CAMBRIDGE SPORTS HALL OF FAME

Galt Robin Hoods

Ontario Junior Champions 1931-32 - plaque 1 of 2

How good were the Galt Robin Hoods junior baseball team from the late 1920s and the early 1930s?

As good as they get. Managed by Laurie Poore and coached for portions of that era by Robert (Bush) McWhirter — George Heggie was the assistant manager — the Robin Hoods boasted some of the best young baseball talent in Canada.

This, at a time when the Depression had taken hold and people badly needed a distraction from the economic uncertainty that was wreaking havoc in people's lives.

It was a time of portent. Al Capone's name was in the news. R.B. Bennett was Canada's prime minister, and a new leader was emerging in Germany by the name of Adolph Hitler.

In Galt's baseball epicentre, Dickson Park, a hotbed for southern Ontario baseball in those days, both the senior Terriers and the junior Robin Hoods regularly vied for provincial honours.

Poore and McWhirter, who had experience with the Toronto Maple Leafs professional club, were a big part of that success.

The Robin Hoods earned Junior Intercounty laurels from 1929 to 1932. They also won the junior Ontario championship in 1930 and 1932. In 1931 they nearly reached the finals, losing to the Toronto Columbias in the semi finals.

For the Galt juniors, Toronto teams were often considered the toughest competition along the way to the provincial finals, but the Robin Hoods, in those early Depression years, were not to be underestimated.

They reached their zenith in 1932 when, after winning the Junior Intercounty title, they advanced through the Ontario playdowns, beating Owen Sound, Brantford and Niagara Falls in succession.

By the time they faced the Toronto McCormicks in the Ontario semifinals, their reputation had preceded them.

It was mid-September, 1932. The Toronto nine knew what they were up against. Their own paper, the *Globe and Mail*, had written: "The Robin Hood's are one of the best junior teams to invade Toronto. They have everything that makes up a championship team, and it is almost impossible to imagine any team in the province defeating them."

Yet the Toronto team was not against trying to intimidate the Galt squad.

Not known for their sportsmanship, in warmups, the Toronto nine stayed on the field long past when they should have yielded to the Galt players. They argued that they knew the rules and that Galt was unaware of the rulebook.

But they were barking up the wrong tree. This was a Galt team with Bush McWhirter and Laurie Poore at the helm, two diehard baseball men who had been around the block and were from the old school; in McWhirter's case, his language was as decidedly colourful as he was crusty.

McWhirter coached the Kitchener Panthers senior team that season but asked to come back as volunteer coach to help Galt in the playoffs. During the regular season he was trading barbs with the Galt fans every time Kitchener invaded Dickson Park, but that was all forgotten as his profanity-laced language now peppered the opposition.

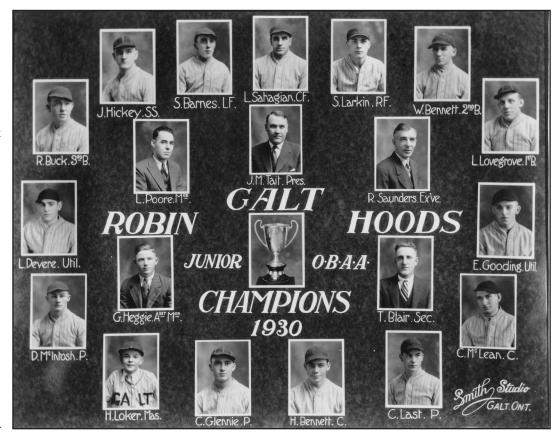
In the 1932 finals against London, he took offence to a sportswriter sitting on the Robin Hood bench. "Get off the bench and make room for the players," he told the scribe.

Later, the reporter had the last word in the *Ingersol Sentinel-Review*:

"Bush takes an apparent delight in strong language, to his team members and everyone else," said the reporter.

But McWhirter was typically unapologetic, saying he had one type of language and behaviour for church, one for home and one for the ballpark.

It was the third straight year Galt had advanced to the provincial semi-finals. Two years earlier (1930) both the Terriers and the Robin Hoods had won their respective OBAA cham-



Intercounty Champions in 1930, above, the Robin Hoods captured Ontario championships in 1930 and 1932.

pionships

In 1932 Galt opened the semi-finals against Toronto with Jack Murphy on the mound and Carl Liscombe at first. Both played superbly.

Liscombe would go on to play in the NHL with the Detroit Red Wings, while Murphy graduated to the Senior Terriers ball team where he once pitched 27 consecutive innings, thus earning the nickname 'Iron Man Murphy.' He proved his mettle a few years later while in the Canadian armed forces during the Second World War. His ship was torpedoed by a German U-boat and sank in the Mediterranean Sea. He clung tenaciously to some flotsam for 24 hours before being rescued and taken ashore to North Africa.

The two Galt natives had grown up watching fabled Terrier teams at Dickson Park, as had another young lad, Earl Gooding. Gooding began as a mascot with the Robin Hoods in 1929 and graduated to become a regular within a couple of years.

During the semis in 1932, held in Toronto's Stanley Park, the bleachers stretched down both base lines and encroached on the field, putting Murphy in close proximity to the howling masses, but he was not the least affected by the shouting and taunts. Reports say he pitched a determined, cool game displaying a reserve, especially when he was behind a batter, that belied his young years. He had pitched an impressive game a week earlier to lift Galt over Niagara Falls.

Still, the player of the game was Liscombe, the first baseman, who was the pivot man for the defence as Galt won 8-5 and captured the three-game series easily.



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