

My presentation today is dedicated to my Uncle Dave Downham, who was a local baseball umpire. He knew how I feel about the IBL. He gave me a photo of the 1949 Brantford Red Sox team. (Uncle Dave, I am still not rooting for the Yankees!)

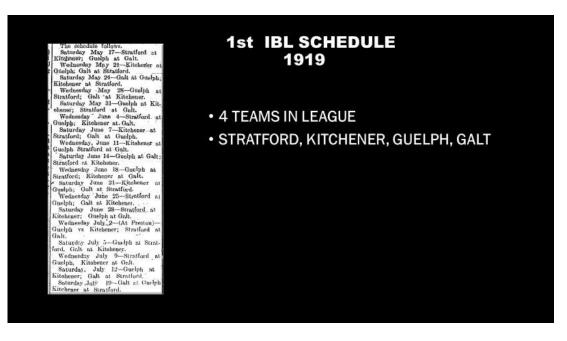
To tell the history of something means telling its stories. And by telling its stories you're weaving the fabric of what it is all about. The Intercounty Baseball League has been around for 101 years. A few of its stories will be told during this presentation today.

Special mention goes to the Kitchener organization. Whether it has been at the senior, intermediate or junior levels, they are the only ones who have been in the IBL from the beginning.

The year was 1919. The professional Michigan-Ontario League was getting ready to start play. Meanwhile, a report appeared in the Preston newspaper stating that a meeting was going to be called regarding the reorganization of the old Waterloo County Baseball League. Teams in that league were Waterloo, Kitchener, Galt, Hespeler and Preston. A week later another report in the same paper said the meeting was set for March 12, 1919. Stratford stated their intention to join, which raised the possibility of reorganizing the Trolley League (the Trolley League allowed the admission of teams from outside the county).

In April 1919, a group of men sat down at the Grand Hotel in Kitchener to talk about forming a new amateur league. Paris, Brantford, Stratford, Galt, Guelph, Kitchener and Preston showed interest in joining. Before the new league was formed, Stratford was already

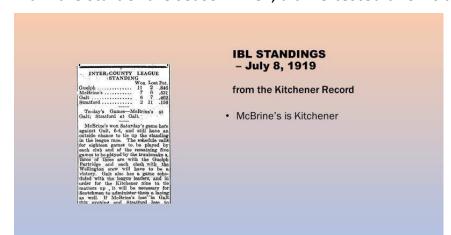
objecting to the inclusion of Brantford and Paris due to the time it would take to travel to those games. As a result, Kitchener, Galt, Guelph and Stratford formed the new league. What to call it? The name decided upon was Intercounty Baseball League. Each team was required to put



down a \$25 deposit. As well, there was a residency rule put in place that said players couldn't live more than three miles away from the team they were playing for. And if any player was found to have played in any games which violated his amateur status he would be suspended.

The first president of the IBL was R. Osgoode; vice president was "Toad" Edmonds and secretary-treasurer was H.W. Strum. Senior and junior divisions were created. There was talk of adding an intermediate division, as it was thought that would be a good "feeding" group for the senior teams.

The senior schedule was drawn up. The first games were scheduled for Saturday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1919: Stratford at Kitchener and Guelph at Galt. The Galt group had a parade planned to mark the start of the season. Well, a time-tested unofficial "tradition" for the league was also



born that same day, before the first pitch was thrown: the rainout. The first weekend of play was washed out for the new league. Eventually those game were played along with the rest of the season. And the Guelph Maple Leafs were the first champions of the Intercounty Baseball League. Lester B. Pearson, the 14<sup>th</sup> prime minister of Canada, played third base for Guelph in the

IBL in 1919. Pearson was inducted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame as a builder on August 3, 1983.

The 1920 season saw Kitchener, Galt, Guelph and Preston fielding teams. Stratford wanted to come back but the other teams didn't want them back due to the time it took to

travel to and from games there. So Preston took their place. As far as I can figure out, it was shortly after Preston's first game, which they lost 27 – 0, that they were removed from the league due to poor play. Preston did, however, get back the money they had paid to the league. With only three teams remaining,

#### PRESTON TEAM DROPPED FROM INTER-COUNTY

At a meeting of the Inter-County Lesgue, in Kitchener, yesterday, at which the Gail, Kitchener and Guelph clubs were represented, it was decided to drop the Preston club from the league. This slep was a necessity as Preston was absolutely unable to put a team on the field that could cope with the other feams in the league. The Guelph club will fill Preston's dates with exhibition games with classy teams from all over the Province. The Hamilton Stelcos may play here a week from Saturday, Guelph plays in Kitchener on Saturday next in one of the crucial games of the schedule.

# PRESTON DROPPED FROM THE INTERCOUNTY

- · Guelph went to league after they won 27-0
- · Preston made 10 errors in that game
- said to league Preston shouldn't be in IBL due to their poor showing

June 1920

Kitchener made a suggestion to have Stratford take Preston's place. Guelph and Galt said no, so the season ended with only the three teams. Guelph were again the champions. They also won it in 1921. This was the first dynasty in Intercounty history.



1921 GUELPH MAPLE LEAFS Courtesy from "At The Plate"

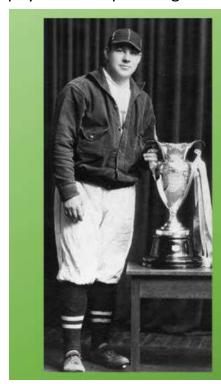
A resolution was made at a 1923 league meeting that "each senior team must carry a junior team next season". A motion at another meeting proposed two umpires for senior

games, a plate umpire to be paid \$10 plus mileage, and a base umpire \$5 plus mileage. Before the start of the season the proposal was amended so that both umpires were paid the same.

1925 saw London enter the league for their first time. It must have been rookie magic as they won the title in their first season.

The formation of the professional Ontario League in 1930 by Knotty Lee was seen as a possible threat to the IBL. However, those fears were unfounded as that league folded before the first season was completed.

Catcher Gord Bradshaw, who came to Galt from Brantford in 1929, won the Oscar Hett trophy for the top batting average in 1930 with an impressive .698. He also won the Arthur



## GORD BRADSHAW August 10, 1908 - February 3, 1952

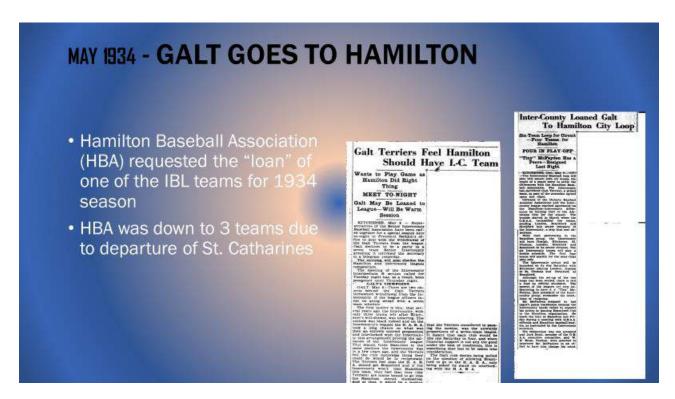
- POSITION: CATCHER
- PLAYER FOR BRANTFORD, GALT
- . 698 BATTING AVERAGE IN 1930
- 1930: WON ARTHUR HALLE TROPHY (MVP). OSCAR HETT TROPHY (LEADING BATTER)
- BOTH BALTIMORE, TORONTO OF INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE INTERESTED IN BRADSHAW
- TORONTO SENT LETTER TO TERRIER EXECUTIVE RE TRYOUT FOR BRADSHAW
- BRADSHAW NEVER SAW LETTER
- · STAYED ACTIVE ON LOCAL SPORTS SCENE
- DIED OF ANEURYSM IN FEB 1952
- INDUCTED INTO GALT (CAMBRIDGE) SPORTS HALL OF FAME IN 2002
- . ON IBL'S TOP 100 PLAYERS OF ALL TIME

Halle trophy for MVP in the same year.

In 1931, Galt won their 5<sup>th</sup> consecutive Intercounty championship. This record would hold until 2013 when the Brantford Red Sox won their 6<sup>th</sup> title in a row. Barrie tied Brantford's record in 2019.

Admission to the senior games for the 1933 season was 25 cents.

In May 1934, the Hamilton Baseball Association put in a request to "borrow" one of the Intercounty teams for the city league, that league having been reduced to only three teams. The Intercounty turned them down. When Galt said they were going to withdraw as they didn't want to be part of a seven-team league, the discussion was reopened. Galt suggested Brantford should go to the HBA. Barring that, Galt said they would go. Galt's reasoning behind this was that since Hamilton had helped the Intercounty out of a jam a few years earlier, under similar circumstances, the league should return the favour. The discussion ended with the Intercounty being a 6-team league and Galt on its way to play in Hamilton.



When World War II started, the Intercounty decided to continue play, reasoning that a distraction from the war was needed. 1940 brought a 6-team senior division made up of Waterloo, Galt, Guelph, Kitchener, Stratford and Brantford. Each team played 20 games, 10 home and 10 away. Play was scheduled to begin on May 18<sup>th</sup> and end on August 5<sup>th</sup>. And probably to make it easier for fans to follow, the possibility of having radio broadcasts was raised at a league meeting. The admission for a senior division game was now 35 cents.

The 1940s was London's decade. They were crowned the Intercounty champions five times: 1943, 1944, 1945, 1947 and 1948. Stratford won the title in 1940, 1942 and 1946. Waterloo won their first league title in 1941, while Brantford won their first senior title in 1949.

The Intercounty
held an emergency
meeting in early May of
1944. At that meeting, it
was decided to combine
the intermediate and
senior divisions together
for the upcoming season.
This was done due to a
shortage of quality players
at the senior level. As a
result of this, the league
was renamed "Intercounty

#### **IBL RENAMED**

May 1944

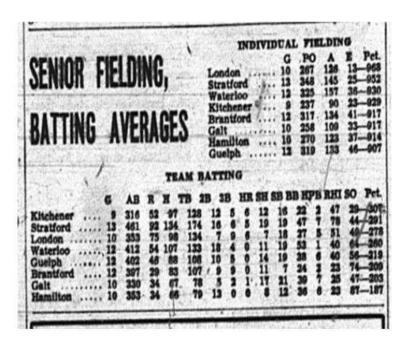
- Renamed "Intercounty Wartime Major League" in 1944
- Senior and intermediate divisions combined due to not enough quality players

Gall. May 11.—A combined frequency of the control o

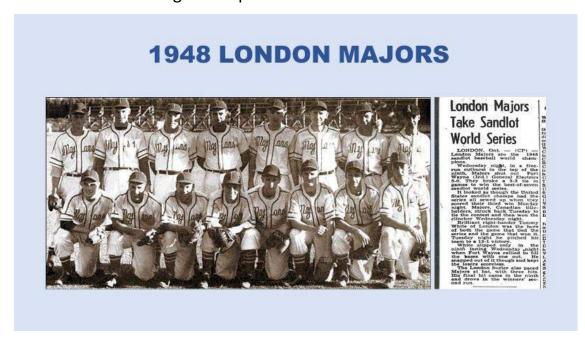
Wartime Major League". Teams entered were Waterloo, Stratford, London, Galt and Hamilton.

In 1947, NHL players Bobby Bauer and Milt Schmidt played for the Waterloo Tigers. Schmidt had a batting average of .364 while Bauer batted .314. They weren't the only NHLers

SR IBL TEAM STATS as of July 5, 1947



who played in the Intercounty. Howie Meeker of the Toronto Maple Leafs played third base for Kitchener. In August of 1947, Meeker was suspended by the Intercounty for three games. He had been ejected from four earlier games for the use of "abusive language", "rough play", and for fighting. A letter from the league's umpire-in-chief, Bill Almas of Preston, said "the player in pro ball for the same offences would be barred for the season. The Kitchener Club should also be fined for allowing such a practice to exist".



It has been said that one of the best teams in the history of the Intercounty was the 1948 London team. Not only did they win the league title, they also won the Canadian Amateur Men's Crown and the Can-Am North American championship of the National Baseball Congress. To win the North American title, they had to defeat the heavily favoured Fort Wayne, Indiana team in a best-of-seven series. Tommy White, who is on the IBL's Top 100 List, was the starting pitcher for the 7<sup>th</sup> and deciding game. White's previous start had been a mere 25 hours earlier. But he showed just how tough pitchers in the Intercounty could be by throwing a 5-hit shutout in a 5-0 victory. With the win, London earned the prize of \$5775. London's team was managed by Clare Van Horne. Van Horne would later be convicted of the murder of Nancy McLennan in California in 1957. The conviction brought a life sentence which was served at San Quentin.

1949 saw the league adapt a 42-game schedule. Galt Terriers went into the season as the favourites to win it all. Gus Murray had signed ex-Major Leaguer catcher Tom Padden, ex-Dodger Goody Rosen, and Tommy Warren. Also on the Galt team was Montreal Canadien Vern "Tex" Kaiser (Kaiser was also being pursued by Major League Baseball teams). I'm sure everyone here knows having top talent is no guarantee of a championship. Galt was defeated in the semi-finals by the Brantford Red Sox. The Sox went on to win their first Intercounty Senior title.

The late '40s and the early '50s was the period which many call the "Golden Era" of the league. Money was being splashed around by the teams to entice top players from the States to come to Canada to play baseball. It was said that the quality of play in the Intercounty was on par with some minor pro leagues. At the same time that was being said, the IBL was also becoming known as an "outlaw" league. This era saw several players come up from the Negro Leagues to play in the Intercounty. One of the best was Wilmer "The Great" Fields. He arrived



in Brantford in 1951. In his first year in the league, Fields was named MVP, leading the league with 10 home runs and 47 RBI, in addition to earning 9 wins (against 1 loss) as a pitcher.

In 1950, the league imposed a salary cap of \$3500. As per the ICBA minutes: "This sum shall include salaries paid to players, managers (either bench or playing) and coaches, and shall cover the period from May 1<sup>st</sup> to the end of the playing season. An additional \$1000 shall be allowed each team for pre-season clothing expenses". And remember the residency rule that limited players to living no more than 3 miles from the team they were playing for? That was finally relaxed.

Don Gallinger, who was suspended from the NHL for betting, came to the Intercounty first as a player then later as a coach with Kitchener. During the 1951 semi-final series against the Kitchener Legionnaires, Brantford was leading two games to none. Game 3 was being played in Brantford. Gallinger, who was the Kitchener coach, knew that if his team lost this game, it would have been difficult for them to come back. Gallinger looked at the sky and saw a storm was heading towards Brantford. He began to delay the game any way he possibly could in hopes it would rain and the game would get called. Brantford fans caught on to what was going on. They stormed the field. Fists flew. From a newspaper report, one lady managed to kick Gallinger in the shins. Brantford fans surrounded the Kitchener bus to prevent it from leaving but they backed away when the police arrived. As a result, Gallinger was suspended for an indefinite period by the league. According to the ICBA minutes dated September 27, 1951, on a motion made by Larry Pennell from Brantford and one W. Farguharson, Don Gallinger was reinstated.

With the money that was being paid to players, a motion was raised at an ICBA meeting in January 1952 that "the secretary investigate the various aspects of the Senior series joining Professional Baseball as a Class-F Semi-Pro league".

The length of games didn't seem to be an issue in the early years as most games appeared to be completed in two hours or less. An exception to this was a game in 1958 when Galt was in London; it went 14 innings and lasted 4 hours and 26 minutes.

As with everything, all good things must come to an end. In the latter part of the 1950s, the winds of change were blowing around the Intercounty. There wasn't as much cash to throw around to bring up players from the States. Level of play started to decline. Attendance began to drop. Fewer fans meant less money for the teams to pay their expenses. The number of teams in the league had dropped to five by 1956. But the alarms bells weren't going off just yet. 1957 saw the Intercounty go back up to 6 teams with the entry of the Oakville Oaks and the Listowel Legionnaires. (As a side note, both London and Brantford had left the IBL to play in the Great Lakes-Niagara District League.) And at the end of the decade, there were 8 teams registered to play.

The first half of the 1960s belonged to the Brantford Red Sox. With players such as Ted Baker, Jimmy Wilkes, "Spud" Bush, Shanty Clifford and Ron Stead, the Sox won the Intercounty title from 1959 through 1963, and again in 1965.

In a game played in July 1964, the Stratford Chiefs forfeited the game they were playing against Brantford. This was due to a couple of their players having been ejected by the umpires in the 6<sup>th</sup> inning, leaving Stratford with not enough players to continue the game.

Fans asked about getting their money back. They were told no, as the minimum number of innings had been played.

1969 saw the Toronto Maple Leafs Baseball Club enter the IBL. With the Leafs came arguably one of the most colourful figures in league history: Jack Dominico. He is also one of the longest, if not the longest, owners of a sports franchise around. 2019 marked the 51<sup>st</sup> year Jack has owned the Leafs baseball club. Back a few years ago in the *Toronto Sun*, there was an article which suggested sprinter Ben Johnson was to be signed as a pinch runner for the Toronto IBL team. Well, of course that wasn't true. I asked Jack about it anyway at a game I attended at Christie Pits just after the article appeared. He just smiled.

When the Listowel Legionnaires dropped out at the end of the 1969 season, the league was down to seven teams for 1970. In 1971, with the return of Brantford, it went back up to eight. The end of 1973 saw Galt leave, only to come back in 1975 as the Cambridge Terriers. And 1976 saw the return of St. Thomas after a long absence.

May 1974 saw Denny McLain signed to play with the London Majors. McLain denied it, saying it was a one-shot deal. He was quoted as saying "I can pitch for Triple-A ball clubs but there is no way I will pitch for a team that intends to pay \$30 a game". McLain did end up pitching for London, but only threw for a few innings due to arm problems. However, he did play the different infield positions for the team.

Jesse Orosco of the Cambridge Terriers threw the 9<sup>th</sup> no-hitter in Intercounty history in June 1977. 1977 also brought the use of aluminum bats into the league. It wasn't until 1994 that wooden bats were brought back.

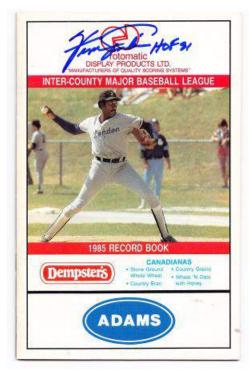


With 10 teams entered for the 1976 season, the league split into two divisions: East and West. The East had Hamilton, Toronto, Brantford, Guelph and Cambridge. The West had

Stratford, London, Kitchener, St. Thomas and Waterloo. When the Windsor Chiefs were added to the West Division in 1979, there were 11 teams. It stayed at two divisions until 1984 when they went back to having just one. 1979 saw the Hamilton Cardinals win their only IBL title to date, defeating London 4 games to 2.

Arden Eddie, who was both owner and player with London, was "on loan" to Stratford during the playoffs in August of 1981. There was a league rule in effect at the time which allowed a team who was in the playoffs to "borrow" a player from a team who was not.

Cambridge Terriers took a year's leave of absence in 1984. They had won the title in 1983, but due to organizational issues they needed to regroup. Cambridge hasn't been back since. For the 1984 and 1985 seasons, Hall of Famer and Cy Young Award Winner Fergie



## **FERGUSON JENKINS**

- Played for the London Majors in 1984, 1985
- Inducted into Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame in 1987
- made Member of Order of Canada in 1979
- Was first Canadian inducted into National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1991

Jenkins wore a London Majors uniform.

1992 saw the league's championship trophy being renamed the Jack and Lynne Dominico Trophy, a change from the Carling "Red Cap" Cup.

It was 1994. Hastings Stadium in Guelph was packed for Game 7 of the IBL finals between the Guelph Royals and the Stratford Hillers. It appeared Guelph was going to take the title, as they were leading 10 – 3 going into the top of the 9<sup>th</sup> inning. In the bottom of the 8<sup>th</sup> inning, the announcer said he knew where the party was being held afterwards. The words of Yogi Berra, "It Ain't Over 'Til It's Over", had never rung truer. Before a shocked crowd of mainly Guelph supporters, Stratford scored 10 runs in the top of the 9<sup>th</sup> inning to win the game and the title. I still wonder to this day if Stratford manager Dennis Schooley got his ride on the fire truck.



#### 1994 IBL CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES: Game 7 Guelph Mercury Sept 6, 1994

- Series between Guelph and Stratford
- Was down to 7<sup>th</sup> & deciding game
- Guelph had 10-3 lead going into top of 9<sup>th</sup> inning
- Stratford scores 10 runs in top of 9<sup>th</sup> to take 13-10 lead

The millennium had arrived. It was another period of growth for the league with the arrival of the Barrie Baycats, Oshawa Dodgers, Stratford Storm (relocated from St. Thomas), Mississauga Twins (relocated from Stratford, then later moved to Burlington), Burlington Twins (franchise moved in the 2019 season to Welland), and the Ottawa Fat Cats.

In 2006, Ron Stead, who many say was one of the best, if not the best pitcher in IBL history, was inducted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame. He was the first inductee to go in as an amateur. Ron pitched for the Brantford, Galt and Guelph teams.













RON STEAD throwing a pitch – August 5, 1964 photo by Expositor photographer Jack Bowman

- Inducted into Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame June 24, 2006
- · 1st player in CBHOF to go in as an amateur
- Pitched for the Brantford Red Sox, Galt Terriers and the Guelph C-Joys in IBL
- · On IBL's list of Top 100 Players of All Time
- · IBL's MVP 1960, 1963, 1965, 1967

The 2007 IBL finals had another unforgettable IBL moment. It was game 7 of the finals between Brantford Red Sox and Toronto Maple Leafs. The game was at Christie Pits in Toronto. Brantford shortstop Lee Delfino was at bat. He hit one over the left field fence. Lee being Lee, did a bat flip. Leaf and former Blue Jay pitcher, Paul Spoljaric, took offence to that. So while Delfino was jogging around the bases, Spoljaric joined him. I thought I was going to learn some new words that night from the crowd!

2013 saw the Brantford Red Sox set a new IBL record for the most consecutive championships with their 6<sup>th</sup> title (they won it from 2008 through 2013). They also won it in 2006: 7 championships in 8 seasons. In 2019, the Barrie Baycats tied the Sox with their 6<sup>th</sup> title in a row.

In 2018, the Intercounty saw the first playoff no-hitter in its history. It was in the quarter-final series between the Guelph Royals and the Toronto Maple Leafs. Toronto starter Zach Sloan, who went the first 6 innings, and Marek Deska, who pitched the last 3, combined to record the no-hitter.

This past season, the Ontario Cup, the league's original championship trophy from 1920 through 1956, resurfaced after not having been seen for 63 years. Sandy Wagter, niece of Canadian Baseball Hall of Famer and former London player, Frank Colman, found it amongst her mother's belongings. Sandy has since donated the trophy to the London Majors Alumni Association.



While the Intercounty Baseball League doesn't have a Hall of Fame, it does have a list of its Top 100 Players. This is from our book Intercounty Baseball League 100 Years Strong:

### **IBL'S TOP 100 PLAYERS**

from "Intercounty Baseball League 100 Years Strong"



WEMER FELDS (P/OS - BRT, OSH, 51-55) HARRY FISHER (P - BRANTFORD, 45-50)

Just before I end, I want to say thank you to everyone who gave their support and helped me with this. It was and is very much appreciated by me. As for the future: who knows what it holds for the IBL? All I can say for certain is as long as the IBL is in existence, I will be sitting in the stands at the different parks, ringing my cowbell.

Anne Chamberlain November 2019