuss the origins and the contents of the Harry Simmons Collection, which now resides in the Harry Simmons Memorial Library in the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame.

Allen Tait: **Toronto Blue Jays Ownership History**

The Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) has an ongoing project to develop and archive an ownership history of every major league baseball team. This paper is part of that project. Consistent with the SABR project guidelines, the focus is on the business of ownership, and team performance is only reflected to the extent it impacted ownership actions. The subsections of the paper are:

- Quest for a franchise
- The building years, 1977 – 1982
- Skydome
- Era of success, 1983 – 1993
- Corporate takeover, Interbrew era 1994 -2000
- Rogers Communications 2000 – present

The presentation will highlight key ownership events with an emphasis on the earlier years up to the full purchase by Rogers from Interbrew.