

# Cardinals to host reunion

By BRUCE STAPLEY  
The Stouffville Cardinals are planning a reunion, 30 years after capturing their Ontario hardball championship in 1958.

Co-organizer Gord Eckardt reports he is confident there will be close to a 100 per cent turn out for the event, which will be held at the home of Murray Stewart in Lincolnville, Oct. 1. Stewart was one of the coaches of the Cardinals.

"All the players had probably been thinking about it," says Eckardt of the planned get together. "I ran into Bob Stover, who played on the team, down at the park at the fireworks during

the Strawberry Festival, and suggested we get the team together. He said 'Let's go for it'."

Eckardt, who played first base and catcher on the team, sat down with Stover and Stewart to put the plans together.

"We sent a letter out to all the players," he says. "Everyone said they'd cancel everything they had planned so they could be there."

He reports that only one player, Lynn Taylor, is uncertain. Taylor, who played second base on the award winning team of '58, resides in British Columbia. "But I wouldn't be surprised to see him

show up," smiles Eckardt.

The event will consist of a barbecue at four o'clock for the players and their wives, followed by a period from eight o'clock on where friends and members of other old Stouffville ball teams like the Red Sox will be welcome to come over for coffee and corn on the cob.

"We're going to try to put together as much memorabilia about the team as possible," says Eckardt. "I understand Bob Stover still has his uniform. Mine is missing, unfortunately. I gave it to someone who said they were putting a ball team together a while back, and I don't

remember who it was. It's gone now."

He hopes to gather old Tribune press clippings, and feels the paper's editor Jim Thomas will share in the enthusiasm of such a project because of his own personal involvement with the team. "Jim would do the announcing for our home games from behind the screen," he recalls.

He says all the players will be contacted again before the reunion to confirm that they'll be there. He is hopeful there may be a few surprises, such as a surviving film clips of the Cardinals in action. "I remember one woman taking some film footage of us,

but she is dead now, so I doubt the film would have survived."

Eckardt asks anyone who either has some film, or knows someone who does, to contact him, or the other organizers of the reunion.

Eckardt says a team photograph will be taken at the reunion, with each player and coach in the same position they were in when the team was photographed by Ted Cadieux after they won the championship in '58. "I'm sure none of us has changed, so it should look just about the same," he laughs.

Apart from Taylor, most players live within striking

distance of Stouffville, with several still living locally. Harold Hodgson, a coach with the team, lives in Stouffville, as do third baseman Ross Madill, outfielder Ted Suzuki, and Stover and Eckardt.

Pitcher Harry Barber will be coming from Elora, and Murray Holden, who also pitched, resides in Campbellford. Outfielder John Little lives in Peterborough, Lawrence Wideman is in Belleville, Erik Barber calls Uxbridge home, and Don Haynes is from Toronto.

"It should be a lot of laughs," concludes Eckardt.

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# Player remembers glory days

By BRUCE STAPLEY

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the season the Stouffville Cardinals won the Ontario Junior 'C' hardball championships. Bob Stover, who played second base and right field for the team that captured the provincial title with an exciting two games to one series victory over Wheatley, still has both his memories and his uniform.

The Loretta Crescent South resident provided us with the accompanying team photo, and some of his recollections of the gritty Cardinals, in a recent interview.

"It started in 1953. We were a Midget team," recalls Bob of the collection of ball players who would go on to make up the Cardinals in that championship year. "In 1956, we won the North York Championships, and went to the semi-finals in the Ontario Baseball Association playoffs."

The group stuck together, going up the ranks from Midget, to Juvenile, then on to Junior, where they became the Cardinals. The team would eventually make the step up to the intermediate level under Roger Todd's leadership, carrying on until the mid 1960s, when hardball disappeared in Stouffville.

The Cardinals were made up of "a bunch of guys who wanted to win, and play ball well," according to Bob. "There were no particular individuals who stood out on the team. We had a lot of fun, and really enjoyed playing ball."

The 1958 champs got solid pitching from Harry Barber, a righthanded fireballer, and Murray Holden, a leftie with a lot of 'stuff'.

"And Don Haynes was an exceptional catcher," says Bob. "He was a great athlete, and a real team leader."

He also recalls that second baseman Lynn Taylor, who would be called upon to pitch in relief on occasion, was an impeccable infielder. The coaches, Harold (Ike) Hodgson, and Mur-

ray Stewart, always maintained high expectations for the club, and were always insistent the players show hustle running on and off the field.

The big season saw the Cardinals fight their way to the top of

a league that was comprised of teams from such towns as Markham, Unionville, Thornhill and Aurora.

They would go on to knock off Durham, Newcastle, Caledon and Hagersville, before locking

horns with Wheatley in the provincial finals. Bob remembers the hard time the Cardinals were given in Hagersville. "They had us change in an old chicken coop. Then, there were adults flashing mirrors at us from the stands

during the game."

But they managed to prevail, and hosted Wheatley in game one of the finals, which the Cardinals lost 2-0. "We weren't hitting well at all that game. The first run was the result of walks, and the

second run scored when a Stouffville outfielder tried to make a shoe string catch, only to have the ball get passed him."

Extra batting practice paid big dividends in game two in Wheatley, with the Cardinals running off with the contest, 16-3. "We had eight or nine runs in the first three innings," says Bob. "We were really on a high."

The third game was played on neutral turf in Port Dover. "It was a much tighter game. We won 5-3, but it wasn't over til the very end."

Bob credits coach Stewart for helping the Cardinals become the best team they possibly could. "He was a good ball player himself. He taught us how to turn the double play, to and run, and to do the squeeze play."

Bob remembers a playoff game where the squeeze was called when he was on third base, with slugger Ross Madill at the plate. "The pitcher took a long, slow wind up. I was six feet from the plate by the time he finally let the ball go. I was just hoping Madill had caught the coaches sign. But he just stepped out of my way, and I slid in with the run."

The Cardinals would be taken down to Maple Leaf Stadium in Toronto to watch the old Maple Leafs of the International League, and to Cleveland and Detroit to watch major league baseball when they played games in Western Ontario.

Bob, who was 19 when the Cardinals won it all, recalls that he was employed in his father's bake shop that year. "Most of the guys were working, and I think there were two of them who were heading off to university."

Bob is now employed as a human relations specialist with the York Board of Education.

"It was a lot of fun," he concludes of his days as one of the Stouffville 'boys of summer'. "The players played good ball, and the crowds were always there watching."



The Stouffville Cardinals, circa 1958. The team is holding their 30th anniversary celebrations this October, to commemorate the Ontario hardball title they won that year. From left, at rear, are; Murray Stewart (coach), Ted Suzuki, Eric Barber, Murray

Holden, John Little, Ross Madill, Harold Hodgson (coach). In front, from left, are: Lynn Taylor, Bob Stover, Harry Barber, Don Haynes, Lawrence Wideman and Gord Eckardt.

# Gord Eckardt prepares for flood of club championship memories

By BRUCE STAPLEY

Gord Eckardt sits at his big desk, sifting through quotes and sketches of the gravel pit machines his company produces.

But the 48-year-old president of Assinck Bros. Ltd. is more concerned, for the moment anyway, about the upcoming reunion of the 1958 Ontario Junior 'C' Championship Stouffville Cardinals hardball team.

He played first base for the team that beat Wheatley two games to one in the finals that year, coming back to win the last two games after bowing 2-0 in the first contest.

Born and raised just east of Stouffville, Gord was an 18-year-old just finishing high school the year the Cardinals won it all.

"It was pretty well the same team that had been together since Murray Stewart (coach) brought us together as a Bantam team 5 years earlier," says Gord. "He kept the same guys together through Junior."

He distinctly remembers the thrill of winning the deciding game 5-3 in Port Dover, which was selected as a neutral site for the rubber match of the series. But he also recalls how the first game, played in Stouffville, had to be re-started after it was discovered the pitching rubber

was six inches closer to home plate than regulation.

"We were winning 2-1 at the time. The other coach asked for a measurement. When it was found to be out by six inches, we had to dig it up and start again."

After winning game two by a 16-3 score, coach Stewart told the Cardinals that if they won the final game, they would head to Cleveland on the way home to watch an Indians game. That trip brings a chuckle from Gord today.

"We were all 17-18 years old," he says. "We got to Cleveland not knowing much about the city. We stayed at a hotel near the ball park that cost us about \$20 for the whole team. It wasn't one of the best hotels, and it wasn't the best neighbourhood, but we survived it."

When the Cardinals returned triumphantly to Stouffville, Gord recalls how fire chief Walt Smith met them with the fire truck and that a parade was arranged. "The town presented us all with a wrist watch with our name engraved on the back."

Eckardt remembers that the team was basically self-sufficient, having to rely upon their own fund raising efforts to stay afloat. "Back then, teams were financed by passing the hat at games. We couldn't afford to use

the lights at the park, so we would play from seven o'clock until nine and sometimes we would only get in six or seven innings."

Monies raised by their own means, or from generous Stouffville businessmen, were used for buying equipment. He recalls that the team would go to any lengths to stretch what little funds they had.

"We were supposed to provide two baseballs for each home game," he smiles. "We'd put in a new one, and another one that was almost new. We'd try to save the new one for when the sun started to go down so we'd be able to see it better."

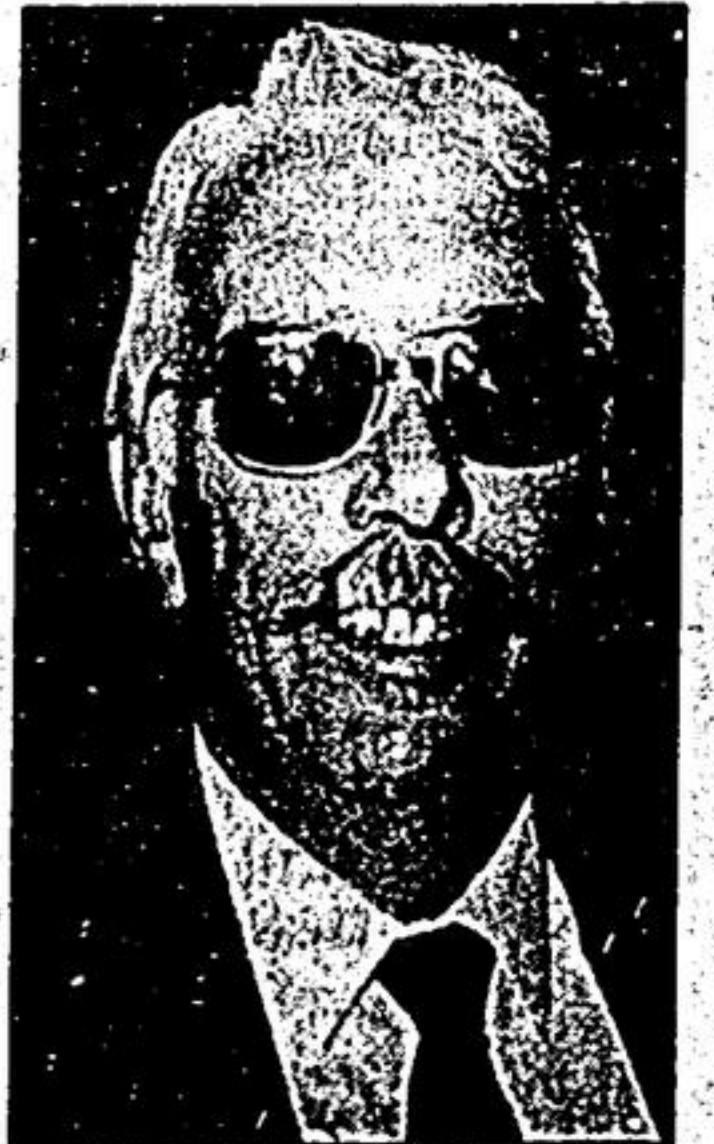
Eckardt's own life has changed as much as the nature of ball in Stouffville. After finishing high school, he went to work at his father's saw mill in the area. "My dad died in 1961 and the lumber industry dwindled."

After running the mill himself for a few years, he went to work briefly for Stouffville Sand and Gravel and then started with Assinck Bros. in 1963.

"I started as a welder, sweeper, painter. Whatever had to be done, I did it." Eventually, he and several other employees bought out the original owners, and he finally assumed the position of presi-



Gord Eckardt as he appeared with the Stouffville Cardinals in 1958.



GORD ECKARDT  
...as he is today