

The SASA Celebrates Fifty Years of Classic Facilities

Few would argue that local teams now play on some of the finest softball facilities in the world. With the SASA taking over all the Glenn Reeve diamonds the league has 6 fenced shale diamonds to go along with two of the greatest individual softball stadiums anywhere in Gordie Howe Fastball Field and Bob Van Impe Stadium. The use of these facilities came about as a result of hard work done by the thousands of local softball volunteers who support the league with their time and effort. Every one of the 31 events hosted in the last 50 years has played a role in advancing our facilities to where they are today.

Over the years each diamond played on, even if it was not the quality of what we now have, has played an important part in the SASA's 50-year history. The story of our facilities begins in the 60's when great adult softball was pulling thousands of kids into minor softball and the SASA had competitive senior men's leagues, a dominant women's team and a long series of high-tournaments including the annual Saskatoon Merchant's Tournament.

Cairn's Field 1950



League history begins with a park that had a long history but was on its last life in Cairn's Field on Avenue A (now Idylwyld Drive). It was an iconic structure some considered the mecca of softball, even though it was used for baseball and softball. It was opened May 14, 1914 when 6,422 people watched the Saskatoon Quakers win the first baseball game. Local pitching legend Joe Gallagher remembers pitching from a spot just in front of the baseball mound on the diamond that Gordie Howe hit homeruns on. He remembers a time in the 50's before the SASA, when Eddie Feigner and The King and His Court were slated to play there. The only problem was he wanted \$250 and they usually charged a meagre 10 cents a person at

the gate. According to Gallagher, the league upped the charge to 25 cents and packed 5000 people into Cairns field and Feigner got his money

Cairns Field set a standard that the next major facility was forced to live up to. In 1964, the SASA gathered 8900 signatures on a petition to city council for a lighted fastball field and led by Peter Sereda, a local softball group began raising funds to help build and equip the Gordie Howe Softball Diamond.



In January of 1965 city council approved the funding required for construction over three years. With old Cairn's Field torn down, teams had to share the new J. F. Cairn' Field (adjacent to BVI) with baseball for a few years so they were happy to see that unlike many recent projects, Gordie Howe Fastball Field was completed ahead of schedule. On June 26, 1966 it opened with a men's league double header. Early SASA men's doubleheaders brought in crowds as large as 1200. One of the highlights of the opening season was when the King and His Court made a return visit and faced pitchers Pete Zacharias and Red Friesen of the Saskatoon College Lads in front of more than 2,500 people. Those numbers came back in 1980 for the final of the Sr. Men's National when Tournament Chairman Lyle Hassen ordered bleachers set past the outfield fence and people were told at the gate there was no seats, they would have to find a place to stand. Some Merchant tournaments featured a roped off section in the outfield where people sat on what is now the warning Track. The Saskatoon Amateur Softball Association officially renamed Gordie Howe Fastball Field to Joe Gallagher Field on Wednesday, May 17, 2017.



Saskatoon's next major facility to be built was Bob Van Impe Stadium. It was a little easier getting the funds for this one as it was built to house softball for the 1989 Canada Summer Games. With a much larger stadium, hosting international events quickly became a realistic option and two were hosted there even before the summer games began. Don and Doug Funk as well as Bill Hunter were among the principals at home plate when Saskatchewan Premier Grant Devine opened the 1987 International Softball Congress Men's Championships in Saskatoon. Sparked by the 1987 success, much of the same committee decided to stage the 1988 International Softball Federation Men's Championships. Bill Hunter marched out in front a team from Denmark in a parade, to signal the tournament's opening. Saskatoon's success as hosts was clearly demonstrated by the overflowing crowd at the 6,500 seat Bob Van Impe. When the Worlds were to come to the city again the numbers even soared greater, when an estimated of 7,500 spectators jammed the extra stands and stood to watch the 2009 ISF Men's World Championship.

The last key piece of our present local facilities started with what used to be known as the "six pack". These six diamonds behind Bob Van Impe Stadium were invaluable to hosting tournaments with a large number of teams. They have gone through a few developments including the loss of the road that used to allow traffic from Bob Van Impe to the golf course road and the discovery of a dead body near diamond 5 after a particularly early spring thaw. Perhaps the biggest development was their being named Glenn Reeve Fields. In spite of the need for city council approval, Glenn who was a huge long-time contributor to softball at the local and national level was kept in the dark about the move to use his name. He was speechless when after giving a brief promotional announcement about the upcoming Worlds to a large crowd gathered

for Minor Softball Night, he was called to microphone by Keith McLean. And was presented with the sign that now adorns the east entrance to the fields.

On the way to what is the now, almost exclusive use, of the diamonds around BVI and Gordie Howe, the league saw action all around the city. The most loved of these were the diamonds located at Kinsmen Park. Found in the north end of 25th street, North and South Kinsmen. The SASA had use of South Kinsmen from its inception for both men's and ladies and North Kinsmen came into their grasp as a result of the work of former SASA President, Ed Reimer, who convinced the city that the league's ladies divisions needed it more than baseball did. Kinsmen welcomed downtown senior citizens and created a relaxed homey atmosphere for all who attended games there. They were particularly dear to the ladies' league. Coach Bob Stayner used to drill his Harmony Centres team there on weekends and then play on week nights. It was the home for the top divisions of ladies' softball for a number of years and lower divisions yearned to play there. The Kinsmen Park diamonds had a rich history of playing host to over 5000 softball and baseball games in Saskatoon over six decades. Following the loss of Kinsmen Park in 2012 to the city's Park re-development plan, SASA President Bryan Kosteroski was quoted as saying, "It was a very sad moment to end an era of softball at Kinsmen Park." Many generations have either watched or played ball at Kinsmen Park since it was first commissioned for baseball and softball back in 1950.

The SASA moved on and was eventually able to move into 3 more of the Glenn Reeve diamonds to replace Kinsmen. A drive around city will expose many other locations for league play, many of which have been taken out of use. Some of the earliest SASA diamonds were school grounds such as Queen Elizabeth, Haultain and Buena Vista, where people like ISF Hall of Famers Gene McWillie and Ed Bitz got their start. Some others include the Airport diamonds in McNab Park, the Westmount diamonds on Rusholme Road, Industrial Park on Alberta Ave and more recently Parc Canada, Gurgulis and Morris Chernesky Parks. There has never been a charge at the gate outside the big parks, however in the early years of the league a lady would drive between the Kinsmen and Airport diamonds with a silver collection box and fans would wait patiently for her to arrive so they could put in the dimes and quarters to support the league.