

Bob Van Impe - Softball Builder From The Grass Roots To The Highest Peaks

Saskatoon's Bob Van Impe had a long-standing association with the sport of softball in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada and the world. He started his career at the grass roots and ended it at the grass roots. In between he has had as much influence on the sport as any builder has ever had.

His initial involvement was as a recreational player during World War II with the Royal Canadian Air Force. From 1946 to 1965 he was a player, a coach, a manager or an executive member of the Saskatoon Amateur Softball Association including years as coach of the Baldwin Hotel on the commercial league. Following this he moved on to the administrative side of the sport organizing a team in the Saskatoon Amateur Softball League and then eventually becoming the first commissioner of the Saskatoon Senior Men's Softball League in 1965.



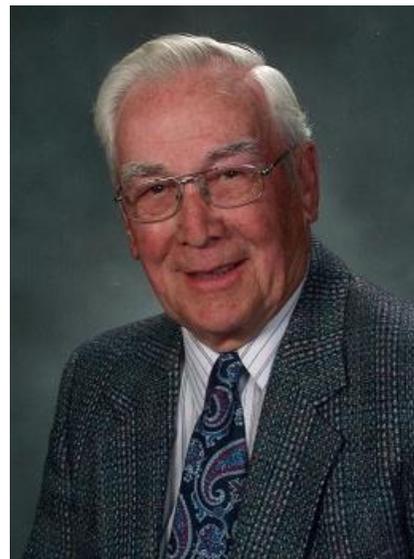
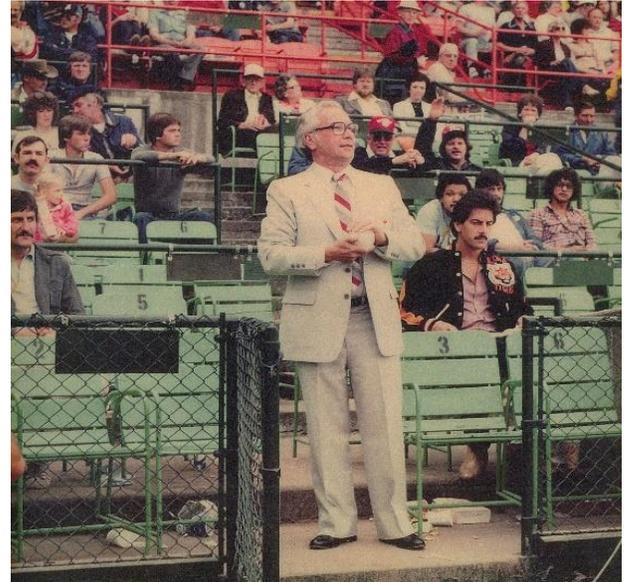
By 1966, Bob had been appointed the commissioner of the Saskatchewan Amateur Softball

Association (S.A.S.A.), which led to his active participation on the national scene. In 1969, Van Impe was elected as President of the Canadian Amateur Softball Association (C.A.S.A.). He served in this capacity until 1986 and his term is marked by rapid growth in the number of players to over one million, and the overseeing of the development of a national officiating program that resulted in over 2500 umpires receiving training and guidance to improve their skills. During this period, Bob helped Saskatoon host three national *men's championships*.



Van Impe became very active on the international softball scene when he was elected North American Vice President for the International Softball Federation (I.S.F.) in 1971. In 1973, he became the first Vice President of the I.S.F. and was appointed to the board of directors

of the Canadian Olympic Association (C.O.A.). As an "A" Director of the C.O.A., he was chosen as a member of the mission for the Pan American Games in Indianapolis in 1987. He is pictured throwing out the first pitch at the 1980 Men's World Championship



Bob has been on the receiving end of a number of special honors. These include: being named the Kinsmen Sportsman of the Year in Saskatoon in 1979, the 1981 Air Canada Sports Award as Executive of the Year, the naming of a softball field

in his honor in Saskatoon in 1984, induction into the Saskatoon Sports Hall of Fame in 1986, he was installed in the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame on June 12, 2004, his induction into the I.S.F. Hall of Fame in 1987, and the 1990 induction into Softball Canada's Hall of Fame.

In spite of all his work with softball at the national level, Bob has found time to help Saskatoon host 3 national championships and over the last number of years you could still find Bob around Saskatoon's big ball parks, helping out in the beer gardens. "People came from across Canada and across the world to Saskatoon for events, and they'd ask, 'Where's Bob?' 'How's Bob doing?' 'I need to go for a beer with Bob,' " Saskatoon Amateur Softball Association president Bryan Kosteroski said.



"You look at the last time we hosted the world championship — 2015. People from across the world came to Saskatoon, and they asked where Bob was. Bob wasn't involved on the hosting committee (pictured active in the opening ceremonies), but he still had that respect, and people still asked about him. I received emails from countries across the world asking for Bob's contact info, (wanting to) catch up with him."

Bob Van Impe Stadium was named in his honour in 1984. "Bob's willingness to grow the sport locally, provincially, nationally, internationally ... you don't put a name on a stadium like that

without having that recognition behind it," Kosteroski said. "There's a reason — a well-deserved reason — for (Van Impe getting his name on the stadium). When you look at it, Bob Van Impe Stadium has hosted the most world championships of any other stadium in the world. That stadium has hosted the most Canadian championships of any other stadium in Canada." And it did it with that name attached. Van Impe was never one to sit idly by when a need presented itself, Kosteroski says, and he retained a keen interest right to the end.

"We just hosted a Canadian championship here last summer, and guess who was part of the opening ceremonies? A 96-year-old man walking out with a Canadian flag," Kosteroski says. "That tells you something about the guy. And he phoned me once a month, for updates on what's going on. He wanted to know.



"Bob, at 96 years old, was at Bridges every Tuesday afternoon, at his one o'clock scheduled time. And when he walked into Bridges, the beer was poured for him before he got there; his plate of ribs was made before he got there. Bob was an orchestrator, bringing people together and telling stories. We'd have our Friends of the Bowl Foundation meetings, and here this 96-year-old man, shows up, seven o'clock in the evening to sit in on the meeting, because he wants to know what's going on. He always wanted to be part of things."