

# C'mon eh! Let's play ball

Somehow, it figures. Last week with the environs of Halton Hills basking in near summer-like weather, negotiations between major league baseball players and the owners were in a deep freeze.

With snow blanketing the ground on Monday, it was learned that the impasse in negotiations had been breached and that there would indeed be a 1990 Major League baseball season.

I couldn't help but chuckle at the irony of it as I gazed out my basement apartment window Monday morning and watched the fluffy flakes cascading down as the radio announcer in the background announced that "The boys of summer will be playing baseball soon."

Of course, it didn't help matters that my pet fish, Bert, was bubbling "Jingle Bells" in the aquarium nearby. I flashed a can of tuna in front of the tank and suggested to Bert that he cease and desist or he would be next.

The baseball settlement timing was appropriate, however, as news filtered in from the numerous baseball and softball organizations in Halton Hills that plans for registrations and the upcoming 1990 season for the respective organizations were well under way.

Perhaps years of writing sports causes a person to become somewhat cynical at times. The shroud of innocence that once covered and protected sporting endeavors is slowly being stripped away and once-revered athletic heroes are revealed to be mere mortals trying to cope - or in some cases failing to cope - with the same everyday trials and tribulations that affect the general public.

I harkened back to my days of innocence when as a young lad, baseball and softball were summer treasures that never lost their glow.

I recalled a column I had written years ago.

Growing up in the small Northern Ontario hamlet of Cochrane, my interest in the game of baseball was aroused not only by the glossy American publications on the newstands that blared out the wholesomeness of the "Great American pastime" but by two characters who entertained me on many a youthful and rainy Saturday afternoon.

I'm referring to baseball immortals Dizzy Dean and Pee Wee Reese, who were the broadcasters for NBC's Game of the Week that was picked up by CBC television every Saturday afternoon during the baseball season.

At that time, the only channel that was available in Cochrane was the CBC through television station CFCL in Timmons, roughly 60 miles away.

Today, with cable television and satellite dishes and super channels, sports programs - or what passes as sports programs - are

Colin Gibson  
Sports Editor



"AS I SEE IT"

regurgitated 24 hours-a-day almost as if sports Armageddon was fast approaching. In reality, sports over-kill is what is occurring.

Up North there were occasional sports specials but for the most part, we were on a strict sports diet.

I think this was what made those Saturday afternoon baseball games so special.

Dean and Reese brought something to the game that is somehow sadly lacking in the majority of today's broadcasting crews.

Perhaps it was character and love of the game. Dizzy might play the buffoon and Reese might play the straight man to some of Dean's put-ons, but they never upstaged the game at hand and it was obvious they had a deep love and respect for baseball.

In the early 1960s, the New York Yankees were everybody's favorite team and admittedly, I was no exception. Unabashedly I loved the Yanks. You couldn't pick up a comic book but there was Mickey Mantle on the back cover, the epitome of the All-American boy.

As we have since learned, Mantle was far from being the angel portrayed by the sporting media but his triumphs and tragedies were etched into the minds of a generation of youngsters.

He was, and still is to many fans, what a baseball player - or perhaps just an athlete in general - was all about.

I remember cheering Mantle and getting apoplectic when teammate (and home run rival) Roger Maris lofted one over the fence. "Lucky shot," I would mutter. "How much are you paying the pitcher?"

When Mantle and Maris were jointly chasing Babe Ruth's single season home run record of 60 dingers, I must have been hell around the house for my mother. Especially after Maris established the asterisked mark of 61.

I plotted my revenge over the winter months.

I would go after the Major League mark, of the time, that the great "Bambino" Babe Ruth had established over a career. I would hit more than 714 home runs just to show Maris, but I would accomplish the feat in one summer.

Through sandlot, pickup, school

yard and league games - anywhere some kind of baseball (or softball) game was going on - I kept track of my home runs.

As May departed, I had hit 200. By the end of June I had totalled 475. As July waned I passed the 600 figure. The momentous month was August when I surpassed the "Sultan of Swat."

I recall circling the bases, jumping for joy when number 715 got lost in the long grass and I knew my quest was over.

My enthusiasm wasn't dampened in the least when the erstwhile pitcher who had tossed-up the historic pitch informed me that he had to go home now because it was time for his nap. Three-year-olds, I discovered, find historic occasions rather boring - especially when they're tired.

I remember one winter I had just finished reading the book "Bat Boy for the Indians" and as it was early in the year, I decided to write to the Yankees and offer myself for that prestigious position with my heroes.

I sent the letter to Ralph Houk, then managing the Yankees, and addressed it to Yankee Stadium, somewhere in New York State in the United States.

I don't think I ever really expected a reply, but some weeks later, my mother came into my room with an envelope addressed to me from the New York Yankees.

The letter was datelined Fort Lauderdale, Florida, site of the Yankees spring training camp and it was hand-written by Ralph Houk.

He explained to me as gently as he could that the Yankee bat boys were recruited locally and that therefore, there wasn't much chance I would get the job.

In a sense, I suppose, I expected as much.

But what I didn't expect was the large manila envelope that arrived in the mail two days later.

Houk had forwarded to me an autographed picture of the Yankees, a pennant, personal biographies of all the Yankee players, including their off-season mailing addresses (in case I wanted to correspond with them) several other souvenirs and a season schedule.

For a young boy growing up in the wilds of Northern Ontario, this act of kindness on Houk's part, made me a life-long devotee of the game.

Yes, innocence and dreams die hard.

So let's get out the gloves, bats, balls and spikes and "Let's play ball."

As I see it, anyway.

# Kinsmen softball set for season

By COLIN GIBSON  
Herald Sports Editor

The Georgetown Kinsmen Girls Softball League is entering its fourth decade of operation this summer offering females from age seven through 19 years the opportunity to play the game and enjoy the camaraderie of participating in a competitive league that also stresses good sportsmanship and team play.

Girls from the various communities in Halton Hills are welcome to join the league and registration forms are available on page 46 of the Halton Hills Recreation and Parks Department Spring and Summer '90 brochure.

The cutoff date to register with the league is April 1 and as places on teams are limited, it is suggested that interested players register as soon as possible.

Further information on the league and registration procedures can be obtained by contacting Jim Ford at 877-9373.

The Kinsmen Club is very active in supporting the league both from a financial standpoint and through the many hours club members devote to coaching and umpiring in the league. The league is also dependent on the assistance offered by volunteers and the financial support shown by sponsors within Halton Hills.

The Kinsmen Girls Softball League is separated into three categories of age groupings.

Junior League players range in age from seven years through 10 years (as of Jan. 1) and learning the fundamentals of the game is stressed.

The three pitch rule is enforced and coaches pitch to their own players. Games are played Thursday evenings on diamonds at the Georgetown Fairgrounds.

Intermediate League girls range in age from 11 years through 14 years (as of Jan. 1) and regular softball rules come into play. Again, all games are played Thursday evenings at the Georgetown Fairgrounds.

Senior League players range in age from 15 years through 18 years (as of May 1) and league games are played Tuesday evenings, employing regular softball rules, at the Georgetown Fairgrounds.

If player interest warrants, the league could add more teams to the various leagues.

At present, the Junior League has four teams; the Intermediate League has six teams and the Senior League has four teams.

An arrangement has been made with the Georgetown Branch 120

Royal Canadian Legion sponsored midget girls softball rep team that would allow more advanced players from the Kinsmen Girls Softball League to experience more competitive softball.

The registration fee for 1990 has been set at \$30 per player, or \$50 per family that has more than one player in the league.

The registration fee covers the cost of a team sweater and a team and individual photograph.

The Senior League begins 1990 season play May 22, while the Intermediate and Junior Leagues get under way May 24.

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