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Baseball in the heartland: Semi-pro baseball survives in Iowa

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BASEBALL IN THE HEARTLAND: SEMI-PRO BASEBALL SURVIVES IN IOWA

An Abstract of a Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Todd Michael Hospodarsky

University of Northern Iowa

July 2012

ABSTRACT

Baseball has been an important part of American popular culture for over one hundred years. In the early part of the twentieth century baseball was the nation's most pervasive sport and symbolized many values and attitudes that Americans held dear. During the late nineteenth century, adult baseball teams were formed within small towns across the nation. The team members were typically considered amateur athletes playing "town team" baseball. Over the years, as they were given opportunities to make money from their play, the term of semi-professional was applied to many of these players.

The decades following World War II were a time of growth and great prosperity for semi-pro baseball in Iowa and the rest of the country. During the later decades of the twentieth century, social and historical trends in America caused many towns to lose their local baseball teams. In the early nineteenth hundreds nearly every town, large and small, had a team. By the end of the century most towns had lost their teams. In northeast Iowa, however, semi-pro baseball has been able to survive relatively unchanged. Despite the failure of teams across the nation, there are currently two leagues with a total of seventeen teams in existence within a relatively small geographic area.

While battling the same undermining trends that weakened baseball's health elsewhere, northeast Iowa has been able to continue to support town baseball. Two key factors in the continued existence of baseball in this area are: sufficient financial resources to sustain the teams and a strong sense of tradition. The tournament structure that has evolved since the late 1940s has given teams in this area the economic security needed to survive. The movie *Field of Dreams* has given the community of Dyersville a

prominent place in the nostalgic mythology of American baseball. However, long before the movie was filmed in the 1980s, Dyersville and other area teams were a part of a strong tradition of semi-pro baseball which has helped to keep town ball alive in northeast Iowa.

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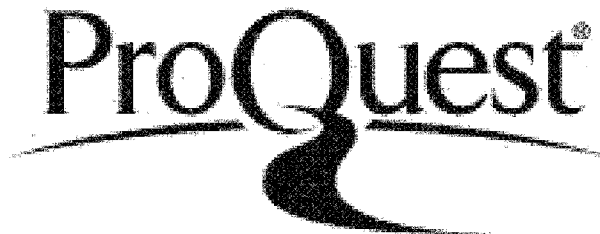


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Entitled: Baseball in the Heartland: Semi-Pro Baseball Survives in Iowa

Has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts

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This work is dedicated to the players of semi-pro baseball in northeast Iowa especially men interviewed for this study. The willingness to share their stories has brought small town baseball back into the limelight. Special attention is paid to former Balltown player Bob Meyer, who is finishing his own book dedicated to reliving the stories of northeast Iowa, semi-pro baseball.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I thank my wife whose patience and encouragement allowed me to complete this study. My family has always been not only my foundation but also my escape when I need a break. For my sons I thank you for patiently waiting to play catch with your dad. I must thank my mother who spent hours transcribing interviews for this work, but more importantly who drove her son to his baseball games as a child and fostered my love of baseball. I want to express my appreciation to Dr. Brian Roberts for convincing me to pursue a thesis and forcing me to deepen my thought process and defend my findings. To Dr. Robert Martin whose patience and sage advice helped guide me through the years of learning, thank you isn't enough to express my gratitude.

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CHAPTER 1

WHY STUDY SEMI-PRO BASEBALL?

Semi-professional baseball has a long history in America. During the twentieth century both semi-pro and town ball have seen tremendous growth in popularity, followed by considerable erosion and in some areas the complete demise of the sport. Northeast Iowa has been able to secure a place in the history of baseball as an area where semi-pro baseball has survived. Despite facing the same social and economic difficulties as other towns in other areas of America, semi-pro baseball is alive in Iowa. Financial security that comes from a tournament structure and a strong sense of tradition have allowed the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League to repel the challenges of the past to secure a future for small-town baseball.

Americans love their sports. Billions of dollars are spent each year on sports through ticket sales, apparel, and memorabilia. Sports have even been blamed for many problems within our society. Businesses claim that millions of dollars are lost during the NCAA basketball's "March Madness" from workers filling out tournament brackets and following the progress of their selections. Thanks to our mass media system, fans have any score for any sport readily available at any time in nearly any location. ESPN continuously has sporting news on one of its multiple channels. Satellite radio has channels that provide sports information twenty-four hours a day. Consumers who want to follow one specific sport can pay extra fees to their cable or satellite television provider in order to receive every professional contest played during the season. Cell

phones can be programmed to alert users of the final scores for their favorite teams' games. It is undeniable; Americans have an insatiable passion for sports.

It is said that we don't choose our passions but sometimes our passions choose us.¹ Curiously, baseball is a common passion among Americans whether old or young, tall or short. Baseball is not the only passion for Americans; there are other sports that capture our attention. For example, Americans love college football. We follow our NASCAR drivers. We root for (or against) Tiger Woods to win the Masters. We usually come together as a nation for the Olympics and we create millions of dollars worth of demand for Super Bowl commercials. Still baseball is different. Baseball will always occupy a unique place in America's heritage and American history.² The sights, sounds, and even, the smells from a baseball game can return us to a time of adolescence.³ Baseball returns us to a time of innocence and trust of the game as an ideology more than as a sport.⁴ Author W. P. Kinsella, who is widely known for his baseball novels, including *Shoeless Joe* and *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*, once commented that we do not look "at" baseball, we look "through" baseball.⁵ It is this ideology and passion to look both at and through baseball that brings this piece of research together.

Much of what is and has been written about the sport of baseball centers around the professional level of the sport called the Major Leagues. S. W. Pope says that

¹ Jean Hastings Ardell, *Breaking Into Baseball: Women and the National Pastime* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 134.

² Robert Elias, *Baseball and the American Dream* (Armonck, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 2001), 9.

³ Hank Davis, *Small-Town Heroes: Images of Minor League Baseball* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 4.

⁴ Davis, *Small-Town Heroes*, 166.

⁵ David McGimpsey, *Imagining Baseball: America's Pastime and Popular Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 36.

although amateur and semi-professional baseball has “sustained the game as the national pastime for more than a century, professional baseball has fundamentally shaped the way that most Americans have played and thought about the sport.”⁶ When someone mentions a great play or game they saw, generally, they are talking about a professional game seen on television. However, baseball is more than the Major Leagues. Little League, American Legion, semi-pro, town ball, the Minor Leagues, and even T-ball all own a bit of baseball’s story.

This study will focus on the level of baseball known as semi-professional (semi-pro) and town team baseball. Unlike professional baseball, which is a more nationally oriented entity, the baseball teams researched for this work are based locally in small towns. This research will be investigating origins of baseball as a sport as well as the beginnings of the localized game of town team and semi-pro baseball. Despite the fact that semi-pro and town team baseball overlap greatly, their fundamental differences as well as their similarities will be discussed. The recent, and nearly complete, demise of small-town baseball nationwide in just the last few decades must be investigated as to reasons for the downturn. Despite the fading popularity of town team baseball throughout much of the country, this research will show that it is not only possible for the sport to hang on but it is surviving in a form consistent with its beginnings. The persistence of this type of baseball in this area will be discussed as will its future in Iowa. Is baseball the future passion of America? Time will tell for sure, but baseball has a strong foothold in northeast Iowa.

⁶ S. W. Pope, *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination, 1876-1926* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 59.

Moving to Monticello, Iowa, in 1995 a town of nearly four thousand located just on the southern edge of being in northeast Iowa it was startling to discover that in this part of the state adult town baseball was still being played. In fact it baseball in this area is organized in nearly the same form it has been played for more than one hundred years. Despite their size, this handful of small towns in northeast Iowa have held onto the tradition of local semi-pro baseball. In fact, there is a long history of town teams in this area competing in organized leagues. The current formation of the league is named the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League and began in 1975. The pride in the local semi-pro team, the Monticello Cubs, is evident by the picture posted in the office of the editor of *The Monticello Express*, the city's newspaper. The editor of the paper is himself a former player on the Cubs and he proudly displays the framed picture of Monticello's 1907 championship team. Unlike other areas of the country where town team baseball has faded, baseball has survived in a relatively unchanged state in northeast Iowa.

The goal of this work is to investigate the history of the current semi-pro baseball league to attempt to understand baseball's persistence within this geographic area. Why has this style of baseball been able to hang on here in northeast Iowa when it has died elsewhere? To explore semi-pro baseball, the narrative and the obstacles of amateur "town ball" baseball need to be studied. What events and trends have caused the widespread death of semi-pro baseball? What factors have allowed northeast Iowa's baseball teams to continue to survive? Once the past and present have been unfurled, the future of small-town baseball must also be assessed. Interviews with the former players and fans of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League were instrumental for this project.

Although time passes, the stories and feelings surrounding the semi-pro teams of northeast Iowa survive within these men and women.

The magnitude of this topic may be trivial for some, but to a baseball fan the importance of town baseball is as important to America as the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. Town ball is the foundation of baseball. It is where it all began. Children grow up playing baseball in hopes of playing in the Major Leagues. Fathers teach their sons to throw, catch, and hit in hopes of watching them someday play in a stadium full of tens of thousands of cheering fans.

Since its inception in 1869, professional baseball has seen continual growth in America. This growth can be seen by the creation and then expansion of both the National and American Leagues, as well as the formation of a minor league farm system. However, on a local level, baseball has seen a decline, especially in the last forty years. Go to the inner-city today and unlike the 1950s and 1960s, children will not be found playing stickball in the alleyways and vacant lots. Drive by a small town baseball diamond and only scheduled practices will be seen. The never ending pick-up game portrayed in the movie *The Sandlot* no longer exists.

The continued existence of Little League Baseball and American Legion Baseball gives the illusion that the number of youths taking part in baseball has remained relatively steady over the years. However, the number of young people playing baseball has diminished. Little League baseball began in 1939 and by 1964 there were one and a quarter million boys playing in six thousand leagues across the country.⁷ Little League

⁷ Stephen G. Wieting, *Sport and Memory in North America* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 25.

baseball has seen a one-percent drop in the number of participants each year since 1996. That comes to about twenty-two thousand fewer children playing baseball every year.⁸ Today Little League can be found in over eighty countries proving baseball has spread geographically. However, the number of young people participating is decreasing considering that there are only about seven thousand Little League programs in existence throughout the world.⁹ The increasing popularity of soccer has surely affected the number of youth involved in other sports, including baseball. Another factor causing the decrease in participation is the trend of athletic specialization at an early age. It seems that if an athlete wants to reach the upper levels of their number one sport they have to forego participating in other sports. Whatever the reasons, there are fewer kids playing baseball.

More importantly for the discussion on town ball and semi-pro baseball, the number of adults involved in baseball nationwide has collapsed over the last forty years. In fact, very few towns in America have existing adult teams today. Narrowing the focus of study to within northeast Iowa during the twentieth century, there have been more than ninety towns that were able to field baseball teams. Nearly every city in the early and middle part of the century no matter what the size, had a team. Today there are only seventeen teams currently playing baseball in the same geographic area. That is almost an eighty-five percent drop in the number of towns with baseball teams.

⁸ Laura Hilgers, "Youth Sports Drawing More than Ever," *CNN.com*, July, 6, 2006. http://articles.cnn.com/2006-07-03/us/rise.kids.sports_1_youth-sports-tennis-lessons-kids?_s=PM:US (accessed March 16, 2011).

⁹ *2012 Little League Media Guide*, 16.

This dramatic decrease would lend itself to the belief that semi-pro baseball is in danger of becoming extinct, yet nothing could be further from the truth. Undoubtedly, in certain towns, the future of baseball is in danger, yet it is currently surviving. Something very different has been happening in this relatively small geographic area of northeast Iowa for the sport to remain viable. Why has this style of baseball survived relatively unaltered in this area when it has failed elsewhere? What is different in northeast Iowa compared to other areas? What is the future of the sport? Will the next generation continue to see semi-pro or town team baseball?

Before going any farther into this subject a very important clarification must be made. Thus far the term "town ball" has been used interchangeably with the term "semi-pro." Whether the expressions are synonymous is debatable. Both town ball teams and semi-pro teams have a similar history within small-town America, however, they have some fundamental differences. There could be ramifications for these players depending how the definitions of the terms are applied.

Town ball can be described as players from a similar geographic background (such as the same city) coming together to play baseball as representatives of the community. Town ball players are not paid and, therefore, would fit very comfortably within the category of "amateur athletes." *Webster's American College Dictionary* defines a semi-professional as someone "actively engaged in some field for pay but on a part-time basis."¹⁰ Transferring that definition into baseball terms means that although players get paid to play, they do not play the sport as their sole occupation. A semi-pro

¹⁰ *Webster's American Collegiate Dictionary* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1998).

baseball player by definition would not be considered an amateur; but, as will be seen, this does not completely close the issue.

The debate within baseball over what defines an amateur is not new. It has been raging since the middle to late 1800s when baseball was just becoming organized. In that century an uproar was coming from some baseball purists who were very opposed to the recent phenomenon of players being paid to play. Many thought baseball was a leisure activity and should not enter the world of professionalism. Lee Richmond amplified the amount of discussion in 1880 when he was allowed to pitch for both the amateur team from Brown University and the professional team from Worcester.¹¹ Richmond not only caused confusion about the definition of an amateur, but also what the parameters of what an amateur would be allowed to do. Into the new century amateurism continued to have a very confusing and debated definition until the 1930s. During this time there was a movement to define, consolidate, and regulate amateur baseball in the United States.

The definitions seem clear enough when taken from text. However, when discussing them with the former players of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League, the distinctions between amateur and semi-pro become cloudier and the study gets a bit muddled. Every player interviewed agreed that the members of the teams in this area are not paid . . . with a few exceptions. This would tend to have the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League leaning toward the amateur town ball definition, yet today's teams and players are considered semi-pro. The solution to this dilemma is a simple one. It is true that these men work during the day and throughout the week, then play baseball at night and

¹¹ Ronald A. Smith, "Lee Richmond, Brown University, and the Amateur-Professional Controversy in College Baseball," *The New England Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (March 1991): 84-87.

on the weekend just as town ball teams have done for years. The teams in today's league are very much structured in the same manner that town ball teams have been organized in past leagues. The difference comes from those exceptions mentioned. Most of the players in the league do not get paid to play baseball, however, some do and all occasionally have the opportunity to make money from playing the sport. It is this **opportunity** to get paid that places these players squarely into the semi-pro category.

For some of the former players who were interviewed, terminology of town team versus semi-pro has less to do with money earned and more to do with where the team recruits its talent. Following this philosophy, town teams would be strictly made up of baseball players from that specific community. Semi-pro therefore does not necessarily represent players getting paid but instead refers to players being recruited from other talent pools and teams. A team would be considered semi-pro by using players to fill out rosters from larger towns in close proximity or even nearby colleges. None of this outside recruitment is against league rules, but is frowned upon by some within the league.¹²

Although players in the semi-pro leagues are typically not paid for playing, there are occasionally circumstances where a player might be able to be compensated for their playing time or playing ability. The most common occurrence of players being paid is when teams do not have enough quality pitchers for tournaments. The manner in which these semi-pro tournaments have been organized varied somewhat from town-to-town over the years, but most were (and are) either eight or sixteen team tournaments that

¹² Dale Sperflage, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, April, 29, 2010.

would take place over the course of a week. Traditionally, teams would use their own hometown pitchers for the opening rounds of the event. However, if a team was able to make it through to the semi-final or final rounds then they may have exhausted their pitching pool from their own regular roster. Teams might then choose to hire a pitcher to pitch in the key games of a tournament.

The payment for these players is not what one would consider a substantial amount of money. Usually, payment is meant to cover travel expense for the player to drive to the tournament to participate and maybe a little extra for food. Typical payments over the years ranged from fifty to one hundred dollars.¹³ There are unsubstantiated stories of some pitchers getting more than a small amount because of their reputation on the mound, but these are rare occurrences and not considered the norm. Another payment plan less frequently used with pitchers was to pay them a certain amount for a victory but less for a loss. There were a few occasions where hurlers would even be paid a set amount such as five dollars per strike out thrown. This obviously gives an added incentive to perform well.¹⁴

Former player and current manager for the Rickardsville A's, Lenny Tekippe feels the days of the hired pitcher are waning. According to Tekippe, it is no longer economically feasible to pay pitchers even a small stipend for travel money. In the past, a team would collect four or five hundred dollars for winning a tournament, so paying a pitcher fifty dollars was profitable. Tekippe says with the increase in gas prices, "to pay

¹³ Art Huinker, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Peosta, Iowa, June 6, 2011, and Dale Sperflage, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, April, 29, 2010, and Pat Weber, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Cascade, Iowa, July 25, 2011.

¹⁴ Dale Sperflage, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, April, 29, 2010.

a guy enough to make it worthwhile you'd probably have to pay him two hundred dollars." With tournaments still only paying the same four or five hundred dollar prize, hiring a two hundred dollar player becomes impractical and unprofitable.¹⁵

Hiring of pitchers is not a recent occurrence and is a practice that is not always looked favorably upon by baseball fans. According to the interviewed former players, hired pitchers have been commonplace since World War II, but *The Monticello Express* reported in 1900 on a game in which the Cascade team hired a very talented pitcher from Dubuque and proceeded to defeat the Monticello squad in extra innings. This game was held in nearby Anamosa, which is usually a heated rival of Monticello. The story emphasized that despite the animosity the hometown Anamosa fans felt toward Monticello, they rooted for the defeat of the Cascade team and their hired arm.¹⁶

Not everyone has agreed with the philosophy of using players from outside the town's ranks. Many leagues and some tournaments created rules regarding the number of players from outside the community that could compete for a team. In 1954, although the league allowed out-of-town players, Monticello set a team policy banning the use of players from outside the community even though the league allowed the use of outsiders.¹⁷ In 1933 Cascade protested to the league a loss to Dyersville on the claim the pitcher for the winning team was ineligible. Although there was no further mention of it in the media, Cascade must have succeeded in their protest given that later news articles

¹⁵ Lenny Tekippe, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 13, 2011.

¹⁶ *Monticello Express*, August, 16, 1900, 5.

¹⁷ "Plan Practice Game with Cascade Team," *Monticello Express*, April, 26, 1954, 8.

regarding season tallies had changed the record of both teams.¹⁸ In 1951 a game between Cascade and Monticello had both sides complaining. Hometown Monticello argued that Cascade had an illegal player, while the visiting Reds complained that the home team had not provided the proper type of ball for the game.¹⁹

There have also been opportunities for non-pitchers to earn money by performing well in tournaments. The most frequent cash prizes given for outstanding tournament performance were for the batter with the most home runs or most runs batted in; the tournament's most valuable player; and the pitcher with the most strike outs.²⁰ One of the largest tournaments held in the area, the Dyersville Tournament, which began in 1951, awards over twenty individual prizes for performance.²¹ Occasionally, a tournament might award merchandise in place of a cash prize, but over the years, cash has been the most common award given to players.

Semi-professionalism, as it pertains to these teams, also comes from teams winning prize money. Teams have had the opportunity to win money for placing in tournaments and also for placing high in the league standings at the end of the season.²² Typically, tournaments have paid prize money to teams ending in the top three or four places of the tournament.

Tournament winnings can be quite lucrative for teams that are able to work their way through the brackets successfully. In 1951 the oldest of the local tournaments, the Cascade Invitational, which began in 1948, awarded the first place team three hundred

¹⁸ "Giants Trim Cubs, 17-12, in Hot Game," *Monticello Express*, August 10, 1933, 8.

¹⁹ "Cubs Beat Cascade 7-0 Behind Tvrdik 's Five Hit Pitching," *Monticello Express*, July 19, 1951, 12.

²⁰ "Monti Cubs-Cascade in Finale," *Monticello Express*, June 29, 1959, 8.

²¹ "Special Player Awards," *Dyersville Commercial*, July 20, 1959, 3.

²² Section 7, Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League By-Laws, revised February 29, 2004.

dollars and second place won one hundred dollars.²³ This may seem like minor winnings, but in 2011 dollars that first place prize would be equal to nearly two thousand five hundred dollars.²⁴ It would be tempting to think that the Cascade prize was abnormal, but the first place team at the 1956 Monticello tournament won two hundred dollars, so several hundred dollars was the norm for the time period.²⁵

A bigger tournament, however, might bring in even more money. In 1951 Dubuque hosted a sixteen team tournament where the winning team would bring home eight hundred and fifty dollars.²⁶ In today's money that sum would amount to a whopping seven thousand four hundred dollars in winnings. Starting in the late 1950s most tournaments also began awarding a small amount of money to the teams knocked out in the first round of the tournament for reimbursement of travel expenses. Typical amounts were in the twenty-five to fifty dollar range for a team losing their first game of the tournament.²⁷

The concept of professionalism can also come from being a member of a recognized organization. With many occupations, the formation of unions that set skill requirements was instrumental in moving that career from a job into a profession. As these teams became more competitive they began forming leagues. Having a fixed set of rules in the form of by-laws and requiring a membership fee sets these semi-pro teams apart from loosely organized town teams. The 1947 by-laws for the Maquoketa Valley League, which later became the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League, set an allowable number

²³ "Cubs Beat Dyersville 9 to 3 to Win Meet," *Monticello Express*, September 13, 1951, 11.

²⁴ U. S. Inflation Calculator. <http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/> (accessed March 30, 2011).

²⁵ "Eight Team Tournament to Start Tuesday," *Monticello Express*, June 25, 1956, 1, 8.

²⁶ "Monti vs Cascade in First Round of Dubuque Meet," *Monticello Express*, September 6, 1951, 9.

²⁷ "Monti Cubs-Cascade in Finale," *Monticello Express*, June 29, 1959, 8.

of paid players at three per team.²⁸ By-laws also set a tone of professionalism by penalizing teams for forfeiting. The current fine for a team's forfeiture is one hundred dollars.²⁹ Therefore, despite baseball not being the main occupation of these players, there is a certain level of professionalism from the formation of leagues with by-laws.

This discussion leaves little doubt that the players in this area of northeast Iowa fit into the semi-pro category. Interestingly, most of the former players interviewed for this project consider themselves town team players instead of semi-pro athletes. It is possible they are just being humble but more likely they fear the negative connotation of playing for money instead of playing for the love of the game or their home town pride.

So, it is established that semi-pro teams have the opportunity to win money from both tournaments and league play. Players, in turn, have the chance to earn a meager amount of revenue from playing ball. Does this damage the ideology of the game? A common complaint about professional baseball is that it has become a business where the players and owners are only interested in money. According to Hank Davis, who has studied professional baseball on the Minor League level, professional baseball has left "sport" and has even left "business" to become commercial entertainment. Evidence of this transition can be seen in the Major Leagues where many teams are now owned by corporations instead of families. Even more obvious of this commercialism can be seen when minor league teams book acts to perform before, during, or after games to attract fans.³⁰ Davis continues his lament that baseball was once Norman Rockwell but has

²⁸ "Elect Officers for '47 Season," *Monticello Express*, April 10, 1947, 8.

²⁹ Section 5, Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League By-Laws, revised February 29, 2004.

³⁰ Davis, *Small-Town Heroes*, 347.

become P.T. Barnum.³¹ Many major league players claim that they would play for free yet they do not. Are these semi-pro players just as bad? Semi-pro baseball is keeping the tradition of baseball's roots. Most of the players in the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League do play for free. They are living out what purists would call the baseball dream.

Do not get the wrong idea that these semi-pro players are not driven by the possibility of getting paid to play some day. Occasionally, town teams have been a stepping stone on the path to the Major Leagues. There are Cinderella stories where the local small town player makes it to the "big show," but they are the exceptions not the norm. Hall of Famers and Iowans Bob Feller and Red Faber are two examples of players who started their careers on a town team and ended with major league teams. More recent big league names who played semi-pro baseball around northeast Iowa are Jim McAndrew from Lost Nation, who pitched for the New York Mets, and Joe Hoerner of Dubuque, who pitched for the St. Louis Cardinals.³² Even more played in the Minor Leagues, such as Art Huinker and Joe Hoerner's brother, Jim.³³ Unfortunately, these players are not the rule. Most semi-pro players never make it past the ranks of their home-town teams.

Oddly, the idea to pay players at any level, even the highest, has had a checkered past. In 1858 the National Association of Baseball Players forbade professional players. However, the teams of the league worked around the rule by secretly paying players. Some teams ensured players access to easy jobs that paid well within businesses owned

³¹ Davis, *Small-Town Heroes*, 347.

³² Rick Westhoff, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 14, 2010.

³³ Jim Hoerner, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dubuque, Iowa, July 12, 2011, and Art Huinker, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Peosta, Iowa, June 29, 2011.

by fans of the teams. Still others just paid the players under the table with prohibited cash payments.³⁴ Most fans did not care if the players were being paid as long as their team won. Later in the nineteenth century semi-pro baseball leagues in New Hampshire threatened college baseball existence. Despite being banned from accepting salaries for playing baseball while participating in amateur college ball, players were being paid during the summers through donations from some New England resort patrons.³⁵ Today's college players face similar difficulties when participating in semi-pro competitions. To retain their amateur status, college players must donate any money they receive to their team's coffers.

Town ball and semi-pro are linked in their roots. However, town ball has not had a monopoly on semi-pro baseball. The term semi-pro also fits the industrial leagues that formed alongside the town teams of America. Over the course of the century, many businesses in cities big and small, formed company baseball teams using their employees as their player pool. Successful teams would attract more media coverage for the company. This created a scenario where good players were often hired to work for the company because of their baseball skills and not necessarily for their job skills. In some cases, the star players were given the easier jobs at the company. As with town teams in the Midwest, these company teams formed leagues where they competed with other

³⁴ Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 61-62.

³⁵ Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 25-26.

industrial teams.³⁶ In Iowa these business teams were more often established in the larger cities.

The usual makeup of these industrial leagues revolved around one type of industry per league; for example, the coal mine leagues of West Virginia, the textile leagues of the Carolinas, or the printer's league in Chicago. Frequently in Iowa there was not enough of one industry to support a league so businesses would play teams from a completely different product line. In 1927 *The Grinnell Herald* reported a game scheduled between the glove factory in Grinnell and the team from Maytag Company in Newton could not be played because the glove factory's cars got stuck and they had to walk home.³⁷

Industrial leagues have a similar history to that of semi-pro leagues: early growth and popularity and then a sudden collapse. Each league has its own story and timeline, but the plot is very similar. Cedar Rapids, Iowa, had the M-J League which was very popular during 1950s and 1960s but then faded and eventually died in the 1970s.³⁸ The similarities do not end with the failure of industrial baseball but continue with the small pockets of survival. For example, the Chicago Printer's League failed long ago, but the current printer's union in Chicago, along with several other large cities, has hosted a baseball tournament annually since 1908.³⁹

³⁶ Thomas K. Perry, *Textile League Baseball: South Carolina's Mill Teams, 1880-1955*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1993), 8-17.

³⁷ *The Grinnell Herald*, April 5, 1927, 20.

³⁸ Dale Digmann Interview by Todd Hospodarsky, Personal interview, Worthington, Iowa, March 10.

³⁹ "Printers Back to Play Ball," *The Daytona Beach News-Journal*, July 7, 2011. <http://www.news-journalonline.com/sports/local-sports/2011/07/25/printers-back-to-play-ball.html> (accessed January 15, 2012).

Whatever the level of play, baseball may be the most written about sport in history. Historians and sports writers have studied nearly every facet of baseball history. It is nearly impossible to find a context in which baseball has not already been studied. Jean Ardell has written in her book *Breaking into Baseball: Women and the National Pastime* about females in baseball.⁴⁰ Race issues have been covered by many historians, including Robert K. Fitts's *Remembering Japanese Baseball: An Oral History of the Game*.⁴¹ Kyle McNary writes about not only the relationship of African Americans and baseball but also Latino players and the sport in his book *Black Baseball: A History of African Americans and the National Game*.⁴² Even odd frameworks can be found when researching baseball. For example, Christopher Bell has written about specific players whose careers were marked by one fateful error in a big game.⁴³ Even the cinematographer, Ken Burns has detailed baseball's history in an extensive and extremely popular documentary *Baseball*.⁴⁴

Historical literature covering the early formation of professional baseball becomes somewhat redundant as it has been well documented for over one hundred years. However, a staple for any baseball researcher is A. G. Spalding's *America's National Game*. Originally published in 1911, Spalding's narrative is an extremely comprehensive telling of baseball's early life. Spalding has the unique advantage in that he was involved

⁴⁰ Ardell, *Breaking Into Baseball*.

⁴¹ Robert K. Fitts, *Remembering Japanese Baseball: An Oral History of the Game*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005).

⁴² Kyle McNary, *Black Baseball: A History of African Americans and the National Game*, (London: PRC Publishing, 2003).

⁴³ Christopher Bell, *Baseballers Whose Careers Are Marked By One Fateful Play*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002).

⁴⁴ Geoffery C. Ward and Ken Burns, *Baseball: An Illustrated History* (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, Inc., 1994).

in the early creation of professional baseball as a player and then as part of the management of the early Major Leagues.⁴⁵

Spalding's connection to early players and owners provides readers with a true insider's view of baseball's early history. However, the baseball magnate's over-inflated ego and national pride ooze into the storyline as it is being told. Spalding was excellent in using his own letters and notes along with materials given to him from Henry Chadwick's wife to create a linear history of the sport. Throughout the work Spalding included original letters or photos in support of his topic. When discussing critical events, such as Abner Doubleday's supposed invention of baseball or the players' revolt of 1889, Spalding struggles to remain an independent story teller and is compelled to invoke his opinion.⁴⁶ This is his weakness as a historian, but his works add to the story when used as a piece of historical evidence.

Difficulty in researching semi-pro baseball came in two main areas. Despite the large volumes of baseball writings, the scant amount of research done on semi-pro and town ball made it difficult to find a historiographical context within to work. The other complication was dealing with the emotional and psychological influences coming from the nostalgia emitting from the topic of local baseball. Even the National Baseball Hall of Fame Museum greatly overlooks the topic of semi-pro baseball to focus on the Major Leagues. The entire story of baseball must be told and who better to tell the story but the players themselves.

⁴⁵ Albert G. Spalding, *America's National Game*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

⁴⁶ Spalding, *America's National Game*, 20-21.

The firsthand knowledge given by the former players, managers, and fans of semi-pro baseball in northeast Iowa was useful to battle the problem of limited information. Since memories can be fuzzy on details, newspaper articles were used to check facts such as dates and names. Despite these interviews being amazing primary sources, other historians and authors were needed to bring a larger context into the discussion on semi-pro and town team baseball.

Lewis St. George Stubbs does an excellent job of researching the beginnings of semi-pro baseball in the central part of Canada. In *Shoestring Glory: A Prairie History of Semi-Pro Ball*, Stubbs lays out a clear and concise story of baseball's beginnings in Canada and also how the sport progressed into semi-pro leagues on the prairies.⁴⁷ There are some similarities between the Canadian semi-pro leagues Stubbs discusses and the league being studied for this work. However, as one would expect, there are some distinct differences within events and issues occurring thousands of miles apart. Still, Stubbs gives a groundwork in which a historian can begin to look at issues and events and their effect on semi-pro baseball.

One of the more helpful secondary research sources used for this project was *The Rangers' Reign: A Glimpse of Semi-Pro Baseball in the '50s* written by Louis Paetsch and Michael Weckwerth. This project investigates a semi-pro team from Merrill, Wisconsin, who won their state championship three years in a row and then less than a decade later folded. The authors are excellent not only in showing the history of the Merrill team, but also the progression of the league from town ball into a semi-pro

⁴⁷ Lewis St. George Stubbs, *Shoestring Glory: Semi-Pro Ball on the Prairies* (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada: Turnstone Press, 1996).

industrial league and then a pseudo-professional league.⁴⁸ This work was particularly helpful due to Merrill's similarity to cities in northeast Iowa and also the similarity in issues the Merrill Rangers and teams in Iowa faced. The book also added fuel to this study. If a team as strong as Merrill could fold so quickly, how has semi-pro baseball in Iowa been able to hang on?

Another valuable resource for any Midwest baseball study is Stew Thornley's *Baseball in Minnesota: The Definitive History*. This work is not focused on semi-pro baseball but instead covers all baseball in Minnesota which is a drawback; however, the pages Thornley dedicates to semi-pro baseball are very useful and well written. According to Thornley, Minnesota semi-pro baseball suffered through some of the same ebb and tide in popularity seen in Wisconsin and other places in the nation, but one advantage that the Gopher State had was a strong state organization. This organization has helped semi-pro baseball survive state-wide, but locally towns struggled to remain viable year-to-year.⁴⁹ Again this poses a new question for this study: Without a strong state organization, why has baseball survived in northeast Iowa?

The discussion for baseball's survival must move away from a strictly historical view of what has happened and look at possible reasons for social trends. In *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination, 1876-1926*, S. W. Pope attempts to explain why amateur sports have been able to remain successful in America under the darkening shadow of grossly over-revenued professional sports. Although

⁴⁸ Louis Paetsch and Michael Weckwerth, introduction to *The Rangers' Reign: A Glimpse of Semi-Pro Baseball in the '50s* (Merrill, Wisconsin: Reindl Printing, Inc., 2004).

⁴⁹ Stew Thornley, *Baseball in Minnesota: The Definitive History* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006).

Pope does not focus solely on America's pastime, being the oldest American sport, baseball is used extensively throughout his book as an prime example for the author's thesis. Pope is excellent in bringing into his discussion the frequent use of myth and nostalgia by Americans to explain away the problematic truth within their sports.⁵⁰

One of the better books on the effects of nostalgia on baseball is David McGimpsey's *Imagining Baseball: America's Pastime and Popular Culture*. McGimpsey examines America's propensity to create baseball fiction that feeds into the nostalgia created by the sport. Americans love baseball and so creators of fiction feed into what Americans love about the sport and, therefore, create a false sense of baseball. But, as time goes on, that false image of baseball travels through nostalgia and exits as true baseball in the minds of people. McGimpsey does an excellent job using examples of baseball fiction to explain this odd occurrence without overly criticizing the fiction itself.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Pope, *Patriotic Games*.

⁵¹ McGimpsey, *Imagining Baseball*.

CHAPTER 2

BASEBALL NOSTALGIA AND BASEBALL HISTORY

For many people, especially in America, baseball is more than just a sport. There is a nostalgia attached to baseball that is undeniable and unshakable. It is an emotional sense of being that always lies just below the surface of consciousness. Frequently, films bring our emotions to the surface. Over the years there have been many baseball movies that have been born of and have enflamed our emotional attachment to baseball. Gary Cooper tugged at our heartstrings playing Lou Gehrig in *The Pride of the Yankees*. We rooted for the band of misfit underdogs in both *Major League* and *The Bad News Bears*. On his day off while skipping school Ferris Bueller and his friends attend a baseball game at Wrigley Field. The ultimate nostalgic baseball film, *The Field of Dreams*, debuted in 1989 and brought baseball nostalgia to the forefront for generations of movie goers. Near the end of the movie, James Earl Jones's character Terence Mann comments on baseball by stating, "The one constant through all of the years . . . has been baseball. America has rolled by like an army of steamrollers. It's been erased like a blackboard -- rebuilt and erased again. But baseball has marked the time. This field -- this game -- it's a part of our past. . . It reminds us of all that once was good, and it could be again."⁵² S. W. Pope within his work *Patriotic Games* hints that to find baseball is to find America. Baseball is a symbol of America. Just as people love their country, they love their

⁵² Charles F. Springwood, *Cooperstown to Dyersville: A Geography of Baseball Nostalgia* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 1.

baseball.⁵³ Semi-pro baseball has relied on this love for its survival. What makes Americans feel so emotionally connected with baseball?

Author Hank Davis went in search of answers for this nostalgic question in *Small Town Heroes*. While visiting minor league games across the country, Davis interviewed fans as to their attraction to baseball. One response from a spectator revolved around the idea of living “the dream” through someone else.⁵⁴ What is “the dream”? The dream the fan spoke of is not the “American Dream.” The idea of the American dream is usually centered around a sense of materialistic accomplishment coming from the success of capitalism or perhaps some feeling of the freedoms granted to American citizens. The dream mentioned by the fan is a baseball dream. It is a dream that allows fans to temporarily and vicariously live through a player. It is a common theme within the romanticism of the sport. The mere attendance to a baseball game at any level can lead into that dream.

Sitting on unforgiving metal bleachers at a local youth Little League game can once again make us feel young. Memories come of playing as a child in the heat of a sweltering summer evening while our family members sat on those same hard metal bleachers. While watching the local high school team play from a lawn chair behind the outfield fence, our thoughts return to our own high school days and questions erupt in the mind. Whatever happened to that fireball thrower from the rival school? Eating a hot dog sitting at Wrigley Field, watching a million dollar arm throw to a million dollar hitter our feelings drift to those youthful feelings again. It could merely be memories of

⁵³ Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 70-72.

⁵⁴ Davis, *Small-Town Heroes*, 166.

watching the Cubs as a child or those feelings could be the regret of not trying harder to make the big leagues yourself. Everyone's dream is different, but the dream is there for everyone to enjoy through baseball.

For baseball fans in northeast Iowa many baseball memories revolve around semi-pro baseball games. When asked to reminisce about past games that stood out for them, each former player of the league would smile and share their special moment in the history of the sport. John "Hoppy" Wright who had a thirty year career playing and managing the Monticello Cubs told of being a child attending a game where towering home runs were hit by Cascade's legendary Johnny Moran who later turned down a professional baseball career to become a priest.⁵⁵ Despite a long successful career as a pitcher, Art Huinker reminisced of being a young sixteen-year-old outfielder throwing out a runner at the plate.⁵⁶ Dyersville's famous Tom Jenk Sr., whose baseball talent allowed him to play all over the world, playfully remembered a severe collision at the plate involving his catcher Dale Digmann and afterwards the team was worried when they could not find Digmann's signature toothpick he chewed while catching.⁵⁷ Story after story unfolds and the nostalgia grows.

Even non-players expand the magic of semi-pro baseball. Sue Burger has been the long time organizer for the Worthington Cardinal's lunch stand. Before her days as lunch stand organizer, Burger attended nearly all of the Worthington games as a child. Burger told of the drama that unfolded when the Farley Hawks planned to bring in former

⁵⁵ John Wright, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, December 12, 2009.

⁵⁶ Art Huinker, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Peosta, Iowa, June 29, 2011.

⁵⁷ Tom Jenk Sr., interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dyersville, Iowa, May 3, 2011.

Chicago Cubs pitcher, Mitch Williams, to hurl for them for one game during the Worthington Tournament years before. The attraction was expected to bring in a record crowd. Organizers were anticipating such a financial windfall from the large crowds that rainy weather was battled with homemade tarps bought at a local hardware store. The curiosity of this story does not end there. In the end, the former big-leaguer lost to the local Rickardsville A's.⁵⁸ Other renowned stories of battling rainwater involved times where the weapons were a gasoline truck and a match. Both Dyersville and Worthington have on occasion poured gasoline on their infield and then lit it on fire to burn off the water in an attempt to keep their tournament on schedule.⁵⁹ Nostalgia creates legendary stories.

The great American author Walt Whitman once said, "It's our game. It belongs as much to our institutions, fits into them as significantly as our constitutions, laws; is just as important in the sum total of our historic life."⁶⁰ Hank Davis stated baseball has a certain "mystique that goes beyond hero worship and transcends time. It keeps people coming to visit a cornfield in Iowa."⁶¹ That cornfield, so permanently attached to American baseball, is located at the Field of Dreams movie site which can be found just outside Dyersville, Iowa. Dyersville happens to be right in the middle of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League, which has had a long history of semi-pro baseball. Each story told by the former players of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League could stand

⁵⁸ Sue Burger, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Worthington, Iowa June 28, 2011.

⁵⁹ Tom Jenk Sr., interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dyersville, Iowa, May 3, 2011, and Gary Langel, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, July 18, 2011, and Sue Burger, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Worthington, Iowa June 28, 2011.

⁶⁰ Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 103.

⁶¹ Davis, *Small-Town Heroes*, 346.

on its own as a symbol of the nostalgia of baseball and its effect on the American Midwest. As a whole, the stories show the strength of the league and nostalgia attached to it.

Nostalgia for baseball is forever linked with a father and son game of catch. Throughout nearly every interview of former players, one key influence concerning baseball came from their fathers. The obvious stereotype of a father and son tossing the ball back and forth is as mythical as the perpetual Doubleday legend, but this image can actually carry some weight. Poet Donald Hall claimed that "baseball is fathers and sons playing catch."⁶² It is fitting then that the baseball nostalgia-ridden film *Field of Dreams* ends with the scene of father-son catch. It fits with the longing of American nostalgia.

Not all of baseball is wistful nostalgia. Baseball has a story that is a rich tale with a long history involving heroes and villains who battled in various settings on issues both new and old. It is not the goal of this piece to revisit the entire history of the sport, but instead to open a new door into a baseball world that has been largely ignored. This research has proven that many of the mythical and mystical nostalgia that are attached to baseball are still a part of small town, Midwest America. More specifically town ball and semi-pro baseball, very much unchanged in style and structure from its beginnings over one hundred years ago, is alive in the small towns of northeast Iowa. Despite a desire to move forward, it is necessary to review a brief history of baseball as a whole to understand how semi-pro, town team baseball fits into the larger story of America's pastime.

⁶² McGimpsey, *Imagining Baseball*, 15.

Unlike other sports created in America like basketball, football, and even NASCAR, baseball lacks the concrete historical evidence of having a specific inventor and date of creation. Baseball as a game dates back into the late part of the eighteenth century when people began playing a game that was a variation of the English game of rounders. These contests were played under a wide variety of names including “old cat” and “stool ball,” but they all involved hitting a ball with a stick or bat and running to bases which eventually led to its name base ball.⁶³

The famous legend (now proven to be false) of Abner Doubleday’s invention of the sport of baseball in a pasture in Cooperstown, New York, in 1839, was brought about and advanced from a sense of national pride. Despite obvious problems with the plausibility of the Doubleday story (he was at West Point in 1839 and claimed to have never been to Cooperstown), it was promoted at the turn of the twentieth century by National League heavyweight A. G. Spalding into a place of near historical truth. A former big league player and fanatic patriot, Spalding desperately wanted baseball to have an American background rather a history attached to rounders.⁶⁴ Thanks to the Doubleday myth and Spalding’s promotion, Cooperstown was later awarded the honor of being the home to the National Baseball Hall of Fame and has given baseball history its sense of having a rural background. However, this pastoral mindset is as misleading as the Doubleday story.

The Doubleday inspired non-urban setting is a stark contrast to the actual beginnings of organized baseball. Not to be misleading, baseball in the early nineteenth

⁶³ Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 60.

⁶⁴ John Odell, ed. *Baseball as America*. (Washington D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2002), 41-43.

century was surely played in the small rural towns across America; in fact, the earliest finding of the term baseball was in a 1791 city ordinance in the small Massachusetts town of Pittsfield. The decree banned the sport of “base ball” within eighty yards of the newly built city hall in hopes of protecting the building’s windows.⁶⁵ The sense of rural backdrop fades with the decades of the 1800s as baseball grows exponentially within the cities of America. Remarkably, before the Civil War one-third of all recorded baseball teams in America were in New York City.⁶⁶

Baseball began within the urban centers of America in the Nineteenth Century from men organizing social clubs structured around health and wellness. There were clubs that focused on other sports, such as cricket, but it did not take long before baseball was the focus of nearly every social club. At first winning was not important for these clubs, as recreation and health were their goal. However, as the fan base developed for these teams, the demands for improved performance also grew. As the desire to win increased, the need for a set of common rules became very strong. The baseball team with the earliest list of written rules resembling modern day baseball was the 1840s New York City Knickerbockers.⁶⁷

Throughout much of the nineteenth century the nation seemed to struggle with its identity.⁶⁸ The American meltdown reached its climax in 1861 with the firing on Fort Sumter by Southern troops. The Civil War exemplified America’s identity crisis by

⁶⁵ David Block, *Baseball Before We Knew It: A Search for the Roots of the Game* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 157.

⁶⁶ Warren Jay Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps: A History of Early Baseball* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 72-73.

⁶⁷ Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps*, 10-11.

⁶⁸ Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 9.

physically, psychologically, and politically dividing the nation into two different factions with different beliefs and values. Despite causing the closest collapse of the “United” States of America since the Constitutional Convention in 1787 and killing hundreds of thousands of Americans, the war had a positive impact for the game of baseball.

As devastating as the Civil War was for society in the 1860s, it was able to nationalize and standardize the sport.⁶⁹ Men by the thousands from all over the country were entering the ranks of both armies. These men brought with them the interests and hobbies from their home states and regions.⁷⁰ One of the most common interests to emerge was baseball. Despite the variations in rules coming from the many regions, a popular pastime of soldiers during their non-combat hours was baseball. Even captured soldiers in the prison camps played the sport.⁷¹ The intermingling of the regional differences over the course of the half decade of war standardized the sport. The rules of baseball were still very different than today, but many of the regional differences were lost to a more connected nation.⁷²

With the end of the war in 1865, units from both armies were disbanded and soldiers returned to their hometowns in the North and South bringing with them their new standardized rules for the sport they had played for years. This post-war era created a fertile garden for baseball to grow and expand quickly across the country. Suddenly, baseball gave Americans a common ground and a shared symbol for the rebirth of a nation. Shortly after the war in 1865, William Trotter Porter the editor of the *Spirit of the*

⁶⁹ Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 5.

⁷⁰ George B. Kirsch, *Baseball in Blue and Gray*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), 39-40.

⁷¹ Kirsch, *Baseball in Blue and Gray*, 28, 42-44.

⁷² Kirsch, *Baseball in Blue and Gray*, 116.

Times is credited with first calling baseball our “national game.”⁷³ According to historian Peter Levine, baseball “symbolically permitted an immediate sense of belonging to a larger American community.”⁷⁴

During the years following the war and leading up to the turn of the century baseball went through an unprecedented sporting metamorphosis. These thirty-five years were the most important in solidifying the foundation of what was to become the professional baseball leagues and modern rules of the game. In 1865 there were few professional players and no professional leagues. It took nine balls for a hitter to earn a walk from the pitcher who delivered the ball underhand to a catcher located thirty feet behind the batter. Defensive infielders were required to remain on their base until the ball was struck by the hitter. Bunting was illegal, yet catching a fly ball with the cap was an acceptable play.⁷⁵ Just a few years after the Civil War and despite resistance from some both in and out of the game, baseball moved very quickly from being a leisure activity into becoming a profession.

One of the early players who pushed for professionalism within baseball was A. G. Spalding. Spalding was an early star to the sport who later became an owner and league leader. Spalding justified paying baseball players by comparing them to entertainers. He saw no difference in paying a pitcher for playing a game than paying a piano player for playing a concert.⁷⁶ The first all play-for-pay team was formed in urban

⁷³ Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 63.

⁷⁴ Peter Levine, *A. G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball: The Promise of American Sport* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 8-16.

⁷⁵ Levine, *A. G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 8-16.

⁷⁶ Levine, *A. G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 8.

Cincinnati in 1869.⁷⁷ It is easy to assume that once a completely professional team was established that everything was set to ride into history. However, running a professional team for seven months in 1870 required about fifteen thousand dollars. This was no small sum. Cincinnati's team as well as several other early professional teams folded because they were not run well as a business.⁷⁸ If not run as a profitable enterprise, professional teams are no different than the semi-pro teams of the twentieth century. They will fold.

Despite the apparent financial struggles of many early professional teams, other cities wanted the civic benefits from having a professional team in their city. Just twenty short years after the Civil War, not only were there published standardized rules, but there were two professional leagues playing for a championship; free agency; and African Americans had already been outlawed by major league teams.⁷⁹ By the time the twentieth century rolled around baseball was cemented in the culture and the history as America's number one pastime.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, baseball seemed to ooze into every facet of American life. Advertisers began using baseball imagery to attach their product to the consumer's feeling love for the sport. Even on the political front, baseball offered politicians a way to connect with the electorate. Leaders often took the opportunity to use baseball to show their bond with the people. In 1910, William Howard Taft became the first President to throw out the first pitch at a major league game. Later, Woodrow

⁷⁷ Levine, *A. G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 10.

⁷⁸ Eric Leiffer, *Making the Majors: Transformation of Team Sports in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 42-44.

⁷⁹ Spalding, *America's National Game*, 270-300.

Wilson was the first President to attend a World Series game. As a publicity stunt aimed at portraying a down-to-earth Warren G. Harding to the common man during the election of 1920, candidate Harding announced the starting line-ups for a big-league game.⁸⁰ In 1935 Franklin Roosevelt flipped a switch in Washington, D.C., which turned on the lights for the first major league night game between Cincinnati and Philadelphia.⁸¹ Even today baseball is imbedded in American politics. In 2004, Senator John Kerry came to *The Field of Dreams* movie site to play baseball while campaigning for presidential election.⁸² The 2011 Democrats in Congress enjoyed a rare victory over their Republican counterparts in the 50th annual Congressional Baseball Game. The GOP has dominated the series over the course of the last half century.⁸³

By 1930, baseball as an entity was still maturing slowly but the professional leagues were not. Thanks to players like Babe Ruth the popularity of the Major Leagues was rolling along through the tough times of the Depression and baseball was ready to explode after the 1941 season when Boston's Ted Williams hit over .400 and Yankee's outfielder Joe DiMaggio hit successfully in fifty-six consecutive games.⁸⁴ However, when the United States entered World War II in December of 1941 there was a real concern among the Major League owners whether baseball would or maybe more importantly "should" continue. In January of 1942, baseball's commissioner Judge Keneshaw Landis wrote to President Franklin Roosevelt asking very frankly whether

⁸⁰ Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 73-76.

⁸¹ Pope, *Patriotic Games*, 73-76.

⁸² "Kerry, Vilsack Play Ball at Field of Dreams," *Dyersville Commercial*, July 7, 2004, 1A.

⁸³ Greg Clary, "Democrats best Republicans in Congressional Baseball," CNN.com July 15, 2011. http://articles.cnn.com/2011-07-15/politics/congressional.baseball_1_congressional-baseball-game-democrats-republicans?_s=PM:POLITICS (accessed March 16, 2011).

⁸⁴ Ward and Burns, *Baseball*, 270-273.

baseball “should continue to operate.” Roosevelt’s response was an emphatic “yes.” Roosevelt felt baseball not only should continue but baseball “must” continue. The President stated that even if the quality of baseball was diminished because of players entering military service that baseball was important as an uplifting distraction.⁸⁵

Even if the quality of baseball being played during WWII diminished, the interest did not. Just as the President predicted, baseball did provide a distraction for many from the stresses of the war. With many of the best players in the country entering the service, baseball had to find ways to be played. The All American Girls Baseball League was brain child of Chicago Cubs owner Philip Wrigley.⁸⁶ In 1941 an eight team semi-pro league formed in New England organized around the National Defense Industry.⁸⁷ Even in the oppressive conditions of the Japanese Internment Camps, teams of internees formed and competed in leagues.⁸⁸

The war brought many changes to the world of baseball. Just as the professional teams lost stars from their ranks, on the local level many semi-pro teams suffered the loss of players to the war effort. Rationing also affected leagues as teams and fans struggled to afford to be able to drive to games.⁸⁹ Another side effect of rationing was the lack of

⁸⁵ Odell, ed., *Baseball as America*, 60-61.

⁸⁶ Jeneane Lesko, “League History,” Official Website of the AAGPBL, <http://www.aagpbl.org/index.cfm/pages/league/12/league-history> (accessed March 16, 2012).

⁸⁷ Charlie Bevis, *The New England League: A Baseball History 1885-1949* (Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 238.

⁸⁸ Odell, ed., *Baseball as America*, 90.

⁸⁹ Bevis, *The New England League*, 248.

leather, which was needed for the war effort, caused a shortage of baseballs and gloves.⁹⁰ Despite being hindered by the war's limitations, baseball pressed ahead.

The decade of 1940s brought the beginning of the end of segregation within baseball. The 1950s ushered in a great time of prosperity for America and for baseball. With the inclusion of African Americans in the Major Leagues, the level of play increased along with the size of the fan base in the nation. It seemed there was no stopping baseball as it rolled into the modern decades of the 1960s, 1970s, and beyond. But there were speed bumps along the way.

The new era of baseball has changed the game as age-old records have been broken, free agency has been established, labor strikes have occurred, and steroid scandals have marred the innocence of the sport. This is no longer the sport of Cap Anson and Babe Ruth. More importantly, this big league baseball is not the sport of semi-pro baseball. For all the technological advancements allowing people to connect with sports, professional baseball on the Major League level has lost its connection with the people.

As time goes on, the sport has been used by others to build connections. Those early decades of the twentieth century laid the foundation for town team baseball. All across the nation teams and then leagues were formed on a local level. Teams always had some sort of link with their immediate surroundings. Many were truly town teams representing their resident city. In other areas the industrial leagues were formed consisting of teams centered around businesses where workers might be hired solely for

⁹⁰ William E. Akin, *West Virginia Baseball: A History 1865-2000* (Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), 156.

their baseball skills. Still, other teams were designed around a certain religion or race. With such deep emotional attachment to a team it is easy to see how baseball crept into every aspect of America. Baseball became more than what you do in your free time, it became who you were.

It is clear that baseball does not originate solely from the rural ideal put forth by the Doubleday myth, yet throughout the last one hundred and fifty years baseball has continued to have a pastoral backdrop.⁹¹ This can be seen even in our baseball fiction. In W. P. Kinsella's popular baseball novels, the author paints a picture of the dark, filthy, and joyless cities, while baseball landscapes tend to contain imagery of bright sunny days and warmth while playing ball in a lush green surrounding.⁹²

This false imagery created by the American mind is not exclusive to baseball. When Americans think of founding father George Washington their thoughts are not of a large plantation owner who possessed slaves, but instead of a simple farmer-statesman. Most Americans consider General Custer a glorious leader who fell victim to a Native American assault, rather than a self-promoting glory-hound whose battlefield errors cost hundreds of brave cavalymen their lives. Baseball's phony representations are everywhere from Doubleday's Cooperstown to the *Field of Dreams* site in Dyersville.

With the creation of professional baseball in Cincinnati in 1869 and the formation of the National League in 1876, baseball now existed as a business, leaving nearly all pastoral images behind. Modern images of the sport bring to mind stadiums built in the heart of urban metropolises or perhaps suburban outskirts. Ticket sales, television deals,

⁹¹ McGimpsey, *Imagining Baseball*, 67.

⁹² McGimpsey, *Imagining*, 38.

contract negotiations, and free agency have come to overshadow the reflections and rural ideals. Many of these issues are not new to professional baseball. Several concerns have been a part of baseball since the sport's birth. In 1890 John Montgomery Ward led a revolt of many professional players against the owners of the National League teams who were led by Doubleday myth promoter A. G. Spalding. The main issues at hand were an imposed salary cap and the "reserve clause" which prevented players under contract with one team from negotiating with other teams. Today this negotiating with teams is known as free agency.⁹³

Baseball is more than just a business however. Over the course of its roughly two hundred year history, baseball has entered every facet of America. Being a game of sticks and balls, baseball has obviously been embedded in the lives of children. As baseball progressed through the twentieth century, youth leagues such as American Legion and Little League Baseball stormed across the country. But it was the adults who made baseball more than a backyard game. It was the adults who made baseball a part of the American experience. Starting as a gentleman's game for recreation and healthy activity, it quickly entered the entertainment business. The key term here is business. Eventually, baseball became an entire industry in its own right. Baseball now claims one of the few legal monopolies allowed in capitalistic America.

Even if the monopoly of professional baseball has left the rural imagery behind, the semi-pro and town teams have not. Iowans have continued to carry the torch of small town baseball, thus keeping the nostalgia of the Doubleday myth alive. Iowans have had

⁹³ Levine, *A. G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball*, 40-65.

a great impact on the sport of baseball both locally and nationally. The strength of the semi-pro leagues within Iowa can be traced back to the state's proud history within the sport.

Perhaps surprising to some, Iowa has been instrumental to baseball's history. There are several men from Iowa who have played key roles in the larger story of baseball as the sport has progressed. Despite being from different times and different parts of the state, all of these Iowans have one common thread binding them together: they all played town ball or semi-pro baseball right here in the Hawkeye state during their careers. Some even have close ties to northeast Iowa's baseball story and the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League.

During the nineteenth century Iowa helped with the creation of professional baseball. When the Cincinnati Red Stockings became the first all pay-for-play professional baseball team in 1869, one of their first players was outfielder Cal McVey who was born in Montrose, Iowa, a small town along the Mississippi River.⁹⁴ One of the first cities west of the Mississippi River to have a professional baseball team was Dubuque. In 1879, just ten years after the Red Stockings began the era of professional ball, the Dubuque Rabbits had considerable success led by their star pitcher and future major league player, manager, and Hall of Fame member Charles Comiskey.⁹⁵ Dubuque has had a long relationship with the semi-pro leagues of northeastern Iowa, including having a team currently a member of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League.

⁹⁴ Jerry E. Clark, *Anson to Zuber: Iowa Boys in the Major Leagues* (Omaha, Nebraska: Making History, 1992), 11.

⁹⁵ *Dubuque Herald*, January 22, 1996, 1. Charles Comiskey collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

Not all of the actions taken by Iowa's baseball men can be remembered with pride. One of professional baseball's first stars and another Hall of Fame member was Adrian "Cap" Anson from Marshalltown, Iowa. Anson is well known as a player and later manager of the Chicago White Stockings (presently the Chicago Cubs). Less known about Anson is his role in the banning of African Americans from playing in the Major Leagues. In the 1880s Anson flamboyantly refused to play against any team with blacks on the roster. Ironically, in 1953 another Iowan, Gene Baker from Davenport later became one of the first blacks on Anson's former team in Chicago.⁹⁶

Not only was one of the Cubs' first black players from the Hawkeye state but one of the nation's first black professional baseball players played in Keokuk, Iowa. John "Bud" Fowler played second base for the semi-pro Keokuks in 1885 but later went on to play for several professional teams on the East coast before the color line was formally added to baseball banning their play.⁹⁷

Another Hall of Fame inductee from Iowa who was instrumental in giving minorities representation in baseball was James "J. L." Wilkinson. Wilkinson is most widely known for managing the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro Leagues from 1920 to 1948. Although most of the Negro League teams suffered constant financial woes, the Monarchs were consistently one of the most financially solid teams in the league. Much of this success was undoubtedly due to world famous players like Satchel Paige and Jackie Robinson being members of the Monarchs. Wilkinson, however, was much more

⁹⁶ David Polich, "The Color Line in Baseball and Iowans Who Played Large in its History," Iowa baseball collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

⁹⁷ Brian McKenna, "Bud Fowler," *Society for American Baseball Research website*.
<http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/200e2bbd> (accessed January 15, 2012).

than just a Negro League manager. He worked tirelessly early on in his career for the integration of baseball before integration was a popular idea. Wilkinson played and coached for one of the earliest integrated teams in America. In 1898 the semi-pro Algona Brownies was an integrated club with two African Americans on the team. By 1902 the Brownies were a completely colored team playing semi-pro ball in northern Iowa and barnstorming some on the side.⁹⁸

After his Algona days, Wilkinson was living and managing semi-pro teams in Des Moines, Iowa, where he formed the "All Nations" team which started barnstorming the United States in 1912.⁹⁹ As the name implies, the All Nations was advertised as a team whose players were from all over the globe. This was a bit misleading but the club was integrated with blacks, Native Americans, and even a woman. All Nations was also the home of the world's first professional Japanese baseball player, Goro Mikami, who played under the name "Jap Mikado."¹⁰⁰ Wilkinson's open-minded philosophy carried him outside of the managerial realm and would eventually take him into the arena of promotion and that helped him greatly when he created the Monarchs.

Thanks to Wilkinson, Iowa was also on the cutting edge with technology. Since Thomas Edison invented the incandescent light, the debate over playing baseball under lights had raged. Many promoters had experimented unsuccessfully with playing night baseball. Eventually, the technology progressed enough that the first successful

⁹⁸ Maury White, "Invincible Algona Brownies," *Des Moines Register*, August 28, 1994, 11D. J. L. Wilkinson collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

⁹⁹ David Polich, "The Color Line in Baseball and Iowans Who Played Large in its History," Iowa baseball collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas C. Fredrick, "Connection Began Baseball's Globalization," *The Kansas City Star*, October 26, 2004, C5.

professional (minor league) night baseball game could be held in Des Moines, Iowa, in early May of 1930.¹⁰¹ Wilkinson's barnstorming team, however, beat the Des Moines team by just a few days with his innovative portable lighting system by playing a game on April 27, 1930. Always the visionary, Wilkinson felt the future of baseball not only could include lights, but the future relied on lights. "What talkies are to movies," Wilkinson said, "lights will be to baseball."¹⁰²

Other Iowa ball players, Dow Wilson and Grover Galvin, expanded baseball as members of the 1936 Olympic Baseball Team traveling to Berlin as an exhibition sport. Wilson and Galvin joined the famous Jesse Owens, but their mission was very different. Their task was not to disprove the superiority of the Aryan race as Owens was asked to do, but instead to demonstrate to Europe our national pastime. During the early part of the twentieth century Olympic hosts were allowed to choose a demonstration sport to be played. According to Wilson, Adolf Hitler and his partner Eva Braun were intrigued with baseball. During a 2005 interview, Wilson reminisced over his days befriendng both Owens and Hitler. Apparently, Owens shared Wilson's love for the game of bridge which led to many hours of the game played during the boat ride across the ocean. Wilson sheepishly admitted to being unaware of the political unrest occurring because of their Nazi hosts. Being a nineteen-year-old Iowan he was excited to travel the world,

¹⁰¹ Sec Taylor, *The Sporting News* May 8, 1930, J. L. Wilkinson collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

¹⁰² John Holway, "K.C.'s Mighty Monarchs" *Missouri Life* (March-June, 1975): 84-85.

meet fascinating people, and play the sport he loved. Things like integration and the hatred of Jews had not occurred to a small-town baseball player from Dow City, Iowa.¹⁰³

Of the two hundred and ninety-five individuals inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Iowa can lay claim to being the birthplace of seven members. The aforementioned "Cap" Anson, and J. L. Wilkinson are joined by Bob Feller, Dave Bancroft, Fred Clifford Clarke, Urban "Red" Faber, and Clarence "Dazzy" Vance. Even more than sharing a birth state, each of these men have a shared past within semi-pro baseball.

Fred Clifford Clarke was a player and manager for the Pittsburg Pirates in the early twentieth century. Clarke's semi-professional career began when he was offered forty dollars a month to play for the baseball team in Carroll, Iowa. This was very good earnings when added to the three dollars a day he could make while painting houses in the area.¹⁰⁴ "Dazzy" Vance pitched for five different teams during his twenty years in the Major Leagues which was an oddity for that time. Although Vance was born in Orient, Iowa, in the 1910s, he played his semi-pro baseball in Hastings, Nebraska, where his family had moved when he was young.¹⁰⁵ There are accounts of Cap Anson playing

¹⁰³ Josh Chetwynd and Brian Belton, *British Baseball and the West Ham Club: History of a 1930s Professional Team in East London* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007), 124-129.

¹⁰⁴ James Jerpe, "On and Off the Field," Fred Clifford Clarke collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

¹⁰⁵ Harry T. Brundidge, "Vance Traces Start to His Boyhood Days When a Barnyard Served as a Diamond," Charles "Dazzy" Vance collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

town ball for his birthplace Marshalltown team before he moved to Rockford, Illinois, where he signed a professional contract to play for the Rockford Forest Citys.¹⁰⁶

Perhaps one of the most successful semi-pro players to make it to the Major League stories is that of Bob Feller. Feller had one of the most amazing careers of any major league player. At the young age of seventeen, Feller struck out fifteen in his first start for the Cleveland Indians. Three weeks later he proved it was not a fluke by striking out seventeen Philadelphia batters.¹⁰⁷ Before his twenty year professional career started, Feller played baseball for his father's Van Meter town team. Feller's dad grew up with the dream of being a professional baseball player. This dream did not come to fruition for the elder Bill Feller, so he made it his new goal to get young Bob to the Majors. It can be assumed this farmer did not hear voices as in the film *Field of Dreams* when he plowed under one of the family's fields to build a baseball diamond on which his son could practice.¹⁰⁸ As a mere teenager, Feller's baseball reputation grew as he played for the American Legion team and his dad's town team. His first semi-pro pitching experience for the local Oak Views was in relief of the team's "paid pitcher" who had left the bases loaded before being pulled out of the game. Feller proceeded to strike out the next two hitters and throw out the runner on third who had tried to steal home. As his reputation grew, the job offers to pitch for other teams began pouring in. Just two weeks

¹⁰⁶ David Fleitz, "Cap Anson," *Society for American Baseball Research website*.
<http://sabr.org/bioproj/person/9b42f875> (accessed January 15, 2012).

¹⁰⁷ Paul Wadey, "Bob Feller: Prodigious Baseball Pitcher Who Earned the Nickname 'Rapid Robert,'" *The Independent*, December 27, 2010. www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/bob-feller-prodigious-baseball-pitcher-who-earned-the-nickname-rapid-robert-2169707.html (accessed April 15, 2011).

¹⁰⁸ Bob Feller, "Starts Hurling in 6th Grade," April 17, 1937, Sect. 2 pg. 9, Bob Feller collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

after his semi-pro pitching debut for his father's team, Feller left a family reunion early to pitch for a Des Moines team versus Truro.¹⁰⁹

Feller might be the best example of the rise of a semi-pro baseball player to the Major League ranks. However, the Chicago White Sox's Red Faber is another special story. As with Feller, Faber grew up a typical Iowa farm kid. Faber worked not only on his father's farm but also at the hotel his family owned after they had moved to town. And as with the rest of the Iowa Hall of Famers, at one time during his early career, Faber played baseball for his local town team. The difference in Faber's story is the location of his birthplace. Red Faber's hometown of Cascade happens to be a long-time member the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League. Semi-pro baseball, even in these small northeast Iowa towns, could be a stepping stone to bigger and better things.

None of these Hall of Fame players were able to have long semi-pro careers. Usually, their talent elevated them quickly to the professional level of baseball. Wilkinson is an exception, however. Wilkinson's semi-pro playing days were cut short due to an unfortunate wrist injury while pitching in the Des Moines area.¹¹⁰ Despite having brief careers within semi-pro baseball, each of these players had an important part in keeping the semi-pro leagues alive for future generations.

¹⁰⁹ Bob Feller, "Out of a Jam With a Fast One," Bob Feller collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

¹¹⁰ John Naughton, "Invisible Man Among Invisible Men," *Des Moines Register*, July 10, 2005. J. L. Wilkinson collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

CHAPTER 3

SEMI-PRO BASEBALL AND THE EASTERN IOWA HAWKEYE LEAGUE

The history of semi-professional baseball is very rich but scattered and not well documented. Early newspaper articles reveal teams listed both as semi-pro and town ball before the creation of the professional leagues. In the early part of the twentieth century, larger cities were experiencing the Industrial Revolution and with a large influx of immigrants many urban neighborhoods as well as smaller rural towns struggled for an identity and sense of community. While professional teams allowed urban fans to have a sense of belonging, smaller towns had to create their own hometown team. Town teams gave these rural villages an opportunity to compete with their neighboring towns and create that community identity in a battle for civic pride.¹¹¹ By the beginning of the century nearly every town in the nation, including towns in rural Iowa had a town team and many of these teams played in organized leagues with other nearby towns.¹¹² Baseball was carving its niche into American society from bigger cities like New York and Chicago to smaller communities like Farley and Cascade, Iowa.

Beginning in the 1930s semi-pro and town team baseball started to transform into a centralized and standardized organization. Despite the growing popularity in the Major Leagues during the 1920s, baseball leaders had noticed a significant drop in the youth of the country interested in playing sports of any kind, including baseball. In 1923, John L. Griffith, who was working as the vice president of the National Amateur Athletic Federation, asked the American Legion to start sponsoring sports leagues across the

¹¹¹ Stubbs, *Shoestring Glory*, 29.

¹¹² "Town Teams," *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* 87, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 43-47.

country, which they did in 1925. The N.A.A.F. was a governmental organization that worked in conjunction with eighteen organizations including not only the American Legion, but also the Y.M.C.A., Boy Scouts, Boys Club., Playground and Recreation Association of America, and the National Federation of State High School Athletic Associations.¹¹³

For the sport of baseball, Griffith went even further. In 1929 Griffith convinced the Major League owners to donate ten thousand dollars to hire former player Leslie Mann. Mann's task was to increase the interest in baseball on all levels across the nation, specifically emphasizing the youth programs. The argument was made that without an energetic youth organization in place the talent entering the professional league would dry up. Mann was also to attempt to centralize the amateur town ball and semi-pro baseball leagues being played throughout America.¹¹⁴

During his first year in his capacity as what the Boston Herald called "baseball's lifesaver," Mann laid out the following goals:

- 1) help the American Legion solidify their position as a sponsor of youth baseball;
- 2) get kids interested in baseball;
- 3) lengthen summer baseball schedules so kids are playing more games;
- 4) get permanent schedules organized.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ John L. Griffith to Ernest S. Barnard, President of American League, September 2, 1929, Leslie Mann collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

¹¹⁴ John L. Griffith to Ernest S. Barnard, President of American League, September 2, 1929, Leslie Mann collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

¹¹⁵ Leslie Mann to Ernest S. Barnard, President of American League, October 29, 1929, Leslie Mann collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

The results of Mann's tireless work were almost immediate. In 1930 Mann visited ninety-three different cities promoting the greatness of the sport of baseball. In Texas alone, baseball was brought back into nine hundred high schools and introduced in three thousand junior high schools as intramural sports.¹¹⁶ In 1931 Mann was reported to have lectured to two hundred thousand boys and to have helped expand baseball to nearly one hundred thousand players in the nation. Mann's organization, the N.A.A.F., which became the United States Amateur Baseball Association, was also instrumental in creating eight regional districts across the country. By 1932 baseball had been accepted by the state high school athletic associations of seven more states, including Iowa.¹¹⁷ The lower levels of non-professional baseball were becoming organized.

The Great Depression of the 1930s hurt the finances of many individuals and organizations across the world. Professional baseball was no different. Therefore, the Major League owners decided to cut their portion of the ten thousand dollar budget for Mann's work in half to five thousand dollars. Luckily, Mann was able to keep his entire budget by acquiring an additional five thousand dollars from the Chamber of Commerce of Manufacturers of Sporting Goods. This funding, however, needed to be reapplied for annually and was highly scrutinized by both organizations. In fact, in 1931, Mann took a reduction in salary to insure the continuation of the funding for that year.¹¹⁸ Not everyone was pleased with Mann's progress. For the year 1932 Julian W. Curtiss of the Spalding Brothers Company recommended to the Major League owners that if he were

¹¹⁶ Carl Warton, "Les Mann, Baseball's Lifesaver," *The Boston Herald* July 27, 1930.

¹¹⁷ Leslie Mann, Leslie Mann collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

¹¹⁸ Leslie Mann to William Harridge, President of American League, November 25, 1931, Leslie Mann collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

going to continue receiving funding, Mann move his home from the New England area. Curtiss encouraged a move to the more nationally centered Cleveland, Ohio. It was Curtiss's belief that Mann focused too much of his efforts near his own home.¹¹⁹

Although Mann was not forced to relocate, his financing was eventually discontinued. Despite the lack of funding, Mann continued his advocacy of the sport throughout the decade. By the end of the 1930s Mann was able to restructure, consolidate, and define much of what amateur baseball was in the United States. On February 4, 1932, the final articles of agreement were signed creating The Amateur Baseball Congress which later changed its name to the American Baseball Congress (A.B.C.). This organization created a central clearinghouse for amateur baseball by attempting to merge all other national groups into one body. Officers for the other factions automatically became part of the governing body of the A.B.C.¹²⁰ This national organizational structure is key to stabilizing semi-pro and town team baseball. If and when Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League teams chose to become members of a national organization, the A.B.C. is the group they joined.

Much of the consolidation of amateur baseball came about due to Mann's labors to assemble an American baseball team for the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany. Mann knew that if amateur baseball was not organized for this huge undertaking, the historic consequences would be devastating for the sport. The American Baseball Congress gained a big boost in 1934 when it was recognized by the American Olympic

¹¹⁹ Julian W. Curtiss to John A. Heydler, President of National League, December 22, 1931, Leslie Mann collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

¹²⁰ By-Laws of the Amateur Baseball Congress of the United States. February 4, 1932 Leslie Mann collection. A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

Committee as the central governing body for amateur baseball.¹²¹ Thanks to the preparations for the 1936 Olympics there were a clear set of criteria created for being considered an amateur baseball player. This criterion creates a set of rules governing amateur status.

The minutes for the first meeting of what would become the U.S. Olympic Baseball Committee show that there was much discussion and debate on whom should be eligible for the Olympics. Since baseball was to be an exhibition sport (baseball did not become an official Olympic sport until much later), the committee was given the power to choose its players in any manner it desired. Mann, who was voted secretary of the committee, and the other members wanted the players to be amateurs and also did not want their group to select the team. The desire was for a national tournament to draw interest in baseball and create a drive to win. According to committee member George Long, under the current system the only goal for high school and college baseball players was their high school and college championships. The problem Long lamented was that 27% of boys in America attended high school and only 17% attended college. If the Olympic Committee could add an incentive and a goal for teams and players to attain, baseball would grow stronger.¹²²

Hosting a national tournament to choose a team would ensure a talented squad of players for the trip to Germany. However, the committee did not want to overlook quality players who might be playing for a poor team. It was decided at the first meeting

¹²¹ Leslie Mann to William Harridge, President of American League, April 20, 1935, Leslie Mann collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

¹²² Leslie Mann, Secretary of the U.S. Olympic Baseball Committee, "Minutes to first Olympic Baseball Meeting," July 6, 1935, Leslie Mann collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

of the committee on July 6, 1935, that there would be a nationwide tournament to select the best amateur team in America and then a group of selected all-stars would be added to the roster of the winning squad. The next hurdle for the commission became the problem of defining what an amateur baseball player would be.¹²³

The committee used three key questions to form their discussion:

- 1) Who should be eligible?
- 2) Who should be ineligible?
- 3) What constitutes an amateur baseball player?¹²⁴

The committee's discussion listed in Secretary Mann's minutes covered many of the different viewpoints of Americans in regards to amateur players. Mann stated that the committee's greatest contribution to the country would be to define what an amateur baseball player would be. Some on the board believed in the pure ideal of an amateur. That is to say an amateur was someone who had never been paid to play. Other members believed in granting a little leeway on the issue of pay. Still others considered a player an amateur as long as he was not making his living playing the sport as would a professional player in the Major or Minor Leagues.¹²⁵ Therefore, the statuses of the semi-pro players across the country were going to be dependent on the committee's decision.

¹²³ Leslie Mann, Secretary of the U.S. Olympic Baseball Committee, "Minutes to first Olympic Baseball Meeting," July 6, 1935, Leslie Mann collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

¹²⁴ Leslie Mann, Secretary of the U.S. Olympic Baseball Committee, "Minutes to first Olympic Baseball Meeting," July 6, 1935, Leslie Mann collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

¹²⁵ Leslie Mann, Secretary of the U.S. Olympic Baseball Committee, "Minutes to first Olympic Baseball Meeting," July 6, 1935, Leslie Mann collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

After much debate, the committee selected the following as the requirements for amateurism in regards to the 1936 U.S. Olympic Baseball Team and the tournament to decide said team:

- 1) No professional ball player now playing in organized baseball will be eligible.
- 2) No ex-professional player is eligible.
- 3) A player who participates in playing baseball as a vocation (not avocation) will be ineligible.
- 4) Any player, college or amateur, who is under contract to a professional club is ineligible.
- 5) Any player or team who enters a tournament when the objective of the tournament is cash value or cash prize is ineligible. It doesn't matter where the team finishes in the tournament. Participation in the tournament renders the player ineligible.¹²⁶

Where did all this leave the semi-pro baseball players of the nation and northeast Iowa? Scanning these requirements, town ball players obviously were to be considered amateurs, but the fifth restriction appears to have been very limiting in relation to semi-pro players. It should be mentioned that teams in northeast Iowa were competing in tournaments offering cash prizes, however, the current tournament structure did not evolve for another fifteen years after the committee's meeting.

¹²⁶ Leslie Mann, Secretary of the U.S. Olympic Baseball Committee, "Minutes to first Olympic Baseball Meeting," July 6, 1935, Leslie Mann collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

Despite the apparent restriction that had been placed on the semi-pro players, committee members Mann and Harry Wolters both expressed the desire for this 1936 Olympic team to not exclude college athletes who were paid in the summer and semi-pro players, such as pitchers, who were paid just enough to cover their travel costs. Realistically, the committee's attitude was an attempt at a compromise. There were rules implemented, however, exceptions were made so that most anyone, barring someone who had played in the Major or Minor Leagues, would be eligible for the Olympics.¹²⁷

During the time Leslie Mann was working with the Major Leagues and the Olympic Committee in the 1930s, baseball entrepreneur, Ray "Hap" Dumont was establishing his own national organization for semi-pro baseball. In 1931 Dumont saw an opportunity to start a business venture by hosting a national semi-pro baseball tournament. Dumont felt that a more geographically centralized tournament would be more successful than other national tournaments being offered. The National Baseball Congress (N.B.C.) hosted its first tournament in Wichita, Kansas, in 1935. To ensure that first year's success Dumont hired the great Negro League pitcher Satchel Paige to bring his barnstorming team to compete in the tournament. The N.B.C.'s Wichita tournament has run successfully each year since 1935 bringing teams from all over the nation to compete for large cash prizes.¹²⁸ As with Mann, Dumont deserves credit for helping semi-pro baseball survive. The difference is Dumont's motivation was much more the

¹²⁷ Leslie Mann, Secretary of the U.S. Olympic Baseball Committee, "Minutes to first Olympic Baseball Meeting," July 6, 1935, Leslie Mann collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

¹²⁸ "History of the NBC," National Baseball Congress World Series Website. <http://www.nbcbaseball.com/nbchistory.html> (accessed March 20, 2011).

entrepreneurial than Leslie Mann. Whatever the reason, semi-pro baseball now had two national organizations offering post-season competition for which to strive.

Although the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League is not the only semi-pro league left in the country, it is one of the few leagues organized and run in much the same manner as leagues of one hundred years ago. Scanning the lists of current semi-pro leagues that in existence across the country some trends are apparent. Most leagues are currently organized in larger cities and many of the leagues, especially N.B.C. affiliated leagues, whether by classification or by default are collegiate summer leagues. These leagues are organized for the sole purpose of keeping college athletes playing baseball while school is out of session. College players have been used on semi-pro teams since the 1800s and they are still being used in the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League today. These other semi-pro leagues are in stark contrast to the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League which is organized very much in the same manner as leagues of the past: small rural towns with teams consisting of mostly local athletes and perhaps a few college players filling in the ranks.

There are currently seventeen known semi-pro teams operating in northeast Iowa in 2011. Of those seventeen clubs, eight are members of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League: Cascade, Dubuque, Dyersville, Farley, Key West, Monticello, Rickardsville, and Worthington. The Prairie League is another semi-pro league operating primarily north and east of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League with some geographical overlap. There are twelve teams playing in the 2011 Prairie League: Balltown, Bankston, Bellevue, Bernard, Dubuque, East Dubuque, Epworth, Farley, Key West, Peosta, Placid, and Zwingle. Three of the teams listed, Farley, Dubuque, and Key West, have chosen to

maintain membership in both leagues therefore increasing the number of games they play each season.¹²⁹ This practice of playing in dual leagues is not uncommon for teams in the area.

Although the existence of the Prairie League affects the discussion, the main focus of this work is the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League. The continued existence of both these leagues despite trends of failure by so many other organizations brings this piece of research together and supports the trend of northeast Iowa's baseball prominence. The Prairie League has also had a long semi-pro history and has been the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League's neighbor for over fifty years.

Presently, the two leagues are operating independently but there has been discussion over the years about merging into one larger league. Several team managers within the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League expressed their desire for the two leagues to remain separate. The general feeling of the leadership within the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League is that the Prairie League is run less professionally and the quality of the teams in the Prairie League is poorer than the teams in the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League.¹³⁰ Prairie League teams would debate this opinion.

The persistence of the two leagues is an amazing feature in this region of Iowa. While baseball has struggled in many other areas, it has survived in this very rural area of the Midwest. The leagues have been in existence for nearly one hundred years overlapping with each other and competing for teams. The region being studied covers

¹²⁹ Jim Leitner, "Semi-pro Baseball Preview" *Telegraph Herald*, May 15, 2011.

¹³⁰ Paul Scherrman, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Farley, Iowa, January 27, 2010, and Lenny Tekippe, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 13, 2011.

roughly five thousand square miles of northeast Iowa, running from U.S. Highway 30 north to State Highway 56 and running from the Mississippi River west to Interstate 380. Within local newspaper articles, there is evidence of nearly one hundred semi-pro and town teams playing baseball within this area since 1900. It is not an exaggeration to say that nearly every town had a team at one time or another.

There are some advantages to having two competing leagues so close to each other. Each year the Dubuque *Telegraph Herald* newspaper hosts an all-star game between the two leagues. According to *Telegraph Herald* sports editor Jim Leightner, the All-Star game gives the appearance of a heated rivalry between the two leagues but in truth each league supports the other. There are so few teams left anymore that they almost depend on each other's existence.¹³¹

The Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League, as it is known today, was formed in 1975 as the Eastern Iowa League and included Cascade, Dyersville, Monticello, New Vienna, Rickardsville, Worthington, and Guttenberg.¹³² However, the history of a semi-pro league operating in many of these same northeast Iowa towns goes back much further. The photo mentioned earlier of the league champion Monticello club of 1907 is evidence that some sort of organized league existed as early as one hundred years ago. Despite the evidence of the photo and numerous articles on individual games played, the earliest report of a league game came in 1922 when *The Monticello Express* detailed a game between Bernard and Monticello in what was called the Mississippi Valley League.

¹³¹ Jim Leitner, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dubuque, Iowa, November 20, 2011.

¹³² "Cubs season to start Memorial Day," May 26, *Monticello Express*, May 22, 1975, B-10.

Monticello won the match 10-4.¹³³ For unknown reasons the Mississippi Valley League of the early twentieth century could not remain viable and folded.

While Leslie Mann worked in the late 1920s and 1930s stabilizing amateur baseball nationwide, small town stability came to northeast Iowa baseball with the formation of the Maquoketa Valley League in 1929. Reviewing the teams that aligned themselves with the Maquoketa Valley League it is clear that the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League is a descendant of the Maquoketa Valley League. For northeast Iowa, the Maquoketa Valley League was the longest running association of semi-pro teams during the early part of the twentieth century. Despite going through reorganization in 1947, the league ran continuously from 1929 through 1964.¹³⁴ Arguably these thirty-five years could be considered the "Golden Age" of semi-pro baseball in Eastern Iowa. It is during this time that semi-pro baseball went through terrific amounts of growth in popularity.

News articles show that the teams participating in the Maquoketa Valley League varied from year to year. Scanning the league rosters over the decades of the twentieth century, there were several teams that were consistently members of whichever league was in existence at the time. It can be assumed these teams were the core of semi-pro baseball in northeast Iowa. The towns of Dyersville, Cascade, Monticello, and Worthington were rarely omitted from the lists of league teams. When one of these four teams was absent from the Maquoketa Valley roster it was usually because they had

¹³³ *Monticello Express*, June 29, 1922, 5.

¹³⁴ "Maquoketa Valley League to Open Season Sunday, May 12," *Monticello Express*, May 9, 1935, 8, and "Cubs to hold first practice," *Monticello Express*, April 9, 1964, 8.

joined another nearby league in the area such as the Prairie League or the Delaware County League.

Around thirty other teams entered and exited the Maquoketa Valley League during the nearly four decades of its existence. Some towns, such as Guttenberg and Alburnett, could be found frequently in the league rosters but were not consistent year to year. Most likely travel distance affected their membership in the league as they are geographically a much greater distance from the core teams. Towns, such as Farley and Rickardsville, have been strong members in the most recent years of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League but were not members in the early years of the Maquoketa Valley League.

Although the 1930 Maquoketa Valley League was missing Worthington, the other three core teams of Monticello, Cascade, and Dyersville continued to hold the league together. The 1930 Maquoketa Valley League consisted of Ryan, Cascade, Dyersville, Baldwin, Manchester, Monticello, Oxford Junction, and Lost Nation.¹³⁵ In 1933 the league lost Ryan, Baldwin, Oxford Junction, and Lost Nation, but was joined by Independence and Guttenberg. This change moved the geographic center of the league more north of U.S. Highway 20.

A year later, in 1934, the league's center moved south again with the towns of Alburnett, Mechanicsville, Martelle, Mount Vernon, Solon, Lisbon, and Springville joining the ranks. The year 1934 is the first that leaders chose to break the teams into two

¹³⁵ "Monticello Baseball Club Loses to Manchester," *Monticello Express*, June 19, 1930, 1.

divisions.¹³⁶ The 1935 league moved back northward with teams from Monticello, Cascade, Dyersville, Alburnett, Coggon, Oxford Junction, and Anamosa being competitors.¹³⁷ One might think that the constant changing of teams in the league would be a sign of weakness. On the contrary, this frequent rollover shows the strength of the league in that teams were anxious to join the league. It also supports the argument that nearly every town, big or small, had a semi-pro team.

Despite an obvious loss of men to the military during the 1940s, even WWII did not erase the strength of the league. The 1941 Maquoketa Valley league included eight teams from Cascade, Monticello, Dyersville, Worthington, Strawberry Point, Guttenberg, Manchester, and Epworth.¹³⁸ After the war in 1947 there was a reorganization that not only shifted the members to Cascade, Colesburg, Petersburg, Dyersville, Epworth, Worthington, Monticello, and Anamosa but also changed league membership fees and prize money awarded within by-laws.¹³⁹

The study of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League should not be confused with the Eastern Iowa League, which was running alongside of the Maquoketa Valley League for much of the 1940s. Just as the current Prairie League and Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League overlap, occasionally over the years leagues would overlap when teams chose to play in both leagues simultaneously. In 1948, for example, the Eastern Iowa League consisted of Farley, Balltown, Bankston, Holy Cross, New Vienna, Petersburg, and Worthington,

¹³⁶ "Monticello Loses Ten Inning Battle to Lisbon," *Monticello Express*, August 16, 1934, 5.

¹³⁷ "Maquoketa Valley League to Open Season Sunday, May 12," *Monticello Express*, May 9, 1935, 8.

¹³⁸ "Valley League Opens May 8," *Monticello Express*, May 1, 1941, 8.

¹³⁹ "Elect Officers for '47 Season," *Monticello Express*, April 10, 1947, 8.

Epworth, and Dyersville.¹⁴⁰ Members of the Maquoketa Valley League in 1948 were Cascade, Dyersville, Dubuque Elks, Strawberry Point, and Monticello.¹⁴¹

The popularity of the Maquoketa Valley League in the early part of the century showed itself in non-game events held by the organization. The league hosted an end of the year banquet to celebrate the season and honor the league's championship team. Trophies were given and the pennant was presented to the team with the best league record. The banquet was usually held in a dance hall where after the meal there would be a dance that was open to the public.¹⁴² Often, the end of the year celebration would also include a game between the league champions and an all-star team of players taken from the other league teams.¹⁴³

Thanks to the efforts of people like Leslie Mann and Hap Dumont in the 1920s and 1930s there were goals for teams to achieve past league championships and local tournament championships. Under both national organizations league champions would represent the league at the state tournament. State champions in Dumont's National Baseball Congress competed in Wichita, Kansas, for the National Championship. For participants in Mann's Amateur Baseball Congress of which the Maquoketa Valley League was a member, state tournament champions would journey to a regional tournament that was held frequently in South Dakota. The winners of the regional tournament then traveled to Battle Creek, Michigan, for the national championship.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ "Eastern Iowa League News," *The Dyersville Commercial*, July 14, 1948, 7.

¹⁴¹ "Maquoketa Valley League Standings," *The Dyersville Commercial*, July 21, 1948, 7.

¹⁴² "M.V. League Boys to Hold Big Day Here," *Monticello Express*, September 4, 1930, 1.

¹⁴³ "M.V. Loop to Enjoy Banquet at Guttenberg," *Monticello Express*, September 10, 1931, 1.

¹⁴⁴ "Cubs Open Season with Home Game," *Monticello Express*, May 27, 1965, 8.

Dyersville's semi-pro team, the Whitehawks, were able to make it to the national tournament three years in a row from 1961-1963.¹⁴⁵

As the 1960s rolled across the U.S., semi-pro and town ball leagues in other areas of the nation were struggling to survive. Although the teams in the Maquoketa Valley league were not as endangered as some others in the country, in 1964 discussions were held among the teams about reorganizing and forming a new league. The 1965 season began with the newly resurrected Mississippi Valley League. Like the format used in the 1930s for the Maquoketa Valley League, the Mississippi Valley League was to be organized into two divisions. At the end of the regular season, the winners of each division would then play in a three-game series for the overall league championship. Just as the champions had done in the Maquoketa Valley League, the league champions of the Mississippi Valley League would then represent the league at the state tournament of the American Baseball Congress.¹⁴⁶

Unfortunately, the Mississippi Valley League did not last long. The league faded quickly as many teams dropped out to join other leagues or remain independent. However, a few short seasons later the Delaware County League, which had existed in years past, was resurrected with many of the Mississippi Valley League teams to replace that failed association. The Delaware County League continued with the two division format that it had inherited from the Mississippi Valley League and the Maquoketa Valley League. Teams competing in the East Division were Independence, Winthrop,

¹⁴⁵ Dale Digmann Interview by Todd Hospodarsky, Personal interview, Worthington, Iowa, March 10, 2011, and Tom Jenk Sr., interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dyersville, Iowa, May 3, 2011.

¹⁴⁶ "Cubs Open Season with Home Game," *Monticello Express*, May 27, 1965, 8.

Monticello, and Center Point. Meanwhile, battling it out in the West Division were teams from Hopkinton, Ryan, Earlville, and the Iowa Men's Reformatory in Anamosa.¹⁴⁷ The reformatory has an interesting history of hosting a baseball team of its own early in the 1900s. Despite not being able to travel to play away games, the Anamosa Reformatory Grays, later known as the Snappers, usually boasted a strong team. The Delaware County League existed for seven years from 1967 until the formation of the current Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League in 1975.¹⁴⁸

According to the current Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League President Paul Scherrman, the new league was created out of desire for a night league. There were several teams in the area that wanted to go away from the Sunday afternoon games which had been the norm for both town ball and semi-pro teams since the 1800s. Lights were, therefore, an obvious requirement to be in the league.¹⁴⁹ There were several Delaware County League teams on the western fringe of the league that did not have lights and the geographic center once again shifted north and east.

After its inaugural season the 1976 Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League was expanded from seven to ten teams and was once again split into two divisions. The South Division included Monticello, Wyoming, Cascade, Hopkinton, and Worthington. The North Division involved Dyersville, New Vienna, Petersburg, Guttenberg, and Rickardsville.¹⁵⁰ Teams within a division would play each other twice per season and would play members

¹⁴⁷ "Monti Cubs Start Season May 29," *Monticello Express*, May 23, 1974, B-8.

¹⁴⁸ "Monti Cubs Start Season May 29," *Monticello Express*, May 23, 1974, B-8, and Lenny Tekippe, interview by Todd Hospodarsky. Personal interview. Monticello, Iowa, January 13, 2011.

¹⁴⁹ Paul Scherrman, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Farley, Iowa, January 27, 2010.

¹⁵⁰ Paul Scherrman, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Farley, Iowa, January 27, 2010.

of the other division once per season.¹⁵¹ At the end of the season the division leaders would still play each other in a playoff to select the league champion. The 1976 season also began a tradition of having a league tournament held at the beginning of the season usually at the end of May. The league tournament typically has been seeded based on the previous season's standings.¹⁵²

Today the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League still hosts the league tournament in May. However, the league has done away with divisions, opting instead for a round robin system where teams play each other twice per season, each hosting a match.¹⁵³ Current participants of the league include charter members Cascade, Dyersville, Farley, Rickardsville, Monticello, and Worthington. These teams are joined by Key West and Dubuque.¹⁵⁴

Despite the advantage of having a governing body to regulate and oversee rules and competitions, there have been times over the years where teams would sometimes choose to remain independent from a league. Reasons for this independence varied. Sometimes the team could not find a league that would accept them and, therefore, had independence thrust upon them. Occasionally, teams wanted to schedule their own games against teams outside of the league, giving them more control over whom their opponents would be. For example, the Monticello Cubs who had long been a member of the Maquoketa Valley League chose to become an independent team in 1967. Team leaders felt they could play more games and find higher quality opposition if they left the

¹⁵¹ "Cubs Open League Play Friday Against Cascade," *Monticello Express*, May 13, 1976, B-7.

¹⁵² "Cubs Team to Start Practice," *Monticello Express*, April 22, 1976, A-23.

¹⁵³ Section 18, Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League By-Laws, revised February 29, 2004.

¹⁵⁴ Paul Scherrman, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Farley, Iowa, January 27, 2010.

constraints of league play.¹⁵⁵ The Cubs remained independent for several years before joining the newly formed Delaware League. Dyersville, on the other hand, has had a reputation going back to the 1940s for playing in multiple leagues simultaneously. Although there were years where they chose to be independent just as the Cubs, Dyersville usually filled their desire for more competition by joining two neighboring leagues.

Once again, the core towns within the Maquoketa Valley League and Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League have been Cascade, Dyersville, Monticello, and Worthington. These towns have been the most consistent members of the leagues in northeast Iowa since 1922. Each of these teams has also played a key role in the history of semi-pro baseball for the league. A closer examination of each of these principal towns reveals reasons for the strength of the semi-pro baseball leagues in this area.

Core member Dyersville has a special place in the nostalgia of American baseball thanks to the movie *Field of Dreams*. In the picture which was filmed and based in Dyersville, Iowa, farmer Ray Kinsella, played by Kevin Costner, hears voices telling him to plow under a corn field and build a baseball diamond. When he does, the ghosts of the 1919 Chicago White Sox team who were accused of throwing the World Series appear out of the corn bordering the outfield. They apparently have come to play on the diamond Ray built. Thinking his mission was accomplished Ray relaxes to watch the ghost players play. When the voices continue Ray sets out on an adventure involving kidnapping and time travel across the country gathering baseball spiritualists to help him

¹⁵⁵ "Cubs will open season with game on June 4," *Monticello Express*, May 2, 1967, B-11.

sort out the meaning behind the messages. That hidden meaning is, of course, that you should play catch with your dad because baseball is your connection to your father.

Playing a game of catch will “ease his pain” and yours.¹⁵⁶

Another town rooted deeply in baseball nostalgia is Cooperstown, New York, home of the National Baseball Hall of Fame. In his book *Cooperstown to Dyersville: A Geography of Baseball Nostalgia*, Charles Fruehling Springwood delves into the American fascination with these two small towns. Springwood states that “Cooperstown is for hero worshippers and those who want to live in the past.” It is true the town appears to be more historical simply by hosting the Hall of Fame Museum. This is in contrast to Dyersville and the *Field of Dreams* site which Springwood claims is an emotional attraction “for dreamers and visionaries.”¹⁵⁷ The film *Field of Dreams* not only touches so many of the emotions connected with baseball but it also draws in the mythical rural connection within the history of the sport.

Field of Dreams has another connection with the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League. Several players from the league were selected to work as extras for the movie, acting out some of the roles of the ghost players that come out of the corn to play on Ray’s field. In fact, an exciting event almost occurred when some of the movie’s filming corresponded with the Great Jones County Fair games being held in one of the league’s core towns, Monticello. After becoming acquainted with some of the players and learning of the league’s existence, a plan was hatched for Kevin Costner to travel in disguise to Monticello in hopes of playing first base for the Farley Hawks in their scheduled game at

¹⁵⁶ Brian Frankish, prod., Phil Robinson, dir., *Field of Dreams*, (Gordon Films Inc., 1989).

¹⁵⁷ Springwood, *Cooperstown to Dyersville*, 9-13.

the fair. Unfortunately, filming ran late that day and he was not able to make it to the game.¹⁵⁸ The attraction to the nostalgia that town baseball still has on people today can be seen even within California movie stars.

Thanks to Kevin Costner and the movie *Field of Dreams*, Dyersville, Iowa, is world famous for baseball. However, decades before the movie debuted, Dyersville was locally famous for being a powerhouse of semi-pro baseball. Dyersville has been a pocket of strong baseball squads for many years. When asked about strong teams of the past, nearly every former player listed Dyersville first or second on their list. Especially during the late 1950s and early 1960s, Dyersville enjoyed a bit of a dynasty period.¹⁵⁹ In the first fifty-three years of the very large and highly competitive sixteen team Dyersville Tournament, the hometown team made the championship game twenty-eight times. Nearly two-thirds of the Dyersville tournaments had the Whitehawks placing in the top three spots. The team with the next closest number of top finishes is the Cascade Reds, with only fourteen tournaments placing in the top three teams.¹⁶⁰ Dyersville's team was so strong in 1962 that it won second place at the national tournament in Battle Creek, Michigan. *Field of Dreams* could not have chosen a more appropriate location in America to film a baseball movie than Dyersville, Iowa.

Hollywood's plowed under Dyersville corn field was created for fiction, but just a few miles south of the *Field of Dreams* site, another of the league's core towns of Worthington can lay claim to using an actual farm field as their first town team diamond.

¹⁵⁸ Paul Scherrman, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Farley, Iowa, January 27, 2010.

¹⁵⁹ Rick Westhoff, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 14, 2010.

¹⁶⁰ "Parade of Champions," *Dyersville Commercial*, July 28, 2004, 5B.

In 1921 the manager of the Worthington team, O.J. Hess, provided the team with their first official field. The field was nothing more than a grassy pasture on the Hess farmstead, but it was the team's home field nonetheless. The club's next playing diamond was another pasture donated by William White where Hess arranged the building of bleachers for spectators. Despite using this farm field for their season games, the 1937 Worthington Sluggers, led by their manager, the Reverend J.J. Breitbach, won the Maquoketa Valley League title playing on the nearby high school baseball diamond in Worthington.¹⁶¹

The current Worthington Cardinals play their games on a beautiful city-owned Veterans' Memorial Field which was finished in the summer of 1949 and dedicated to the veterans of World Wars I and II. Total cost of the field's construction was \$3,300, with all the labor being donated. The Worthington Community Club purchased the land and materials for the new park, concession stand, and scoreboard. The field was christened with a double header Sunday afternoon, July 17, 1949, with Worthington facing Farley and Cascade taking on Monticello. Fittingly, Mayor O.J. Hess, who had donated the meadow for the first diamond nearly thirty years previously, presided over the ceremonies that weekend.¹⁶²

Appropriate fields become increasingly important as the level of play improves for these teams. Just as early stadiums in large cities had to be adaptable to the contour of the neighborhoods in which they were erected, baseball diamonds in small towns

¹⁶¹ "Baseball in Worthington," *Cascade Pioneer Advertiser Commemorative Issue*, June 16, 1999, 2.

¹⁶² Clarence Cox, "Worthington Plans to Dedicate Field," *Cascade Pioneer Advertiser Commemorative Issue*, June 16, 1999, 4.

sometimes were as fluid as the environment in which they were built. Despite teams wanting to instill pride in their diamond, former players recall many oddities and obstacles provided by local diamonds over the years.

Former Monticello player Rick Westhoff tells of both Petersburg's and Rickardsville's right field fences being extremely short.¹⁶³ John "Hoppy" Wright laughed about struggling to keep from getting injured by stepping in the ground squirrel holes that riddled Monticello's outfield.¹⁶⁴ When playing in Cascade, batters, catchers, and umpires used to battle the setting sun in the western sky. Since 1989, the sun has not been a problem with the construction of a great wall that envies the Green Monster in Boston.¹⁶⁵ Key West's Jim Hoerner recalled playing in Springbrook, Iowa, where the batter could not see the right fielder owing to the field descending sharply.¹⁶⁶ Although these odd quirks were a nuisance for the players, they also have added character to the stories told.

After World War II many town teams felt that night games would offer opportunities for the teams to play more games. To be able to host night games, however, teams obviously had to install lights. Each town advanced into the modern era of baseball at a different pace. Both Worthington and Monticello inaugurated their lights

¹⁶³ Rick Westhoff, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 14, 2010.

¹⁶⁴ John Wright, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, December 12, 2009.

¹⁶⁵ Pat Weber, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Cascade, Iowa, July 25, 2011.

¹⁶⁶ Jim Hoerner, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dubuque, Iowa, July 12, 2011.

during the 1950 season.¹⁶⁷ Independence started discussing how to pay for their lights in 1955 and was able to install them shortly thereafter.¹⁶⁸ Twenty years later, the formation of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League was in response to the desire for a completely night-game league. It took time, but, eventually, J. L. Wilkinson's vision of night baseball became a staple for small towns.

It is not hard to see the importance of lights. The first half of the century saw that without lights, games needed to be played during the daylight hours. Since baseball was not these men's profession, as they are designated semi-pro, they needed to work during the day and some players might work six days a week. This left Sunday as the only day when teams could play. Until the late 1940s and early 1950s when lights began to be more commonly installed at the diamonds of the semi-pro teams, Sunday games were the norm. Not everywhere were these Sunday games popular. In 1903 both Indiana and Alabama passed bills banning Sunday baseball games due to the Sabbath.¹⁶⁹ Even in states where there were not regulations, church pressures affected the availability of men. Lights relieved some of that pressure.

With the addition of lights moving baseball games to the evening, the next logical step for these games was to move away from the weekends and into the work week. For many years most Maquoketa Valley League games were played on Sundays at two in the afternoon. Lights allowed teams to play games during the week after the workday had

¹⁶⁷ "Still Early but Baseball Loop Set for Action," *Monticello Express*, April 19, 1951, 10, and "Worthington Builds Veterans' Memorial Baseball Field," *Cascade Pioneer Advertiser Commemorative Issue*, June 16, 1999, 5.

¹⁶⁸ "Held Discussion on Ball Field," *The Bulletin-Journal*, May 27, 1955, 7.

¹⁶⁹ *Strawberry Point Mail Press*, February 26, 1903, 1, and *Strawberry Point Mail Press*, October 1, 1903, 2.

finished. Lights also allowed for the tournament structure to change. Tournaments could be played over the course of a week or two allowing for the finals on a Saturday night, ensuring a large crowd in attendance.

During semi-pro baseball's "golden age" in the 1950s and 1960s, games used to be more than mere games; they were events. Baseball lured people out of their homes for afternoons or evenings of entertainment orbiting around the sport. Many small towns were lacking for options for entertainment, such as movie theaters or dance halls. For years bands played, parades were held, and prizes were given out. Often, music would accompany games making it a night out for the entire family. Sue Burger, who has managed the Worthington lunch stand for many years, remembers attending Worthington baseball games with not only her parents but also her grandparents long before her brothers began playing for the Cardinals.¹⁷⁰ In Monticello the municipal band frequently would host a concert before the start of the baseball games. The band concert might start at 7:15 that night with the competition following at 8:00 p.m.¹⁷¹

Despite an air of entertainment accompanying these games being played by small town local men (who are not getting paid), there was without a doubt a desire to win. This is very evident in the descriptions of disagreements that occurred during contests dating all the way back to 1904 when the *Monticello Express* described a conflict between the local team and their opponents from Wyoming. According to the article, Wyoming's players started saying some things which the Monticello team did not appreciate. Although the reporter did not go into any detail as far as the language used, it

¹⁷⁰ Sue Burger, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Worthington, Iowa, June 28, 2011.

¹⁷¹ "M.V. League Boys to Hold Big Day Here," *Monticello Express*, September 4, 1930, 1.

is certain that this type of behavior was deemed unacceptable. "Whenever a campaign of rag chewing becomes inaugurated there will be a decided drop in the interest of the public."¹⁷²

Early on in the century, when travel was more difficult and much slower, there were occasions where trains would carry teams and fans to their competitions. In 1902 Oelwein and Dyersville, towns nearly sixty miles apart, played a two-game series. On Sunday, May 11, Oelwein traveled by train down to Dyersville, with a stop in Manchester to pick up more fans. The game went to Oelwein 3-1, with an estimated five hundred in attendance and gate receipts were reported to be over one hundred dollars.¹⁷³ Two weeks later the Dyersville delegation made the trek, with the train again stopping in Manchester to pick up interested patrons. A slightly smaller crowd watched the home town win once again sweeping the series.¹⁷⁴ A few years later, in 1906, there was a special train that took about one hundred fans from Monticello to Oxford Junction for a game.¹⁷⁵ As cars became more popular after World War I, no doubt the flexibility they allowed teams and their fans caused the special trains to no longer be needed.

The sense of entertainment reached a climax with the Dyersville Tournament where a queen pageant was held and a car given away to one of the lucky six thousand fans in attendance. With attendance falling dramatically later in the century, the sense of entertainment began to diminish. Bands no longer played, attendance prizes were much less than a car, and semi-pro baseball came one step closer to extinction.

¹⁷² *Monticello Express*, July 21, 1904, 5.

¹⁷³ "Oelwein Wins the Game," *The Dyersville Commercial*, May 16, 1902, 7.

¹⁷⁴ "The Game at Oelwein," *The Dyersville Commercial*, May 30, 1902, 5.

¹⁷⁵ *Monticello Express*, August 30, 1906, 5.

CHAPTER 4

VIABILITY COMES WITH FINANCING

Financing is important in the running of a baseball team at any level. Whether discussing Little League, semi-pro, or even the Major Leagues, there needs to be some sort of revenue source to cover expenses. Teams had yearly costs such as equipment, paying for umpires and the occasional new uniform expenditure. As leagues were formed and by-laws written over the years, membership fees were collected for participation in the league and also any national organization. Similarly, entry fees are assessed for teams to play in the various tournaments during the season. There are also hidden expenses that many, even baseball enthusiasts, might not consider, such as paying for the electricity for the lights used during the games. Any updates to the fields such as installing lights, grass, or fencing would also need to be paid. It currently costs an estimated three thousand dollars per season to run a team in the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League.¹⁷⁶ If the money to cover expenses cannot be raised, then the team folds.

There have been a variety of methods used for funding baseball teams for the towns in the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League. The simplest method of financing is to seek donations. There are examples of teams asking for contributions as far back as 1901. Just after the turn of the century in East Dubuque, Marshal Duffy and Alderman Matt Mertes went around town gathering donations from businesses to buy new uniforms for their team.¹⁷⁷ In the 1960s, when the Dyersville team qualified for the A. B. C. national tournament hosted in Michigan, local patrons and businesses donated money to help pay

¹⁷⁶ Gary Langel, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, July 18, 2011.

¹⁷⁷ *Sunday Morning Telegraph*, June 2, 1901, 3.

for travel and lodging.¹⁷⁸ Although collecting donations is the simplest method of fundraising, it is not always the most successful or commonly used. In fact, an attempt to raise donated funds was made by Paul Scherrman, the manager of the Farley Hawks. In the mid-1970s Scherrman asked local businesses to contribute money for the purchase of new uniforms for the Hawks. According to Scherrman, this experience left him with such an unpleasant feeling that he vowed to never ask for charity again.¹⁷⁹ Currently, the most common use of philanthropy by teams occurs when local tournaments use donated items or cash for prize giveaways to players and fans.

Concessions and, in some cases, alcohol sales from lunch stands bring in a great deal of revenue for teams. In Monticello, when the Cubs lost their diamond and began playing their games on the local high school diamond, they also lost the ability to have a lunch stand which had been a large part of their revenue source. A private donor kept the team afloat for several years until they were able to establish another source of income in the form of an annual golf tournament.¹⁸⁰

In earlier times when the fan base for teams was larger and crowds for weekly games were larger, admission to games and tournaments was a significant income source for teams. Several teams have offered season tickets, which were more popular during the decades of the 1950s and 1960s than currently. Two of Monticello's former managers, John Wright and Rick Westhoff, both tell of going to various businesses in town to sell season tickets knowing the businessmen had never attended a game. In a

¹⁷⁸ Tom Jenk Sr., interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dyersville, Iowa, May 3, 2011.

¹⁷⁹ Paul Scherrman, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Farley, Iowa, January 27, 2010.

¹⁸⁰ Dale Sperflage, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, April 29, 2010.

sense the businesses were donating to the team but it felt different than asking for charity.¹⁸¹ According to the local paper *The Bulletin-Journal*, the Independence baseball club also sold season tickets.¹⁸²

Admission prices have clearly changed over the years. In 1959 admission to a Monticello game was one dollar for adults and fifty cents for students.¹⁸³ Attendance was waning by the 1970s. The Monticello team gave away one hundred season tickets for the 1971 season to try to encourage attendance for their games.¹⁸⁴ As fan interest has diminished over the years teams have had to adjust their pricing. Attendance has decreased so much over the last twenty years that today a fan can attend most league games for free.

Larger construction projects, mentioned earlier, might create a need for extra fundraising outside of the necessary yearly income. When Worthington decided to install lights in 1950, they needed to come up with a plan to finance the project. They chose an interesting path of finance by selling one hundred shares of stock to the public at one hundred dollars per share to raise the ten thousand dollars needed to install lights at the new diamond. All stockholders were eventually repaid from revenue taken in at the facility.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ John Wright, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, December 12, 2009, and Rick Westhoff, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 14, 2010.

¹⁸² "Independence to Face Dysart in Corn Valley Opener Sunday," *The Bulletin-Journal*, May 11, 1962, 9.

¹⁸³ "Monti Cubs-Cascade in Finale," *Monticello Express*, June 29, 1959, 8.

¹⁸⁴ Advertisement: "Free 100 Tickets to Monticello Cubs Baseball Tournament," *Monticello Express*, May 27, 1971, A-12.

¹⁸⁵ "Worthington Builds Veterans' Memorial Baseball Field," *Cascade Pioneer Advertiser Commemorative Issue*, June 16, 1999, 5.

Monticello also added their lights in 1950 using a similar type of funding structure. After the passing of his father, Rick Westhoff tells of finding shares of stock from the "Greater Monticello Athletic Commission" among his father's belongings. Just as in Worthington, shares of the stock were sold to individuals and businesses for one hundred dollars apiece. However, unlike Worthington, it is unknown whether anyone in Monticello was repaid on their investment. Westhoff doubts they were repaid, but instead looked at the venture as a donation.¹⁸⁶

Other costs for teams come from fees charged to be associated with a league. Throughout the twentieth century, most leagues, whether they were a local or national, charged teams a fee to be in the association. Even the professional teams of the Major Leagues pay a fee to be a part of that organization. Under the 1947 reorganization of the Maquoketa Valley League, the precursor to the current Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League, membership dues to be in the league increased from twenty-five to fifty dollars.¹⁸⁷

The money raised from the membership dues can be used in a variety of ways by the league. In the 1930s the American Baseball Congress stressed to its members that their dues went toward maintenance of the organization only and any extra money left would be funneled into the Olympic Baseball Fund.¹⁸⁸ In the Maquoketa Valley League, the team with the best league record at the end of the season received sixty percent of the money in the pool and forty percent went to the team in second place.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Rick Westhoff, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 14, 2010.

¹⁸⁷ "Elect Officers for '47 Season," *Monticello Express*, April 10, 1947, 8.

¹⁸⁸ By-Laws of the Amateur Baseball Congress of the United States. February 4, 1932 Leslie Mann collection. A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

¹⁸⁹ "Elect Officers for '47 Season," *Monticello Express*, April 10, 1947, 8.

According to the current by-laws of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League, teams are required to pay a two hundred dollar membership fee to be attached to the league. Teams are then awarded prize money for winning a contest with another league team.

Admittedly, the reward for a victory is a meager fifteen dollars. Presently, at the end of the season, the league champion receives a seventy-five dollar award while the second place team gets twenty-five dollars.¹⁹⁰ These amounts seem trivial, but they are an attempt to encourage competition. In fact, strong competition is so important to the league that it penalizes teams who forfeit games. If a team fails to play a scheduled game the squad must pay a one hundred dollar fine.¹⁹¹

Since tournament and league play winnings are not guaranteed income, and even attendance revenue could vary, other forms of financing needed to be found. One popular money maker for small town teams during the earlier decades of the century was to invite a traveling barnstorming team to play an exhibition game. Barnstorming teams from the early and middle part of the century would travel the continent playing local clubs for a share of the gate receipts.

Most barnstorming baseball teams tended to form around some special niche that would attract fans. These special teams became a very common and very popular form of entertainment over the course of the twentieth century. There are accounts of these teams playing as far south as Florida and as far north as Saskatchewan, Canada. Some of the earliest barnstorming teams were the Cuban Giants, All-American Black Tourists, Page

¹⁹⁰ Section 7, Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League By-Laws, revised February 29, 2004.

¹⁹¹ Section 5, Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League By-Laws, revised February 29, 2004.

Fence Giants, All Nations, Boston Bloomers, and House of David.¹⁹² Since barnstorming squads were common, each of these teams needed a gimmick to make their games attractive to fans. Even P. T. Barnum's traveling circus jumped into the baseball realm in 1912 with their all elephant baseball team involving pachyderms who not only pitched and hit, but also ran the bases and slid into home plate.¹⁹³

With the ban on African Americans in professional baseball and the Negro Leagues struggling financially, many barnstorming squads consisted of black players. The Cuban Giants were one of the earliest groups of black barnstormers. They were a group of black waiters from the Argyle Hotel in New Jersey, but since discrimination toward American blacks did not always transfer over to foreign blacks, they took on the Cuban name and pretended to speak Spanish. The Page Fence Giants were a team of blacks who would ride bikes through town with signs promoting their game against the locals. The All-American Black Tourists would arrive at their games wearing suits and carrying umbrellas.¹⁹⁴

There were other sections of American society represented on the baseball field through barnstorming. As previously stated, Iowa's own J. L. Wilkinson's All Nations team from Des Moines had a mix of African Americans, women, Native Americans, and even the world's first Japanese baseball player.¹⁹⁵ The all-female team the Boston Bloomers, traveled the country during the early part of the century playing and usually

¹⁹² Stubbs, *Shoestring Glory*, 63-65.

¹⁹³ Odell, ed., *Baseball as America*, 202.

¹⁹⁴ Stubbs, *Shoestring Glory*, 63-65.

¹⁹⁵ *Des Moines Register*, January 8, 1995. J. L. Wilkinson collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

defeating male teams. The House of David players were from a religious sect in Michigan where the men did not cut their hair or shave.¹⁹⁶

There are records of the “long whiskered” House of David squad playing teams all over Eastern Iowa. In 1931 the religious club came to Monticello to play the hometown Cubs.¹⁹⁷ Four years later the travelers ventured to Riverside, Iowa, to play the local squad. To add to the attendance draw, the House of David brought with them longtime major league pitcher Grover Cleveland Alexander and Elmer Dean, the younger brother of famed St. Louis pitcher “Dizzy” Dean.¹⁹⁸ During the early decades of the twentieth century, the House of David team acquired a reputation for being a very tough opponent to defeat.

In addition to these nationally known teams, there were local organizations that barnstormed. One team that frequently played in Eastern Iowa was the Colored Giants from Cedar Rapids. They played in many of the small towns belonging to the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League at some point during the early part of the century, including Monticello in 1930.¹⁹⁹ The Colored Giants came to play in Worthington frequently in the 1920s and 1930s and often attracted crowds of nearly four hundred. In fact, one of the contests hosted by Worthington unknowingly led to what was possibly the first integrated team in northeast Iowa. The 1925 Fourth of July match between the Giants and Worthington nearly had to be cancelled when one of the visiting team’s cars did not show up, leaving them with only eight players. It had broken down along the way. Rather than

¹⁹⁶ Stubbs, *Shoestring Glory*, 63-65.

¹⁹⁷ “House of David Takes Ball Game from Monti,” *Monticello Express*, May 7, 1931, 1.

¹⁹⁸ “The Attic Files,” *Riverside Current*, April 22, 2010, 3.

¹⁹⁹ “Colored Giants to Play Here Monday, May 18,” *Monticello Express*, May 14, 1931, 5.

send home the spectators and each team lose about one hundred dollars, the teams decided that the Giants would borrow Les Ament from the home team. Despite not being one of Worthington's stars, Ament managed to get himself on twice and ended up scoring the winning run for the visitors.²⁰⁰

Southern Iowa had their own all-black team at the turn of the century although they did not travel as far. Buxton, Iowa, was a black coal mining town which also fielded a baseball team. In 1910 an interesting event occurred when the all-white and all-female Boston Bloomers came to play the Buxton Wonders. During a time period when many places in the country would not allow black men to talk to white women, these players played a rare gender and racially integrated game.²⁰¹ This attraction for fans was clearly a strong draw.

During World War II, the All-American Women's Professional Baseball League was created from the fear the Major League teams would not be able to field teams. The League eventually folded; but the All-American Women's Baseball Team continued to barnstorm and in 1957 traveled to Iowa in order to play the Cascade Reds.²⁰² The team of women included players such as the pitcher Delores Lee, who struck out ninety-four batters in twenty-two games in the last season of the league for the Rockford Peaches; Betty Weaver, who had a lifetime batting average of over .350; and Katie Horstman, who

²⁰⁰ *Des Moines Register*, August 22, 1993, 13D. Iowa baseball collection, A. Bartlett Giamatti Research Center at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

²⁰¹ Janice A. Beran, "Diamonds in Iowa: Buxton, and Baseball," *The Journal of African American History* 87, no.1 (Winter 2002): 56-69.

²⁰² "All American Women's Baseball Club to Play at Cascade on July 7," *Monticello Express*, July 1, 1957, 8.

batted .286 and had a twenty-nine and eleven pitching record in four years playing in the women's professional league.²⁰³

An estimated two hundred people came to see the Indianapolis Clowns play the Monticello Cubs in a special game in June of 1965.²⁰⁴ The Clowns were a Negro League team that barnstormed across the country playing comedic games in a similar style to basketball's Harlem Globetrotters. In fact, the Clowns were owned by the Globetrotters' owner Abe Saperstein. As with Saperstein's basketball team the skills of the Clowns was not to be questioned. Even though players might bat backward and the catcher played while seated in a rocking chair, the Clowns usually were loaded with talent. In fact, the great hitter Hank Aaron, along with other stars, once graced the roster of the Clowns.²⁰⁵

Special fundraising games could even include contests between local teams. During the 1950s the Monticello Cubs started playing an annual game between single men and married men from the community. Anyone in town could play, although the rosters were usually dominated by their local semi-pro players.²⁰⁶ Eventually, these games were changed to an annual "old timers" game where retired players and older members of the Cubs would strap on the cleats again to play the younger members of the team. These games were quite popular and continued on for more than a decade into the 1970s.²⁰⁷ In 1968 the Monticello Cubs baseball team played a crowd pleasing game against the town's fast pitch softball team, the Monticello Merchants. Adding to the fun

²⁰³ *Official Website of the AAGPBL*. www.aagpbl.org (accessed August 1, 2012).

²⁰⁴ "Cubs Defeat Holy Cross in First Tourney Round," *Monticello Express*, June 17, 1965, 8.

²⁰⁵ Indianapolis Clowns, Negro League Baseball Players Association.

http://www.nlbpa.com/indianapolis_clowns.html (accessed March 17, 2011).

²⁰⁶ "Married Men to Battle 'Upstarts' Sunday," *Monticello Express*, September 9, 1954, 8.

²⁰⁷ "Annual Oldtimers vs. Cubs ballgame set for July 30," *Monticello Express*, July 24, 1969, B-9.

and excitement, the rules were reversed for each team. Baseball rules were used when the Merchants were up to bat and then softball rules followed when the Cubs were at bat. Two separate sets of bases were used to accommodate the two teams.²⁰⁸

Other towns had their own traditional competitions between locals. In the 1920s Dyersville would host their annual game between the “North Side” businessmen and the “South Side” businessmen. Of course many of these men also played on the Dyersville semi-pro squad.²⁰⁹ Just ten miles north of Dyersville the small town of Luxemburg annually hosted a “Dads versus Lads” game.²¹⁰ The competition between team members and their sons no doubt helped strengthen the tradition of baseball in many families.

League teams might also face off against each other outside of league play for a special occasion, such as county fairs, the Fourth of July, or even their local town celebration. Often, these games were used to raise proceeds for the team. In an attempt to bring in a large crowd for their game against nearby rival Cascade, Worthington brought in Mickey Owens in 1947 to play during the Worthington picnic. Owens had been a four-time National League All-Star for the Brooklyn Dodgers.²¹¹

Occasionally, there have been non-baseball related fundraisers held to bring in revenue for teams. In June of 1952 there was a professional wrestling benefit for the Monticello team. A wrestling ring was built in the infield of the baseball diamond where three matches were held. All of the wrestlers were advertised as having been involved in televised matches. The main event pitted Ivan Rasputin of New York City against

²⁰⁸ “Merchants to Play Cubs in Challenge Ball,” *Monticello Express*, August 15, 1968, B-9.

²⁰⁹ “War is on Between North and South,” *The Dyersville Commercial*, June 8, 1922, 5.

²¹⁰ “Luxemburg Dads and Lads to Play Sunday,” *The Dyersville Commercial*, September 7, 1949, 4.

²¹¹ “Mickey Owens to Play at Worthington,” *The Dyersville Commercial*, August 27, 1947, 3.

Gentleman Jim Dobie from Des Moines in a best two out of three falls.²¹² Today the Farley Hawks host an annual youth basketball tournament each March to raise funds for the team.²¹³ Spring also brings the annual Monticello Cubs golf tournament to raise money to fill their coffers.²¹⁴

With the large amount of money raised, many towns have had, and some still have, a separate organization that oversees the team finances and helps raise money for the team. For many years the Monticello Sports Association would set the rules and schedule for the local Monticello team. The American Legion Post in Cascade owns and takes care of the baseball team's field. For over one hundred years the Dyersville Commercial Club has been the financial organizer for the Dyersville team.²¹⁵ For many years, Worthington and Farley also has had a Commercial Club that sponsored their tournament and town team, however, those organizations ceased to exist. Currently, the Worthington Cardinals are run as part of the Worthington Parks and Recreation Department which has a board of directors to oversee the team's finances.²¹⁶ The Farley Hawks, Monticello Cubs, and Rickardsville A's remain independent from any outside organization.

One of the major keys for the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League's continued existence compared to other leagues has been the tournament structure that has developed over the years. As the popularity of the tournaments grew and the crowds increased, the

²¹² "Sports Assn. Sponsors TV Wrestling at Fairgrounds on Friday, June 20," *Monticello Express*, June 12, 1952, 4.

²¹³ Paul Scherrman, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Farley, Iowa, January 27, 2010.

²¹⁴ Dale Sperflage, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, April 29, 2010.

²¹⁵ "Commercial Club Annual Meeting," *The Dyersville Commercial*, May 17, 1912, 3.

²¹⁶ Sue Burger, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Worthington, Iowa, June 28, 2011.

atmosphere became almost carnival like. Historically, tournaments have given teams not only a chance to play in front of crowds of sometimes thousands but also make a substantial amount of money. Teams could earn prize money from performing well in tournaments; but, more importantly, teams hosting just one tournament can make enough money to finance their entire season and more.

Despite the popularity of tournaments within the league, one town was never successful in getting a tournament permanently established there. Monticello tried several times over the years to host a tournament. Regardless of its failure to institute a permanent Monticello tournament the team did have other carrots to offer. The Cubs' advantage over many other teams, even the ones with an established tournament, was the fact that the local county fair is held in Monticello each year.²¹⁷ Although the Great Jones County Fair began in 1853 and the fair did not move to Monticello until 1874, baseball was consistently a part of the scheduled fair entertainment from before the turn of the century through 1992.²¹⁸ The Great Jones County Fair has been one of the largest county fairs in the state with lots to offer teams that played in fair games.

Before night tournaments became possible and viable around 1950, thanks to lighting systems, fair games were considered one of the biggest opportunities to make a large amount of money playing baseball. Just after the turn of the century, the Great Jones County Fair hosted a baseball tournament . . . "For the Amateur Championship of

²¹⁷ Rick Westhoff, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 14, 2010.

²¹⁸ Elinor Day, *Five Best Days of Summer: Great Jones County Fair* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: WDG Publishing, 2002), 6.

the State of Iowa.” The winners also were to receive a five hundred dollar prize.²¹⁹ That is a very handsome sum for that time period. Converting that prize into 2011 dollars it comes to nearly thirteen thousand dollars.²²⁰

For nearly fifty years the typical schedule for the Great Jones County Fair would involve the Monticello Cubs hosting Little League games for local youth teams on the Wednesday of the fair; then the Cubs would host semi-pro games on Thursday and Friday afternoons of the fair.²²¹ Even after the tournaments became the norm, the fair games offered players a chance to play in front of a good-sized crowd and for teams to earn a nice payday for playing just one game. Usual prize money for fair games was one hundred dollars for the winning team and fifty dollars for the losers. Of course, most of the money never left the fairgrounds being spent after the game on the many forms of entertainment the fair offered.²²²

Admittedly, it was possible that not all of the people in the fair crowd were there to see baseball during fair games. Before the Monticello Cubs were forced to move to playing on the high school field, their diamond lay in the middle of the infield of the fairgrounds racetrack. Many times during the fair there would be harness racing scheduled at the same time as an afternoon semi-pro baseball game. Former Monticello

²¹⁹ “Big Baseball Tournament in Connection with Jones County Fair,” *Monticello Express*, August 29, 1907, 1.

²²⁰ U. S. Inflation Calculator. <http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/> (accessed March 30, 2011).

²²¹ John Wright, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, December 12, 2009.

²²² Rick Westhoff, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 14, 2010, and Gary Langel, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, July 18, 2011.

outfielder John “Hoppy” Wright tells of foul balls nearly pelting horses and drivers as they raced around the ball diamond after being hit over the backstop.²²³

The Great Jones County Fair is not the only fair to host baseball games. Contests between town teams were occurring at many county fairs all across the state since before 1900. Monticello’s neighbor to the northeast, Cascade, hosted the Dubuque County Fair in 1900. According to a local paper, Dubuque sent a large faction of fans including a band on a special train scheduled to travel to Cascade. The marching band led the crowd in a parade through town to the fairgrounds where fans watched the Cascade team take on Sand Springs.²²⁴

The Delaware County Fair hosted a four-team tournament in 1937 involving Worthington, Cascade, St. Lucas, and Quasqueton. According to the *Hopkinton Leader*, the winner of the tournament got to play the barnstorming black team called the Black Spiders who once had the great Negro Leaguer Buck O’Neil on their roster.²²⁵

During the 1950s and into the early 1960s semi-pro baseball was exploding in popularity. Tournaments were an opportunity for players to showcase their talents in front of larger crowds, and even more importantly it gave teams an opportunity to make a lot of money. Within just a few years several local towns began a long tradition of hosting tournaments. The oldest of the tournaments from the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League area is the Cascade Tournament. In 1948 American Legion Post 528

²²³ John Wright, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, December 12, 2009.

²²⁴ “Dubuquers at Cascade,” *Dubuque Daily Herald*, August 30, 1900, 8.

²²⁵ “Delaware County Fair August 10, 11, 12, 13,” *The Hopkinton Leader*, July 29, 1937, 4.

began hosting an eight-team tournament at the beautiful American Legion Park.²²⁶ Worthington's tournament began just a year after Cascade's in 1949. During the last sixty-two years, the Worthington tournament has varied between an eight-team tournament and its current sixteen-team format.²²⁷

There is great debate among members of the league in regards to which local tournament can lay claim to being the "granddaddy" of the tournaments. Obviously, Cascade can maintain the title of oldest; however, Dyersville's tournament has been arguably the largest event. Dyersville began hosting their sixteen-team tournament in 1951.²²⁸ This event eventually grew large enough that an annual tournament queen contest was added to the schedule. Each team in the tournament would select a local young woman from their town who would then represent their city and compete for the crown. Winners of the Dyersville queen contest won numerous prizes donated by local businesses. Attendance prizes were also given to fans during the games. In fact, on the night of the 1959 championship game, a new Studebaker Lark Station Wagon was given away to a lucky fan within the crowd of nearly six thousand in attendance.²²⁹ Crowds of five, six, and even seven thousand were the norm for many of the annual Dyersville tournaments. The atmosphere at this tournament was similar to a minor league game

²²⁶ "Baseball Tourney Aug. 8, 9, 12, 13, at Cascade," *Dyersville Commercial*, July 20, 1949, 4.

²²⁷ "Worthington Semi-Pro Baseball Tournament Results," *Cascade Pioneer Advertiser Commemorative Issue*, June, 16, 1999, 8.

²²⁸ "Pairings for Dyersville's First Annual Base Ball Tournament Announced by Committee Last Monday," *Dyersville Commercial*, August 1, 1951, 4B.

²²⁹ Advertisement: "Free! Final Night Free!," *Dyersville Commercial*, July 30, 1959, 3B.

with peanut and popcorn vendors patrolling the stands.²³⁰ The car giveaway continued for some years but as the popularity of semi-pro baseball faded so did the level of prizes. The 1956 Monticello Cubs hosted a tournament where one lucky fan in attendance was awarded an eleven-foot chest freezer.²³¹

Unlike most weekend youth tournaments which operate within one day, local semi-pro tournaments would be scheduled for multiple days. A typical sixteen-team tournament would have four nights with opening round play, two nights of quarter final play, a semi-final night, and a finals night. Off days would be intermixed to provide rest for pitchers. Purses for winners varied throughout the years but usually the winning team could expect to win several hundred dollars. Also, it was common for prizes to be given to individual players who performed well during the tournament. The best pitcher of the tournament could be signified by either most strike outs or by earned run average. Offensive awards might be given to the player with the most home runs hit or highest tournament batting average. Awards for the best play at a certain position, such as catcher, might also be given.²³²

Starting in the late 1950s most tournaments also began awarding a small amount of money to the teams knocked out in the first round of the tournament to reimburse teams for travel expenses. Typical amounts were in the twenty-five to fifty dollar

²³⁰ Sue Burger, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Worthington, Iowa, June 28, 2011, and Jude Milbert, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dyersville, Iowa, May 3, 2011, and Tom Jenk Sr., interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dyersville, Iowa, May 3, 2011.

²³¹ "Eight Team Tournament to Start Tuesday," *Monticello Express*, June 25, 1956, 1, 8.

²³² "Special Player Awards," *Dyersville Commercial*, July 20, 1959, 3.

range.²³³ Clearly this was not meant to be a money maker for teams, but more of a way to cover costs.

By the 1970s the tournaments were still a key component of semi-pro baseball however, the payout for the winners had not grown much in twenty years. In fact, the 1971 Monticello Tournament paid a mere two hundred dollars for first place.²³⁴ This was the same amount as the 1956 Monticello Tournament. Due to inflation, the money was not worth as much. The two hundred dollar prize in 1956 would be worth almost one thousand-seven hundred dollars when adjusted into 2011 dollars, but the 1971 tournament prize would only be worth just over one thousand dollars in current dollars.²³⁵

The prosperity and popularity that baseball was enjoying during the 1950s and 1960s was evident in the number of teams and leagues in existence. During this time baseball was king. In 1948 the Dubuqueland Baseball Tournament was one of the largest tournaments in Eastern Iowa. The Dubuqueland Tournament invited the leading teams from the Maquoketa Valley League, Scenic League, Northeast Iowa League, Turkey Valley League, Prairie League, Delaware County League, Illowa League, Kickapoo Valley League, Iowa County League and a few independent teams from the area to participate in a sixteen-team tournament with a five hundred dollar prize.²³⁶ The next year Cedar Rapids hosted a similar tournament and invited the leading teams in the Buchanan County League, Scenic League, Delaware County League, Tall Corn League,

²³³ "Monti Cubs-Cascade in Finale," *Monticello Express*, June 29, 1959, 8.

²³⁴ "Set June 14 for Annual Monti Baseball Tourney," *Monticello Express*, June 3, 1971, B-7.

²³⁵ U. S. Inflation Calculator, <http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/> (accessed March 30, 2011).

²³⁶ "Baseball Tourney to be Held in September 13-20," *Dyersville Commercial*, August 11, 1948, 7.

Wapsie Valley League, Maquoketa Valley League, Iowa Valley League, Eastern Iowa League, Turkey Valley League, East Central Iowa League, and the M-J League.²³⁷

While baseball was enjoying such an incredible time of growth and success it is easy to see why towns would be able to continue fielding a team. When times begin to get tough in the 1970s and 1980s, teams and leagues started to see the affects to their ranks. America was not the same place it was and baseball needed to work if it was going to survive.

²³⁷ "Eastern Iowa Baseball Tourney at Cedar Rapids," *Dyersville Commercial*, July 27, 1949, 4.

CHAPTER 5

PROBLEMS THAT HAVE UNDERMINED BASEBALL

Across the nation baseball has grown into its unmistakable place as America's pastime. In northeast Iowa many leagues have existed, cementing semi-pro baseball in this region. There have been obvious problems that have occurred at all levels of baseball over the last century. Attempting to break down these difficulties is a painstaking process with no clear answers to the cause of small town baseball's departure. The United States is not the same nation it was one hundred years ago. Some of America's social trends have caused the demise of many great teams and strong leagues.

Baseball, as with any major industry, has had difficulties to overcome throughout its existence. Just as they impacted the American people, historical events and trends obviously have had a large influence on America's pastime. Much of the twentieth century was shaped by the Great Depression of the 1930s and World War II. These two events rattled America at its foundation, and baseball is part of that foundation. There is no doubt baseball struggled through those two decades of uncertainty, but baseball also adapted itself and was able to come out of those troubled times stronger than ever. Especially in the semi-pro realm, the 1950s and 1960s were the golden age of baseball. However, even outside of these mid-century decades, there have been large events and concerns that have affected baseball's survival or, in some instances, brought about baseball's death on some level. When considering factors that have been affecting baseball in these small towns, the focus for this study has been the Midwest and more

specifically northeast Iowa. Sometimes national trends help to explain local tendencies, but, the emphasis is always: what caused semi-pro and town ball to die in so many communities across America? And the important follow-up: Why has this style of baseball survived in northeast Iowa? What makes Iowa different?

Semi-pro baseball gained in popularity during much of the early twentieth century because of its proximity for fans. If a baseball fan from a rural Midwest town wanted to see professional baseball being played they would likely need to travel a great distance to a bigger city. Of course, as new forms of media such as radio and eventually television expanded, more and more patrons of the sport could enjoy baseball without the travel. But the rural outreaches of America have always been the last to enjoy the comforts of new technologies. The number of rural Midwest homes with a radio in the early twentieth century was low compared to their urban counterparts. Television would follow a similar pattern during its period of expansion in the 1950s.

However, to watch “quality” baseball and some might argue “good” baseball, fans had only to travel a few miles from their farms into the nearby town. Today, thanks to technological advances in media, from mid-April until mid-October the ease of watching a major league baseball game is exemplified by the push of a button. Even cell phones can be used to view games, allowing fans to watch their favorite professional teams from anywhere. This technological phenomenon has led the public to forget the effort it takes to play quality baseball. Despite the difficulty in playing well-executed

baseball, the Major Leagues along with ESPN highlights and replays have made the sport look effortless.²³⁸

Up to 1950 there were only one hundred television stations nationwide. As federal restrictions were lifted on television, baseball saw a decline in interest. Fans were now able to watch great baseball, without leaving their house. States with large, rural populations saw a slower decline in baseball in areas where television could not reach.²³⁹ But eventually, television does reach areas like Iowa. Dyersville's former manager, Tom Jenk, blames much of the recent lack of attendance for semi-pro games and tournaments on the popularity of television. For the Dyersville tournament there would "have between six thousand and eight thousand people there for a game." People would be there at one o'clock in the afternoon for a seven o'clock night game. "We don't do that anymore. It's just...TV took over...It's pretty hard to fight TV when you sit at home and grab a Coke, pop popcorn, and not get up."²⁴⁰

One of the key issues for any sport, whether it is children on a playground or adults on an athletic field, is whether there are enough participants for a game to be played. Baseball requires nine players per team and realistically clubs need reserve players if an incident were to happen preventing a player to continue due to injury or penalty. It seems that it would be simple for any hamlet to field a team of ten to twenty young men to play, but town after town have lost their teams during the century. The

²³⁸ Ardell, *Breaking Into Baseball*, 81.

²³⁹ Akin, *West Virginia Baseball*, 163.

²⁴⁰ Tom Jenk Sr., interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dyersville, Iowa, May 3, 2011.

overall size of the population of these small towns surely played a part in the availability of players for teams.

Reviewing census data for the last one hundred and ten years, it is clear that over the course of the twentieth century each decade saw the population of the United States become increasingly urban. Despite President Theodore Roosevelt's efforts to conserve our natural resources through his "Square Deal" for the common man, more and more of our nation's land was being consumed by urban sprawl. According to the U.S. Census, in 1910 just twenty-eight percent of Americans lived in a metropolitan area compared to a whopping eighty percent of the population at the end of the century in 2000.

Realistically, a majority of this migration occurred toward the suburbs rather than the midtown areas of the cities.²⁴¹ The Census Bureau has changed how it categorizes the term "urban" over the years. The 1950 census used urban to describe an area so as to include the rise of the suburbs. As the decades of the twentieth century progressed, the urban population grew larger than the rural population in the United States.²⁴² However, even in states where there were not major urban centers, such as Iowa, population migration still occurred.²⁴³ It is easy to see as people are migrating away from small towns toward bigger cities the number of available players in these small towns also saw a decrease.

The Midwest saw the same pattern of migration occurring in the rest of the country. In 1910 only one-quarter of the Midwest's population lived in an urban setting

²⁴¹ Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century* (Washington D.C.: United States Census Bureau, 2002), 7.

²⁴² Hobbs and Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century*, 32.

²⁴³ Hobbs and Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century*, 7.

whereas in 2000 almost three-quarters of the Midwest population were living in a metropolitan area.²⁴⁴ Following the trend of rural flight, but narrowing the emphasis to the Midwest, brings into focus some of the biggest changes in population over the century. In 1900 more than one-third of the total American population was residing in the Midwest but less than one-fourth of the population lived in the Midwest one hundred years later.²⁴⁵ Obviously, there was a massive migration occurring from the rural farms of the Midwest to the non-rural cities on the outer edges of the nation. This greatly affected the number of available men to fill out the squads in these small Iowa towns.

Clearly, small rural towns struggled throughout the twentieth century to maintain a population that could support a town team, but another factor affecting the availability of players in these small towns was the total number of people in the state. During the century, Iowa's ranking in population size dropped from tenth in 1900 down to twenty-second in 1950 and then dropped even farther down to thirtieth in 2000.²⁴⁶ Population trends show that people were leaving small towns, leaving Iowa, and leaving the Midwest.

Not only is the number of men available to play going to affect the ability of towns to field a squad but also the age of those men also can be a factor. Semi-pro town teams rely on having a population of young men available to join the clubs. The median age of residents in Iowa has risen over the century leaving teams with a smaller pool of age-appropriate talent from which to draw. At the beginning of the century, in 1900, half

²⁴⁴ Hobbs and Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century*, 40.

²⁴⁵ Hobbs and Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century*, 18.

²⁴⁶ Hobbs and Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century*, 29.

of the U.S. population was under the age of twenty-three. By the end of the century the median age had risen to just over thirty-five years old.²⁴⁷ This statistic is important in showing that there were fewer young people to play the game. Semi-pro teams were and are teams of adults, but the clubs required a group of younger players. As team members get older marriages occur, followed by fatherly duties. All of these factors affect the amount of time players can commit to baseball.

The 1950s seem to be more than just a mid-point for the century but also a catalytic time of change in America. Huge changes can be seen in the second half of the century in nearly all areas of life, including music, government, medicine, product development, gender roles, the economy, and sports. Being a male-dominated pastime, there needs to be a look at data regarding population trends revolving around gender in America. The half-way point of the century marks a big transformation in regards to gender. Before 1950 there were more men than women in America, but after the mid-point there have been more women than men in the country.²⁴⁸

Former Rickardsville A's player and current manager Lenny Tekippe brings up this very point and its effect on the smaller towns' teams. "You get a town like Rickardsville, which is basically two hundred people and a farming community around it. We used to have all these farmers with five sons. And you only needed a couple of families to field a team." Today a farmer might have one son and a daughter and be

²⁴⁷ Hobbs and Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century*, 49.

²⁴⁸ Hobbs and Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century*, 49.

done having children. Tekippe believes kids want to play baseball as much as before but there are just fewer young men available.²⁴⁹

Census data backs up Tekippe's theory. In 1900 the common household had seven or more people living in it. By the end of the century that number had dropped to just two people.²⁵⁰ Add to that situation the change in marriage demographics over the last half of the century. In 1950 more than three-fourths of households reported being a married couple. That number dropped to just over one-half by 2000. That trend also followed into the child-rearing category. In 1960 nearly sixty percent of married-couple households testified to having at least one of their own children under the age of eighteen living with them. As early as 1990 that figure dropped fifteen percent to under half.²⁵¹ There are fewer kids playing the game because there are fewer kids available to play the game. If children are not growing up learning the game of baseball, they are not going to play for their local team as adults.

Most former players of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League interviewed attributed their interest in baseball to their fathers. It was their fathers who taught them to catch, throw, and hit. Often being players themselves, fathers took their sons along to semi-pro games. The census found about one-fifth of households were run by a female when it began collecting that data in 1970. That number increased to about one-third by 2000.²⁵² It is well-known that the divorce rate has increased over this same period of time. No doubt the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s has increased the

²⁴⁹ Lenny Tekippe, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 13, 2011.

²⁵⁰ Hobbs and Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century*, 137.

²⁵¹ Hobbs and Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century*, 137.

²⁵² Hobbs and Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century*, 158.

confidence of women in their ability to be single mothers. From 1970 to 1994 the percentage of children living without the presence of a father doubled from eleven percent to twenty-two percent.²⁵³ For nearly a quarter of the boys of America there is a consequence to this trend for baseball; without a father to play catch with, who is teaching the youth to play baseball?

Another aspect affecting semi-pro baseball after WWII was the erosion of the sense of community within many smaller towns in America. Workers began migrating in search of jobs leaving a revolving population without a feeling of community pride.²⁵⁴ *Los Angeles Times* reporter Terry McDermott, who grew up watching his dad and brothers play for the Cascade Reds, believes economic factors have wreaked havoc on Midwest towns in the last few decades. These economic factors have in turn contributed to the health or demise of semi-pro baseball within these towns. McDermott remembers the lumber mill and several other industries employing players in Cascade, but as the four-lane highway (U.S. 151) by-passed the town and businesses left, something began to change economically. Without daytime jobs within these small towns to employ the players, it became difficult and will continue to be difficult to field teams. Players are not willing to commute home from a job in a larger city and then turn around and drive to a nearby town to play a game that night.²⁵⁵

The late 1940s and early 1950s also saw dramatic changes within the American society in regards to entertainment. Baseball on all levels was affected by the explosion

²⁵³ McGimpsey, *Imagining Baseball*, 151.

²⁵⁴ Akin, *West Virginia Baseball*, 2.

²⁵⁵ Terry McDermott, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, telephone interview, Monticello, Iowa, March 9, 2010.

of television. Although semi-pro baseball was surely challenged by television's popularity; attendance records show that it is the Minor Leagues that were dramatically wounded by television. In 1948 there were 448 minor league teams with over 39.5 million fans attending games that year. Just five short years later in 1953 the number of teams in the Minor Leagues had fallen to only 292 teams nationwide. Attendance dropped to just over seventeen million by 1957.²⁵⁶ Rural areas of the country where television's reach saw a slower development also saw a slower demise of baseball.²⁵⁷ Television's erosion on local baseball as an entertainment source was happening, just not as quickly.

By the mid-1950s minor league baseball was in trouble. With attendance slipping and revenues falling, the Major League owners could not ignore the plight of their farm system. The owners decided it was necessary to pump more money into the faltering Minors. Minor League stadiums were updated and teams were pushed to succeed more than in the past. The overall level of play in the Minor Leagues improved. No doubt with newer stadiums and better minor league teams around the country, fans began choosing to attend minor league games instead of their local semi-pro teams.²⁵⁸

Another imposing factor on semi-pro and town baseball was the somewhat similar sport of softball. Softball has not had the longevity of baseball but still has a long history, being invented in the late 1800s. However, according to several of the former players from the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League, the slow-pitch version of softball had a

²⁵⁶ Akin, *West Virginia Baseball*, 157-163.

²⁵⁷ Akin, *West Virginia Baseball*, 163.

²⁵⁸ Akin, *West Virginia Baseball*, 174.

strong impact on semi-pro baseball over the latter part of the century, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. In the opinion of many former semi-pro baseball players, slow-pitch softball nearly killed semi-pro baseball.²⁵⁹

The allure of slow-pitch softball is obvious. In slow-pitch softball, athletes can compete at a higher level of success with a lower level of talent and skill compared to baseball. Most successful slow-pitch players would struggle to perform well in a semi-pro baseball game. Slow-pitch softball is also very alluring due to its time much smaller time commitment. Most slow-pitch teams do not practice, nor do they need to practice to be competitive. Typical slow-pitch softball games are completed in an hour or less. Compare this to baseball competitions which commonly take three hours or more. The pool of prospective baseball players has clearly shrunk over the years because of time constraints.²⁶⁰

The mid-century decades of the 1950s and 1960s brought fundamental changes in America revolving around the television and car. Not only did Americans hit the streets in their cars to drive across town, but they hit the new interstate system to travel across the country. Cars led to the popularity of drive-in movie theaters and drive-in restaurants seen in the pop culture of the time. Cars gave people things to do on a weekend night outside of a baseball complex. Add into the pop-culture a mix of television, bowling

²⁵⁹ John Wright, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, December 12, 2009.

²⁶⁰ John Wright, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, December 12, 2009.

alleys, and air conditioning and the recipe exists to steal fans away from the semi-pro town baseball.²⁶¹

Some towns started seeing difficulty fielding semi-pro and town teams in the later decades of the century because there were other forms of entertainment available. The television for example exploded in popularity after 1950. Another popular indoor activity taking off after 1950 was the attending movies. The movie industry was growing during the late 1950s and into the 1960s due in part to new technologies, such as air conditioning.²⁶² Before air conditioning a common means to beat the heat of the summer was to go out and catch a cool breeze while you caught a ball game. With the advent of air conditioning, people have been more and more willing to spend their summer months inside.

For some towns, undoubtedly, their geographic locale hurt their ability to have a team. When the Boston Braves moved to Wisconsin in 1953, the availability of high quality baseball to watch hurt the interest of fans in local semi-pro teams.²⁶³ Minnesota saw a similar occurrence when they acquired a professional baseball team in 1961.²⁶⁴ The lack of any major professional sport in northeast Iowa undoubtedly helped keep semi-pro baseball a popular form of entertainment for fans.

Many towns started seeing the difficulty of fielding teams as early as 1960s. For some areas the 1970s became worse, then the 1980s extended the drought and by the 1990s and into the new century semi-pro baseball became like an oasis in the desert. "I

²⁶¹ Akin, *West Virginia Baseball*, 170.

²⁶² Thornley, *Baseball in Minnesota*, 140.

²⁶³ Paetsch and Weckwerth, introduction to *The Rangers' Reign*, v.

²⁶⁴ Thornley, *Baseball in Minnesota*, 140.

think it was like everything else. There was less competition in the fifties,” stated former Monticello Cubs player Rick Westhoff. “You know, there wasn’t T.V. Kids weren’t doing the things they are doing now.”²⁶⁵ Another Monticello Cub, John Wright, has similar feelings. “Anymore these kids are too busy. . . to want to play baseball.” And in the smaller towns often the managers get tired of trying to field a team so they quit which leads to the team folding.²⁶⁶

Lenny Tekippe of Rickardsville brings up another issue when discussing how active modern young people are. Over the last sixty years, semi-pro teams have always had a core of men living in town on their roster, but they also have relied heavily on college students returning home for the summer to fill out their ranks. A current trend has many students choosing to stay at college through the summer or working an internship job rather than returning home.²⁶⁷ Former Dyersville Whitehawk, Jude Milbert also mentioned this change. Milbert, who attended college in Cedar Rapids during the 1970s, stated, “It wasn’t as important to have a job back then...If you got a job that was a bonus. We came back to play baseball.”²⁶⁸

Looking at Wisconsin as a comparable example to northeast Iowa there are many interesting similarities and some glaring differences. In central Wisconsin, as with much of the nation, there were teams playing and leagues forming during the first half of the century. With the difficulties facing many during the 1930s and early 1940s, baseball

²⁶⁵ Rick Westhoff, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 14, 2010.

²⁶⁶ John Wright, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, December 12, 2009.

²⁶⁷ Lenny Tekippe, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 13, 2011.

²⁶⁸ Jude Milbert, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dyersville, Iowa, May 3, 2011.

struggled, yet survived. With the end of the war, baseball entered what some call the golden age. Arguably the reason baseball saw such success in the 1950s and 1960s was the groundwork that people such as Leslie Mann had laid in the 1930s. With the organizational structure and stability that the national association gave semi-pro and town ball the sport was able to thrive. Whatever the reason, baseball exploded in popularity and presence during the first decades after World War II.

The expansion of baseball was nationwide but focusing on the Midwest there are some similarities in events and trends from state to state. In 1950 the Wisconsin Valley League was formed and included teams from Edgar, Phillips, Wausau, Antigo, Rhinelander, Minocqua, Tomahawk, and Merrill. The history of the Wisconsin Valley League is not much different than any other league from across the nation. The league is interesting to study because they had great success in a short amount of time but completely died out almost as quickly. Despite being around for a dozen years and placing several players into professional baseball, the league folded after the 1962 season.²⁶⁹ The demise of Wisconsin semi-pro baseball is related to money, as can be seen with the collapse of the championship team from Merrill, Wisconsin.

The Merrill Rangers of the Wisconsin Valley League won not only their league but the Wisconsin State Championship three years in a row from 1951 through 1953. As with many semi-pro teams, most of their players lived and worked in Merrill. For the Rangers their team mostly worked at a local factory that made windows. Merrill and the

²⁶⁹ Paetsch and Weckwerth, *The Rangers' Reign*, 30, 189.

Wisconsin Valley League took a distinctly different course from the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League which may be why their ending was so different.

When the Wisconsin Valley League was formed in 1950 it was a common rule across the nation to allow several out-of-town players per team. However, there was a motion during the league meeting in 1950 to increase that number to four per team. The vote among the eight club managers ended tied four to four. The league president who was from Merrill broke the tie in favor of increasing the number of out-of-town players per team to four. Eventually, the limit was thrown out completely and the players became free agents, being allowed to jump from team to team based on whomever offered the most money. With more outsiders playing for the teams, fans no longer had friends and family to watch play and attendance for games decreased. With the cost to run these types of teams simultaneously increasing with the lowering of gate receipts the semi-pro teams died out and eventually the league failed.²⁷⁰ The desire to continually field quality teams and the cost involved in that pursuit clearly destroyed the viability of semi-pro baseball in the Wisconsin Valley League. Wisconsin was not alone in seeing money matters constrict teams.

As with its neighbors Wisconsin and Iowa, Minnesota has a long and a strong history of semi-pro and amateur baseball over the last century. Minnesota is different from many other states in that it has maintained a strong state organization regulating its local baseball teams. Many of the Minnesota leagues formed in the southern part of the

²⁷⁰ Paetsch and Weckwerth, *The Rangers' Reign*, 31, 92-95.

state because the climate is more supportive to a longer baseball season. Some leagues even crossed the border into Iowa.

The St. Paul Pioneer Press and Dispatch organized the first state tournament in 1924 between eight league champions. The tournament organizers set a player's amateur status as never having played above "D" class minor league baseball. D level minor league baseball was the lowest level of professional baseball for the early part of the century. By the late 1920s there was a need for a more structured classification system in place for Minnesota town teams. Larger cities were classified as "AA" and small towns were categorized as "A". At the end of each season the Class AA champion would play the champion from Class A for the overall title of state champion.²⁷¹

In 1948 a restructuring occurred in Minnesota which included not only size clarification, but also discussion on player pay. The new organization included Class B teams of strictly local residents who were unsalaried players. Class A teams were semi-pro groups from smaller sized towns. Class AA clubs were now pseudo professional teams allowed to freely recruit and pay players, much like the Wisconsin Valley League teams of the 1950s. Many AA squads began attempting to lure players from the Minor Leagues and former Negro Leagues.²⁷²

By the end of the 1950s Minnesota was seeing the same events that had doomed many baseball teams in Wisconsin. Due to the increasing cost of running what had become a professional team, at the same time, teams saw a decrease in revenue as teams across the state were folding. Eventually, there were only Class A and Class B left in

²⁷¹ Thornley, *Baseball in Minnesota: The Definitive History*, 125-126.

²⁷² Thornley, *Baseball in Minnesota: The Definitive History*, 132-134.

Minnesota. In 1986 there was yet another restructuring into three different classes. Class A was created exclusively for the three leagues located within the Twin Cities. Class B is for the semi-pro teams who can hire a set number of players, but are generally non-professional baseball players. Class C, on the other hand, is meant to be like the town baseball of the turn of the century. No payment is allowed and there are stricter recruiting limits in Class C.²⁷³

Many of the circumstance occurring in Wisconsin and Minnesota were also happening in Iowa. Discussions within the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League frequently returned to whom was eligible to play in the league. According to former players and managers, the league has never considered opening up the rosters to traveling players. Paying of players occurs, but has never entered the realm of professionalism seen in Wisconsin and Minnesota.²⁷⁴ Perhaps keeping the players as non-professionals has been a factor for the salvation of the league.

What has slowly eroded semi-pro baseball from other towns in American society over the last one-hundred years? Unlike a math problem where there is a definite correct answer to find and unlike a science experiment where controls can be monitored, baseball's answer might be out of our reach. In Minnesota and Wisconsin money was clearly a deciding factor to their failure. In other areas there are other possible and plausible factors for the failure of local baseball.

²⁷³ Thornley, *Baseball in Minnesota: The Definitive History*, 141.

²⁷⁴ Gary Langel, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, July 18, 2011, and Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League By-Laws, Revised February 29, 2004.

Opinions of the former players as to why so many towns had lost their teams or why some of these leagues had failed are varied. Some of the players think that baseball failed because these small towns lost their high schools which acted as a feeder system for new players to enter the league. Most of the former players interviewed played for their home town high school throughout their youth. Some began playing semi-pro while still in high school, but most started their adult baseball career after their high school eligibility ran out.

When discussing the continued existence of the Monticello Cubs, former player and manager, Rick Westhoff, mentioned the family aspect within town baseball. As with many former members of the Eastern Iowa League, Westhoff was greatly influenced by his father, who also played and managed for the Cubs. In Westhoff's case, his brother Al played and managed the team when their father retired. Eventually, Al Westhoff moved out of the state and younger brother Rick took the reins.²⁷⁵ So, baseball was handed down from generation to generation within a single family.

Wayne Schnier, the current manager of the Worthington Cardinals' current manager, also grew up watching his father, Dick, play and manage the local semi-pro team.²⁷⁶ Key West was managed by Jim Hoerner for years as members of the Prairie League. Now all three of Hoerner's sons play semi-pro baseball and his oldest son Jeff manages in the Dubuque Blues which compete in both the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye

²⁷⁵ Rick Westhoff, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 14, 2010.

²⁷⁶ Wayne Schnier, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Cascade, Iowa, November 10, 2010, and Dick Schnier, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dyersville, Iowa, January 12, 2011.

League and the Prairie League.²⁷⁷ Many of the players believe that when there is not a person willing to take over the management duties and organize the team, then the town joins countless others as a town that used to have a baseball team. Over the years families have passed this responsibility down but if the families are dying out then the teams also dissolve.

It is no surprise that managing became a family run job. Managing a town team is a thankless job. It is amazing enough that young men are willing to take time out of their schedules to play the sport of baseball. It is even more remarkable when one of these players decides to manage the team. Managing a town team is more than just filling out a line-up card. Early in the season managers are responsible for organizing practices and finding players. In circumstances where the town has been struggling to field a team, the recruitment of players is a stressful task. In some situations it has been the manager's role to find funding for the team. As the season progresses into the hosting of games, most managers take on field maintenance and upkeep. The managing of a team is not a paid position and does not offer any sort of reimbursement for their time and energy.

The cause of semi-pro baseball's downfall in most of the nation is a combination of factors occurring in conjunction with each other. Demographic and economic changes have altered the foundation of small towns and the core American family. Increased competition with fads like television and movies for the public's attention as an entertainment choice; and competition has also come from other sporting options, such as softball and minor league baseball. In some leagues teams went bankrupt when the

²⁷⁷ Jim Hoerner, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dubuque, Iowa, July 12, 2011.

hiring of players grew out of hand. Each one of these issues individually could have crippled baseball's existence in these towns over the course of the twentieth century. More importantly is that these factors have attacked baseball at the same time. The combination of these factors has been devastating for baseball's existence. With the exception of maybe the strike of the 1994 season, the Major Leagues have been big enough to weather nearly every storm. The Minor Leagues suffered their losses but came out of the tough times, with the help of the Majors, stronger than ever. The rest of baseball, specifically small town baseball, has not been as lucky and, therefore, has suffered greatly.

This leads to a dramatic question: Why hasn't baseball in northeast Iowa died along with its counterparts all over the country? The answer lays both within the stubborn attachment to nostalgic tradition, but also with the cold emotionless need for money.

CHAPTER 6

A FOOTHOLD IN IOWA

The question that has been the most interesting throughout the interviews with former players gets to the heart of the matter. “Why and how has the league (Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League) and teams in the league been able to stay viable when town baseball teams in other areas have faded?” Nearly every player doubted they knew the answer, yet each one offered their opinion. As is typical, opinions varied in their specifics, but trends or similarities can be found. The two most consistent ideas to the success of baseball in northeast Iowa were a sense of baseball tradition that has gripped the area; and a strong and long established tournament structure, leading to a secure funding source and financial stability.

Whether a player said it directly or they hinted at it, nearly all of the answers revolved around the concept of tradition with a smidgeon of nostalgia. It is tough to date, but at some point in the last one hundred years baseball in northeast Iowa has become an institution that can withstand a certain amount of erosion. Former Dyersville player, Jude Milbert, remembers as a high school player being called to substitute for the Whitehawks and feeling as if he had been “called up from AAA to the Majors.”²⁷⁸ People here in northeast Iowa play baseball. They always have and most people in this area hope they always will.

With the filming of the *Field of Dreams* in the mid-eighties and also with the creation of the Dubuque County Semi-Pro Baseball Hall of Fame in 1987, northeast

²⁷⁸ Jude Milbert, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dyersville, Iowa, May 3, 2011.

Iowa's connection with nostalgia is clear. Many of the former players and managers who were interviewed for this project are members of the local Hall of Fame. Their importance to this sport in northeast Iowa is clear. They are a part of the nostalgia and the story of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League just as Babe Ruth and Jackie Robinson are key to the national baseball tale.

A common theme among the dominant teams from the league is having a core group of players dedicated to their team. Whether it was Dyersville's championship team from the 1960s or Cascade's record setting squad from the 1990s, successful teams are the ones that consistently have players that show up night-after-night to play. "We had twelve guys and they were there every game," said Dyersville player-manager Tom Jenk Sr.²⁷⁹ According to long-time Cascade Reds pitcher Pat "Yipe" Weber, "You have to make a commitment to be there. . .you can't decide I'm going to show up to the Cascade Tournament with my nine best players because it's the Cascade Tournament and expect to go out and win. You know, it's important that those nine guys were there the day before at a Prairie League game in Placid at one o'clock because that game is just as important as the next game."²⁸⁰ Tradition and a respect for the game have pushed household responsibilities onto the back burner in the name of baseball.

In many circumstances, the baseball tradition is as much a family dedication to semi-pro baseball, as a town tradition. According to these former players, nearly all owe their baseball passion to their fathers. Some have fathered their own sons who took up the family baseball tradition. In Monticello, the Cubs were managed by a member of the

²⁷⁹ Tom Jenk Sr., interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dyersville, Iowa, May 3, 2011.

²⁸⁰ Pat Weber, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Cascade, Iowa, July 25, 2011.

Westhoff family for almost fifty years. In Worthington, the Schniers have been a driving force for the Cardinals for the last sixty years. Key West was the land of the Hoerners for years and, when that team failed Jim Hoerner's son, Ryan, eventually took to managing the nearby Dubuque Blues semi-pro team. To the people of Cascade, the names of Simon and Weber bring visions of winning programs. In Dyersville the Jenk name is not only tied to the long time player-manager Tom, but the baseball field has been named in honor of the Jenk family. Tom Jenk's father was also a long time player manager and his son Tom Jenk Jr. has had a successful career coaching the local high school team in Dyersville.²⁸¹ In northeast Iowa it could be said that "blood is thicker than pine tar."

Even if blood ties and town tradition hold a team together, no league or team can survive without some sort of income source. Unlike the Major Leagues, these teams are not businesses so their funding does not have to be in the millions. Yet, revenue must be brought in if expenses are to be paid. Donations held teams together through the first half of the century but could not be relied on for long-term funding. Tournaments have become a large part of the league structure of northeast Iowa, starting with Cascade's 1948 tournament. The continued financial security that tournaments have provided teams has helped solidify their future. In towns such as Monticello, where tournaments were not able to remain viable, other funding sources were key to giving their teams the security needed to continue their existence. Towns that have not been able to find a stable and predictable source of revenue have watched their teams fade away into history.

²⁸¹ Jude Milbert, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, telephone interview, Monticello, Iowa, March 28, 2011.

Rick Westhoff, former manager and player for the Monticello Cubs, believes that one advantage that the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League has had compared to other leagues is the tournament structure. Tournaments have great amounts of hype and can draw large crowds.²⁸² Lenny Tekippe from Rickardsville agreed. Teams that might have poor records within the league still have a chance to succeed by winning in the early rounds of a tournament. According to Tekippe, "It's more fun to play in a tournament. You can have a poor year . . . but if they do well in one or two tournaments, they still have something. They still had some rewarding parts to their season."²⁸³

Financial advantages of hosting tournaments also can play a part in teams continuing to exist. Former star pitcher for Dyersville Art Huinker might have summed it up best when he discussed his feelings concerning tournaments. For Huinker the tournament system has allowed the teams in the area to remain financially viable. Without the tournaments many teams could not afford to continue.²⁸⁴ Tekippe agreed by stating, "So, if the town that puts it (the tournament) on can make money and the teams enjoy playing in it, I think the tournaments will stick around and the teams will stick around."²⁸⁵

In the late-1990s a rule change was instrumental in extending the careers of many Eastern Iowa Hawkeye players and maybe extended the life of the league itself. With the introduction of aluminum bats in the 1970s, the game tilted in favor of the hitters. In

²⁸² Rick Westhoff, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 14, 2010.

²⁸³ Lenny Tekippe, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 13, 2011.

²⁸⁴ Art Huinker, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Peosta, Iowa, June 29, 2011.

²⁸⁵ Lenny Tekippe, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Monticello, Iowa, January 13, 2011.

1998 Cascade had an idea to organize their fiftieth anniversary tournament using only wooden bats. This one event led to other tournaments and eventually the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League to adopt a wooden bat only regulation. According to Cascade pitcher Pat “Yipe” Weber this change to wooden bats prolonged his career many years.²⁸⁶

Dubuque Telegraph Herald Sports Editor Jim Leitner also believes that this new wooden bat rule was key to the survival of the league. By balancing out the power between the offense and defense, games were shortened and teams were able to be more competitive.²⁸⁷

One of the last questions that the players of these town teams answered was, “What is your hope for the future of the league?” There is a definite feeling of deep concern over the future of the league. This is not surprising when looking at the history of semi-pro baseball in America. The sport most certainly is in constant danger of failing. Not surprisingly, each and every person interviewed was staunch in their desire for the league to continue. They did not always know how to make that happen but it is clear at least for these men, that semi-pro baseball is critical to the future of their towns.

Baseball has had such a deep and positive affect on the men from the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League that it is not surprising they want to see it continue. For some of these players, baseball has opened doors to worlds outside of rural Iowa. Many have played baseball for colleges and universities and some have traveled the country to play in tournaments. Baseball even took Tom Jenk Sr. to Brazil to play in the Pan-American

²⁸⁶ Pat Weber, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Cascade, Iowa, July 25, 2011.

²⁸⁷ Jim Hoerner, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dubuque, Iowa, July 12, 2011.

Games.²⁸⁸ For many, baseball was a way to entertain while others use the sport as a connection to family traditions.

Something surprising in the interviews conducted as part of this research was the deep sense of brotherhood and camaraderie that these players have for each other. It is as if they have served and fought together on the same battlefields of war. Many of the players have met and reminisced over the years at funerals of their fallen brethren. As time goes on, the traditions strengthen their bonds.²⁸⁹

Asking random people walking down the street, “What symbolizes America?”, common answers would revolve around the flag, apple pie, the eagle, and baseball. Early on in their lives children tend to learn two songs by heart, “Happy Birthday” and “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.” Since its conception sometime in the eighteenth century baseball has been America’s game. The sport created by Americans for Americans. Baseball is a part of the cultural foundation of American society. Author John Grisham said, “Baseball links generations like no other sport and few other traditions. Our church and family were the most important institutions. Baseball is a very close third.”²⁹⁰ Baseball has been handed down from generation-to-generation for more than two hundred years, sometimes as a game of catch, other times as membership on a local team.

Baseball’s place in American history is undeniable. Just as Elvis will always be the “King” of rock ‘n roll, baseball will always be our national pastime. Other sports, such as soccer, will catch our passing fancy and may eventually attract more fans or

²⁸⁸ Tom Jenk Sr., interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dyersville, Iowa, May 3, 2011.

²⁸⁹ Jim Hoerner, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Dubuque, Iowa, July 12, 2011, and Art Huinker, interview by Todd Hospodarsky, personal interview, Peosta, Iowa, June 29, 2011.

²⁹⁰ Odell, ed., *Baseball as America*, 148.

money, but no other sport can claim the history that baseball has already established. More importantly, no other sport can assert a shared history that ran alongside the nation's past. No other sport in any other part of the world can claim such an effect on a country. Baseball returned the nation to a common sense of community after the Civil War. It gave immigrants coming into their new home a connection and a doorway to assimilation. As a link with the homefront during World War II, baseball was taken to every corner of the world by our men in uniform. From alleyway stickball and farm field diamonds to million dollar free agent contracts and billion dollar stadiums, baseball has grown with the nation and changed with the decades. Despite its changes, it is always baseball and it is always America.

Canadian author David McGimpsey has an interesting twist on the study of baseball. According to McGimpsey, baseball is very much like the U. S. Constitution. Just like the Constitution, baseball is adjustable over time to the changing needs of the public, but always correct.²⁹¹ As with the Constitution, baseball enters our everyday life but we do not always see it there. Even our language is baseball oriented. Just look at some common phrases used by Americans that originate from baseball: playing hardball; being off base; coming out of left field. Whether a fan of the sport or not, baseball's influence cannot be escaped.

The image of baseball depends on the glasses worn to observe the sport. Through rose-colored glasses of nostalgia, baseball is seen as the pastoral Doubleday image of the small town Midwest father playing catch with his young son in the yard by a farmhouse.

²⁹¹ McGimpsey, *Imagining Baseball*, 90.

Perhaps they are even playing catch before the father's semi-pro game. Two distinct generations brought together with the common bond of baseball. But baseball's influence is more than that dreamy picture glamorized by Cooperstown and *Field of Dreams*. Baseball enters other realms, such as marketing, labor negotiations, and even performance-enhancing drug discussions. The sport has created industries like athletic trading cards, memorabilia, and sporting goods. Baseball also can be credited with bringing change to other areas, such as sports journalism.

Sports journalism was invented to bring baseball to the public. The concept of having a newspaper reserve an entire page and eventually an entire section for sports was directly due to baseball's popularity. As radio changed America in the 1920s, baseball was alongside giving radio a purpose to broadcast. And, of course, what was good for radio has become even better for television. Baseball has not only made sports a business, it has taught other sports how to become a business. As W. P. Kinsella said we continue to look "through" baseball, however, the means by which we see through it has changed.

Looking through baseball at the semi-pro leagues in northeast Iowa, there is a rich history of Midwest America. From the beginning of the twentieth century through the 1960s, semi-pro baseball has been impressively strong. Since the sixties there have definitely been struggles. In most towns, the difficulties have caused the death of adult baseball. Even in the towns where baseball has not died, the troubles have led to uncertainty. Uncertainty has put the future in question.

What is the future of town ball and semi-pro baseball? It is clear that it will continue to have an uphill struggle anywhere it still exists. With the many types of competition for the public's leisure time, it is probable that there will not be a return of the golden age when local town teams were the main source of entertainment for the community. However, there is a continued attraction to nostalgia in America which can be seen manifesting itself in the popularity of television shows like *American Pickers* and *Antiques Roadshow*. Fashions regularly return to styles of the past. Hollywood often takes popular films of the past and remakes them in an attempt to profit off the nostalgia. As long as America is around, baseball's connection to nostalgia will always be present.

To the people of northeast Iowa, the ability to keep semi-pro baseball alive comes from the combination of a baseball tradition creating a sense of necessity for the sport, along with a tournament structure that allows financial stability for teams. Call it Midwest stubbornness, but there are some things of which people just refuse to let go. In this part of the world, they will not let go of baseball.

Thank goodness they refuse to let it go. There are few things Americans can enjoy in its original style. Baseball being organized and played in nearly its original form is a rare thing these days. For over two hundred years, it has been the American way to find improvements and to offer alternatives. However, Americans also love their traditions. Semi-pro baseball in these small towns is without a doubt a tradition.

At this time it appears that the nostalgia and tradition of this area will keep the semi-pro leagues alive. Most towns in the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League currently have a yearly revenue source and a leader, that special person who is willing to take the time to

manage the team next season. Fields will be maintained. Games will be played. Towns will continue to host tournaments. Nostalgia will continue. Baseball will survive. How could it not? This is America. After all, it is our national pastime.

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APPENDIX
INTERVIEWS OF PLAYERS AND FANS

Personal interview with John "Hoppy" Wright

By Todd Hospodarsky

Date: December 15, 2009

What is or was your connection with the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League or any other names of league?

Well actually not now I'm not, but for years I was. I never was an officer but, I was an officer on the Monticello Board, you know. When we had the baseball team here we'd go to these meetings in the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League, you know, and vote, vote teams that wanted to come in or if we didn't want them in we wouldn't let them in.

How does that work? How is that Board set up? Who sits on the board and what teams are in the league and that type of thing?

I can remember like Paul Scherrman of Farley was the President. Lenny Tekippe from Rickardsville was the Vice President. Then we had a couple of the smaller towns had treasurer and different things like that, you know.

What years would that have been when you were in?

Well, let's see I quit playing in probably I'm thinking '82 maybe, or '85. Somewhere in there I quit playing and managing. So it would have been in that, before that, some probably in the late seventies and early ...

When did you start playing?

1952.

How did you become involved in baseball overall and like who influenced you in baseball and how did you get into the Monti team?

Back in '52, of course back in those days I didn't have a vehicle, you know. I rode to... Bill Nehl lived out close to us. I rode to practice, because I wanted to play baseball, you know. Because I'd be out at the farm and you have a little flat stick and throw rocks up and hit them, you know. So anyway, I played in the Monticello Panthers baseball team in '52 and Monticello didn't have a whole lot of kids, you know, or players in them days. So, they asked me if I'd play, you know, I was pretty quick. I mean I could run. So I did, I joined the Cubs. I play in not a whole lot of games my first few years, but I played in some, you know.

So is this the same time as high school or is this after high school?

This is mostly after high school. You see we only played on Sundays most of time. You know you could play then both times. They kind of made a law now that you can't do it while you're playing high school ball but back then you could.

What do you know about the formation and running of the league that is in existence today? Whatever you can tell my about finances... How does it run? How does it pay the officials?

Well, you see, you had to have an entry fee. You know, like when we... They developed a league tournament later on there about as I was about ready to get done. And you had to ... I am trying to think, to join the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League if I remember you had to pay like \$150

or \$50 or I don't remember the exact amount. And that was in a fund that they set up to have their tournament and then different things like that you know. That's about all I can remember as far as... you know. And then if a team...if you were scheduled to play Cascade today and they didn't show up, well then the rules say they forfeited the game and that cost them like fifty bucks or something ... They had to pay that to the league.

I think I heard this is considered a semi-professional league. Do the players get paid any?

No. The only time you'll pay a person if you hire him. Like a pitcher, you know. We've already hired pitchers to come in and pitch for us, you know. Cascade does it. The whole caboodle does. Because we don't have enough pitchers. They run out of them, pitchers.

Who are some of the key people that you remember in the formation and running of the league? Who have been the leaders of the league?

Well, I would say Paul Scherrman was one of the best ones that kept that thing going. He was from Farley. He was the manager of the Farley Hawks at that time. He is pretty up on things. In fact I think he still manages. Or he is still involved in that outfit.

Was he around when you were younger too? Or was this later?

Yeah later. Yeah he was a player years ago. He's ... You know I'm probably thirty years older than he is.

So who when you were a kid in '52 like who was managing the Monticello team and what teams were in the league?

Yeah, I remember Winthrop was in there, and Petersburg, and Worthington, Dyersville, Cascade. I'm not sure... You see Hopkinton, they had the Delaware County League, too. So you had Hopkinton, Delhi and all them small teams there they all participated in that league.

Is that league still around that you know of?

No.

When did it die?

I would say, probably about...oh gosh I imagine about 1980 somewhere in there. It's been gone a long time. But that was a great league. That was probably better than Eastern Iowa. They had a lot of teams and they had some good players.

So why do you think that league died and the Eastern Iowa stuck around?

Well you see, you had towns like Prairieburg, Central City, Ryan, and it got so they can't field a team anymore so they just, they had to fold. Delhi was another one, Earlville was another one, Dundee I mean all those little, Earlville. All those little towns had...I think the first game I played with the Monti Cubs was up in Earlville you know.

What players or coaches stick out in your mind over your whole life on the Cubs or any other team that were just...for whatever reason stuck out? Good players, good coaches, or maybe bad players, or jerks or whatever.

Well, like Hopkinton, they had a good player in "Duck" Huber. Ryan they had a good, good pitcher in Leo Schulte, although he couldn't fool me, but he fooled a lot of right handed hitters, but I always batted left handed and I probably hit .900 off of him for my career. I just ate him up. But he was really tough. Then Bobby Meyer of Center Point was a good player. And then you

get up to Dyersville and Cascade I mean you had a lot of good players. You know Dale Digmann, Sal Olberding, they were a couple that were up there. Art Huinker was another good one in Dyersville. And Johnny, oh what's his name I can't think of it of hand, over in Cascade. They had a lot good players. Lenny Tekippe in Petersburg or at Rickersville was a good player when I was about done playing, but you know.

Did anyone go on to the Major Leagues or Minor Leagues or do anything other than town ball that you can remember?

When we had some tournaments around here we had pitchers like Eddie Roth, er Eddie Watt that played for the Baltimore Orioles. He pitched right down here in Monticello against Sal Olenburg of Petersburg. The score was one to... it was nothing to nothing going into the ninth inning and Watt's team Dyersville scored a run in the bottom of the ninth to win it. I mean that there were some really good players. And then there was guy by the name of Jim McAndrews that was from Lost Nation. He was, he pitched for Dyersville, Dyersville always had the ones seems like that if they did go they went up. We had a kid, well he wasn't a kid. We had a guy from Davenport. We went down and played down at Stanwood one Sunday afternoon. This guy came up from Davenport and pitched for us. A guy by the name of Bill Best. He played AAA ball in out in Denver with Billy Brutan and some of them. He got let go and he pitched for us. We went 36 - 4 that year when he pitched for us. Him and Mike Hall. I mean we won, I think we won about every tournament. But we really had a good team that year.

Are there any teams over the years that you remember being especially good maybe outside of that one since you just went? What year would that have?

For us?

Yeah for Monticello or for other teams like a Cascade team or Dyersville team? What year was that team that you just mentioned do you remember a season?

That would have been about, that's, that's, '60, I would guess '61 or '62 in that area. Yeah, Yeah. Mike Hall did some pitching for us in that time. And it went between him and Bill Best. I'll tell you Best had a slider and that was about the time anybody around here had heard of the slider. And you could put him on the mound against Dyersville and they had a really good team at that time. They had the Jenks and the Digmans. He could just check and they were beat. They just couldn't hit that slider of his, no way. That, that ah... Dyersville had some awful good teams. In fact we...me and my brother went with them to the Little World Series in Battle Creek, Michigan a couple of times. They asked us to go. But they were... I mean everybody...Dyersville was the kingpin.

What years would that have been when they went to the World Series?

Well that, I'm saying '67 in that. Yeah, '67 because I, let's see... I'm trying to think. I joined the Sheriff's Department in '66. It was between '66 and '68 I know that because I went, I went to Dakota with them once and then I went to Battle Creek with them.

How's that work? How do you get to go to the World Series? Do they have a State Championship or anything?

Yeah, back then had a yeah, they had a state thing and then you had to go to the... what would be the next step? The division or something and that was in South Dakota. And we got out there and it rained and rained. You know and I don't know if they flipped a coin or what they did or I

don't know what happened then but anyway we won the thing. Got little trophies and went to Battle Creek.

Do you have any idea how many teams Iowa played to become a state championship? Was there a hundred teams or fifty or a thousand?

There wasn't very many, Todd, no. Back then, you know, there, there's not very many teams in the state of Iowa. I bet you, you can't get. I doubt if you could get more than thirty teams in the whole state of Iowa semi-pro baseball.

Even Back then?

There were more back then but I mean now. I suppose there were probably a hundred back then maybe more.

If we go all the way back to your childhood, do you think most towns had a team?

Pretty much everybody did. You take towns like Scotch Grove, Center Junction, no, but you get up there in that Delaware County all those little towns. They all had them.

Those towns probably weren't a whole lot bigger back then. What...Why did they have teams back then but they can't field a team now do you think?

Well, that is all they did on Sundays. That is all they did. You know, play baseball. They didn't have nothing else to do, I guess. And you know you'd have some kids around the area probably and they, they'd want to play baseball. Some of them weren't very good I can tell you that. But they had fun, you know. They'd try to get you out and they'd try to play and that was the main thing. That is what it's all about.

What do you think separated the good teams from not so good teams? Was it pitching or was it the number of players they had to choose from like bigger towns would be better or tradition?

Well, I would say pitching. You know, you could go to Dyersville and they might only have eight or nine players. They wouldn't have very many more then we did, you know. But they always had some pretty top notch pitchers, you know. Gee wiz, those guys are good compared to us. I mean we just had we had guys that could throw it over the plate. We didn't have anybody outstanding. Mike Hall got to be pretty good. Jack Schmitt pitched some for us, but we never had a real caliber high. I think Dave Schemmel could have been really been good if he wouldn't have hurt his arm.

What happened with that? He just threw it out?

Yeah, he pitched for Sacred Heart and just over did it. You see Sacred Heart had baseball too a baseball team years ago. A high school team.

In your experience as a player and a coach both could you explain the league. How many teams were there? What teams changed? Any changes in teams over the thirty to forty years when you were...? Was there always a set number of teams in the league or did that vary?

No, I think, I am trying to think. I broke my finger one time when we were playing for the championship and I wasn't playing anyway. We were playing Winthrop. And they were in and Independence but see and I think there was like Worthington, Dyersville, Cascade and us and that was it was probably it then. Just six. I think that was all there were, you know.

And then different teams...I know you mentioned earlier, Farley and Rickardsville so they kind of come in and go?

A little later on you know they you see I think that thing broke up. I think Winthrop they didn't have a team and then Independence they didn't have a team. So then we got in with this other league you know. We joined with Cascade and well... they got ... well even Wyoming down... Wyoming used to have a team years ago, but I don't think they were in a league. Lowden was...Lowden had a real good baseball team years ago. They were...

What range years was that roughly?

I'd say in the seventies and early eighties. The seventies and early eighties they were one of the top notch teams around. They had a Cornbelt League down there they called it.

Give me a couple of names of people down there that were on that team. Can you remember any?

Oh yeah, Scott Olson, what's his first name? Paul Olson was pretty darn good and there was ah... Oh my there was three of those... I can't think of his...He had three boys that played and they all played and they were top notch. Then there was Marty Sheepest he was a good player for Lowden. Daryl Barney was a pretty good pitcher in fact once in a while we got some of them players from Lowden to come up here and play for us if we were short in some of these tournaments you know.

Did that happen a lot where teams trade players? Would Monti guys play for Cascade if they needed?

Yeah, yeah you just call them up and say you know we got a game we need you if you can come. And Oh yeah they'll come you know. Most of the time you didn't have to give them anything. Once and while you pay them a little bit of something. You know back in them days we didn't have any money. I mean the only way that we funded to pay for our lights and our uniforms is that we had season tickets that we had printed and we would go to the businesses in Monticello. And we'd go in a say "we've got the season tickets, how many would you like?" And a lot of them would take... they hardly ever got turned down. They would buy one or two or some of them would buy ten. You know like Energy or Cuckler they'd buy ten tickets. I think they were five bucks apiece, you know. Well it was more of a donation then anything. You know a lot of those people never come. But we'd get, I mean sometimes that added up. We'd have about eight or ten of us baseball players go around. We'd have certain businesses and people that we'd see and we'd do that. And that's how, that's the only reason that we could buy uniforms and bats and bases. I mean we had ah, that all had to come from us.

How do/did teams get their players? Are there try outs? Is there a set number of people? Do you cut people? Is everybody on if they want to be on? How do the teams get set?

What you do is just put in the *Express*, "Spring practice of the Monticello Cubs begins Sunday, May 22nd or something and everyone's invited." You might have ten there. You might have twenty. You might have four. You know, you just, you don't know. Then you weed them out, I guess. You just keep practicing and practicing. Well then come game time, you just pick out the players, you know. Usually you got...you don't have too many. You're lucky if you got... if you got fourteen or fifteen you're a kingpin you know.

We talked a little bit about compensation. When you did pay somebody, like if a pitcher came to pitch for you, what would be a typical compensation? And you can go from whatever time period you want that you can remember. What's the most you ever saw somebody get paid?

I think like when we'd hire a pitcher every once and a while out of Cedar Rapids to come up and play for us. Or Lowden or we had Roger Tangman out of Guttenberg come. A lot of them back then, they paid fifty bucks. Fifty to seventy-five dollars. And that was quite a bit of money back then. And Cascade they used to hire these guys out of Wisconsin you know. Any time and ah, Even Placid that little town had a good baseball team years ago. I mean that's just a little... all that's there is a church. And you know where Placid is? They had a top notch baseball team. In fact they were better than Cascade. Yeah, they won the Cascade Tournament a couple of years in a row. But, you know they went out and hired some pretty good pitchers. You know, I've heard one hundred twenty-five and one hundred fifty bucks, if they win. "I'll give you a hundred and fifty if you win you get seventy-five if you lose." I mean that's the way a lot of them put it.

What changes do you remember in the field? Regulations in the League or baseball in general etc? I know you mentioned earlier when you got lights? You might mention that.
The biggest change, I think, is the fields. You know I mean I remember when we were playing out here we had ground... not ground hog but ground squirrels all over. You know, we had holes in the outfield where them... And there was a lot of sand you know just sand that we had to play ... There wasn't really any good diamonds. I mean back then you had your picket fence or snow fence you know for your... the first I remember we played, I am not sure where it was, but some guy hit a ball over my head somewhere and I don't know how far I ran to get it because there was no fence. You know they didn't have no fences in some places.

So in Monticello do you want to tell us where we played back when you were playing?
Where we played? We played in the park.

In the fairgrounds?
Yeah

The whole time? From '52 on?
Yep.

What about when you were kid? Same?
Yep. That's where we played. Even the high school played all their home games there. But see town team only played on Sundays. You didn't have no lights you know.

And when did we get lights?
Well I can't tell you for sure, but it had to be around '60, between '60 and '62 or three in that area. I'm guessing in that area.

How are the umpires paid and like maybe who does the grounds keeping as far as chalking of the lines? Is that a league responsibility or a team responsibility?
Well, like here it was always the manager or whoever, like it was me and Bobby Hines, Rick Westhoff we always did all that. Diz Edwards, and we always done all that. But Rick did most of it, because he had more time off than anybody though.

What about umpires? Who would you hire? Professionals?

We always had umpires out of Anamosa. Usually they were Freeman Shanklen and Buzz Davenport. They umpired years. That's been, you know a long, long time ago. They umpired a lot of our games you know. And then we got guys from Cascade in the later part of the years when I was just managing mostly not playing much. I got most of the umpires right around Cascade, Epworth, Dyersville.

Are they guys who are general like high school officials?

No their just guys who have played baseball or maybe still do play baseball. If they maybe have a night off and maybe don't have a game you get them to ump, you know. And most of them were pretty darn good umpires. There weren't very many that were pretty poor.

Do the teams have their own fields? Do they share with local schools?

They already had... Most of them got their own they got their own diamond, you know. Well, like Cascade, you know their high school team plays on the same one as and you a lot of these...

Is it the team's field and the school uses it or is it the school's field and the team uses it? Or don't you know or does it vary?

Cascade it is the Legion's field but they use it. Dyersville it's the...I think it's the... that's the White Hawks. Mostly it's the semi-pro's got them because they do all the work. But the high school teams... You see the high school teams will pay for the lights. You know they will pay for the lights and anything else. That's all we ever charged them. Yeah to use the field.

How much crowd support do teams receive? Are there been better times historically than others with bigger crowds or more people?

I think, yeah years ago, you know we used to get some pretty good crowds down here. But that was when we had a good team. If you're have a good team you're going to get some good people. And I remember some of them we used to have it so they could sell beer down there at the fairgrounds you know. And in that lunch stand. We always run the lunch stand. The baseball team would try to run the lunch stand. To get their wives to run the lunch stand you know. So that would give us some spending money as far as trying to buy some stuff too. And we always done that during the fair which that was probably one of our better incomes, you know.

Did they always run a tournament during the fair?

It wasn't a tournament, Todd. Here is what it would be. They played on Thursdays and Fridays. And um, they always picked four teams, usually from Jones County. Wyoming, Anamosa had a team at one time, Dyersville. Not from Jones County but I mean the surrounding area. Like Worthington, Cascade. Mostly any tournament that we were involved with, I mean that we got invited to we would invite them back to play down here. Because the winner got...the winner got ninety bucks and the loser got sixty. So, and most of the time when they come they spent all right away they went to the beer tent and spent all here anyway. But Lowden is... Lowden is about the only team that I remember that didn't come from our Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League.

Did you get bigger crowds during the fair?

No. No. You'd have... You'd have a few sitting on the bleachers down there. There was a few even in the grandstands in the fairgrounds but they, they... the horse races were going on at the same time.

So you would have the horses going around you? Because the diamond I know is in the middle of the horse track.

Yeah so it was... A lot of people were watching the horse races. The balls would go over... It got so the balls would go out clear out in the grandstand. Then they got one of those things that went up and then out and over and you were back there inside so you didn't have that much trouble anymore.

But there still had to be some close calls with hitting horses.

Yeah there was. There was.

What kind of support do the cities and towns offer to the host teams? Are there some cities do you think that are more supportive than others in either promoting them or helping them out financially?

Yeah, I really think so. You know, we really don't really get much help. The only way we got help is if we went out and sold our tickets. Which is great I mean you can't... The businesses and the people would do that but as far as they won't just go and support one you know. In fact Monticello has a hard time now fielding a... I mean they can field a team but I don't what they do as far as paying for it... You see I haven't been involved in it so long that I don't know what they do right now. But I know they don't sell nothing, you know. They just...

In your forty years or so with the league, what problems has the league had to overcome like whether they be financial or attitudes or anything that really threatened the teams?

Really not a whole lot of problems. I mean some of them just didn't know if they were going to be able to field a team, you know. That was about the biggest thing. Usually you didn't have much problem, you know. Everybody seemed to get along pretty good. You had your president and your vice-president. And they made... If there was something that had to be decided. If you were going to be kicked out... that was their decision to kick them out of the league. But we... I don't remember if we ever kicked anybody out but I think there was a couple of times there was some of these small towns that couldn't field a team so we had to you know put them away and try to get somebody up. Because some of these... lots of times there is teams wanting to get in you see. "If you get an opening we'd like to get in." You see.

Sort of like a waiting list?

Yeah. Yeah. In fact, Dubuque I know a couple of those teams they're in there now and they waited for quite a while before they got in

Do you think the league was ever in danger of failing like the Delaware League did?

No.

Pretty strong?

Yeah. Yeah.

Are there certain people to your knowledge that are responsible for keeping the league alive? Like we said the Delaware League and where I'm from those leagues have all died.

You've got to give Paul Scherrman a lot of credit. I think Rick Westhoff probably had a lot to do keeping that league going, too. But Paul Scherrman in Farley and Lenny Tekippe in Rickardsville. They were probably two of the main ones that really, really stuck to it, you know.

And kept it going. You know, it is like I say... it has been probably fifteen years since I've been involved. So things have changed some since then I'm sure. Pat Weber can probably tell you a few more things now.

Why and how do you think has the league and the teams in the league been able to stay viable when Iowa baseball teams have faded in other areas? Why has it stuck in the area of Iowa?

Well, you know, there used to be a big league down around in Davenport and down around Lowden and all them you know. And Delaware County and all them folded. It seems here is my theory. Anymore these kids are too busy, they don't want to play baseball and we have that problem here in Monticello today. Try to get nine players to come and play. And this is the biggest trouble in these smaller towns. And nobody... and if you're a manager you finally get tired of ... well that's it we're going to fold and that's how they folded. They, they just... can't get enough kids to participate.

You mentioned kids being busy. Are they busy with jobs? Are they busy with video games? What are they busy with?

The biggest problem was a few years ago this slow pitch softball was just phenomenal you know all over this part of the country. In fact, I don't know how we ever come from not even having a team, because these players all here wanting to go play softball. You play slow pitch for an hour, hour and a half, you know and your done. Where baseball takes you three hours you know, but they have a lot of fun you know they hit that thing and they have a lot of fun playing... But now that's kind of... I think now you get a little more interest in, in baseball again now. Because softball is kind of it's... it's about gone.

What is your hope or wish for the future of the league and the Monticello Cubs?

Well, I always hated to see it fold up. And I did my darndest years ago to say we're not going to fold up. We're going to field a team. We are not going fold up. If we have to go to Hopkinton, Delhi we'll get... In fact we got four players out of Maquoketa Valley one time. And here three or four years ago we had three players out of Manchester come down here and play for us. We couldn't get enough in Monticello, you know. So, you see like these teams like Rickardsville and Epworth they get a lot of kids out of Dubuque. Kids that go to the University of Dubuque. A lot of them... You see they don't have nothing in Dubuque. You see in Dubuque, East Dubuque and Dubuque both are in the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League now. And they have their players. But they probably have got players that don't make their teams and they go to Holy Cross and they go to Sherrill, you know.

What... Do most of the players come right out of high school? Are they people in their 30s 40s? You obviously played into your...

Well I played too long probably. There's, you know, like Paul Scherrman he has got to be in his fifties and he still manages. He don't play none anymore. Of course there Loras Simon in Cascade he's still managing this year he's got to be sixty years old. And that's fine. That's great, but most of these kids are through high school. Very few do you get that are still in high school. Once in a while you get some if you can't field a team. Last year I think Monticello had Evan Felton and some of them kids playing for them, you know out here, because they can't get anybody else. That's why Dale Sperfslage, you see Dale coaches or he lives I mean he teaches up there in West Delaware so he knows a lot of these kids. That one year he got them to come and play for us. Which is great, otherwise I don't know if they could have fielded a team.

Are there any other memories you wanted to share? Before we had the camera on you talked about going as a kid and seeing some homeruns hit. Tell that story again, because I didn't have the camera on.

Yeah I was...I don't remember when this happened but I couldn't have been over fourteen years old probably, and we'd come to the fair. And I was sitting in that grandstand and Monticello was playing Cascade and John Moran was a really, really good baseball player. Probably one of the great ones out of Cascade. And ah, he could have signed and probably played pro ball but he had to make a decision. If he wanted to be a priest or if he wanted to go to...play baseball and he became a priest. Father John Moran was his name and I seen him hit two homers over that left field fence that day. And it just...I mean I was in awe because you know I had never seen that before. They were clear over that fence. If you talk to any guys, of course this was years ago...Cascade will tell you he was one of the best players to ever come out of Cascade. But he just played until he was... he went in the priesthood. But Cascade, Cascade and Dyersville over the years have had the best players of any of these semi-pro teams

Anything else you want to add?

Years ago we had a Nelly Fox baseball bat. And they are a big round bat. And we'd drill that out and poor lead in it. That was our warm up bat. Well we were down in Wyoming playing one night and that lead flew out of there and it flew into the bleachers. They had some tin bleachers you know sitting over here. Thank goodness nobody was there. But anyway, they got that thing and instead of throwing it away they stuck it ... pounded it back in there you know. So July 28 of 1958 we were at Cascade. Getting ready to play Worthington and in them days they just had a little bench like this you know. Like we were sitting on cement blocks or something. We had done our infield because we were going to play Worthington in the game there in the tournament. Ronny Long was swinging that bat and I had just sat down and Bobby Adamson was standing right there. And that thing flew out of that bat and it hit Bobby Adamson in the chest glanced off and hit me right here in the head. And I stood up and "who the hell threw that baseball?" Of course the old blood was a pouring out. Of course Bobby Adamson he was down on the ground moaning and groaning. And John Banard who was our manager at that time, he came over and he and they got a wet towel and they got a pud and they laid me down and they put the pud underneath my head you know and put this wet towel over my head. I still didn't know what was going on. They got the ambulance for Bobby and took him to Monticello Hospital. And hell I was hurt worse than he was. He just had a bruise you know. So I went up to...Maynard Lange and Patty Clark took me up to the doctor in Cascade. Miloy or something like that. And he put three stitches in there. And I had to go into Dubuque to go see if I had a concussion. Of course I didn't. I wanted to go back and play that night but the more it was thumping. I couldn't go back and play. But I still got that and I'll bring that and show it to you. I got that piece of lead and I'll show you that. I'll bring those pictures.

Personal interview with Rick Westhoff
By Todd Hospodarsky
Date: January 14, 2010

What is or was your connection with the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League?

I played semi-pro baseball in the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye and every other league around until I was forty-one years old. I played my first game when I was fifteen.

What year would that have been?

My first game I played in 1960. Yeah, 1960. And I played in twenty-six straight Dyersville Tournaments.

That's pretty impressive.

No, it was just old. Old guy wasn't smart enough...

All for the Monti Cubs?

No, I played for some teams around. I played some for Hopkinton. Then when I lived in Cedar Rapids, I played a lot of ball for Williamsburg and some of those teams, but most of it right here. I managed the team for years.

What years were you involved with the league?

Oh geez, you know I am not quite sure, I think I managed probably you know right after "Hoppy" managed. I took over from there. And I managed all the way up until about 1985-86 in there. Probably from the, oh the mid-seventies into or even earlier than that at times...

Were you still playing at the end or just managing?

I was doing both. I don't think I ever just, well when you're in semi-pro baseball there is a lot of times you think you're done playing and you might be the ninth player. I played... Most of the time I was playing.

How did you become involved in not just the Monti Cubs and the semi-pro, but baseball general and then how did you get into the Monti Cubs?

Well, I was probably different than Hoppy, you know. My dad managed the cubs from in the forties and into the early fifties. He was the only manager they had there for probably twelve, fifteen years. So it was bred into us. And we played Little League baseball for Dean Nelson and then I played at Sacred Heart. Then bang right to town team. I played some college ball. You know it was just the thing to do. Of course my dad was really instrumental in Monticello baseball.

I don't think I know your dad's name.

My dad his name is Dick. His real name is William but everybody always called him Dick. He was kind of the business manager the everything there was. Then my oldest brother Al he past that to Al for... I don't know if you remember my older brother Al. He lived here and He managed the fair for years here until the late eighties. Moved out to Oregon took on a huge fair job out there. But up until that time he was in town sold insurance, real estate had a Sears catalog store. But all that time he... I don't know if Al ever managed. He played. But I had three older brothers and all three of them played a lot of baseball. They were all pretty good players. Really

good players in fact. Al, played at Iowa. Another played at Loras. The two of us played at... My older brother and I played at Wyoming.

So your dad was pretty big in getting you involved in baseball. You mentioned your brother played at Iowa and you said you played college ball. Was it a big deal then playing semi-pro ball and college or High School at the same time?

It was never a college program, or problem. It was a high school, and not in our day it wasn't a high school program. As you know now and later on it became a problem with the schools. If they hadn't graduated or were still playing they had to get permission from I think the athletic directors or whatever. But in those days no because we used to play... of course I went to Catholic school. And in those days we played spring baseball at Sacred Heart and then fall baseball. So summers were open anyway. But we used to play... I couldn't tell you how many games a summer we'd play. And it was tough when you were married and had kids, because baseball was in those days we played fifty games a summer. But no I don't think there was any reason you couldn't. The college rule was pretty strict in that. There was a lot of... Semi-pro that's the name there. Some of them were being paid. And the college rule, we had to watch really close because we would hire some, some pitchers once and while for these tournaments and they could not be paid. You had to find things that were legal you know. You could pay them mileage, certain things you could... but you couldn't just hand them \$100 and say thanks for showing up.

Was anybody else paid? Or was it pretty much just pitchers?

Your own local team and you generally at least we never had any hired pitchers until we'd get down into a tournament so far that we didn't have any pitching left or something you know.

Then who would you usually go to, to hire? Would you go to Cedar Rapids or Cascade or where?

In my... In my dad's day it seemed like there was a dividing line here. And every time we played some people from the north over there. Which a lot of the league was... Cascade, Worthington, Dyersville those teams. Their pitching generally came out of Dubuque and, and southern Wisconsin. A lot of them out of that Beloit area. In our case we always seemed to go to Cedar Rapids. We ended up with a lot of Cedar Rapids pitchers. It just seemed to divide it right there.

You mentioned your dad obviously as a big influence? Is there anybody else that was a huge baseball influence or was it pretty much just the family?

My brothers. You know I had three older brothers. And there was, there was a tradition. A story, kind of interesting... My mother, my mother is from Dyersville and my dad was born in Petersburg, big baseball towns. And Petersburg and Dyersville, both of course had really good programs, town teams, semi-pro programs. In those days I guessed we just called it all town team ball. One day, one game in the Dyersville Tournament Monticello played Petersburg. And there were nine first cousins on the field that started. Eighteen players and nine of us were first cousins. My dad had a big family. He came from a big family in Petersburg. There were some really, really good players throughout our families. A lot of them, some of them actually played pro-ball too.

What can you tell me about the formation and running of the league? Hoppy told me there were officers and a board?

Generally that's just about right. Each team would have in most cases, each team's manager would be... that would be how these first meetings would go, every town would send a manager. And then from all those managers, they would elect a president or vice-president, or whatever. There wasn't much need for secretary-treasurers because there wasn't ever any money involved in it, you know. And then, it would always be interesting because I've been to a lot of those meetings and it would always be interesting because there would always be talk about new teams wanting to get in. And then there would have to be some decisions made as to who you were going to let in. And then there for a while when it got really competitive. In my day it was still very competitive. A lot of these towns including us, Monticello, we had a lot of college kids. and a lot of players who had played college ball were back home and you know working here in town. It was some really good baseball, excellent baseball in those days. In fact I could list a number of major leaguers I faced. In around here and so could have "Hoppy". But so there for a while they were talking of limiting rosters. That used to be a big talk. You know like, "If these people weren't within so many miles..." It got to be that competitive. Generally that never worked, because you know nobody... There for a while these tournaments they tried to get teams to only use their league rosters. So that's generally all the meetings amounted to. Who was in and then of course set up your schedule. It was really good because, to be real honest, the league thing was always, it was good but it was always secondary to the tournaments. Because that is where you made your money you know. I mean that is where a lot of teams lived on their tournament winnings and supplementing other things. The tournaments were the real, real blood rivalries. That is when you ran into some, some awful tough pitching and stuff like that.

So maybe talk about what teams were in the league when you were around? If there were any changes in teams?

You know when I was around it most of the time I was around it. It was, it was pretty consistent. And there was another league that went on at the same time one of the other leagues which was up around North. It was called the Prairie League. And that had, and some of the teams played in both leagues. I mean these guys were playing daily. But, in our league it was pretty much... The real core was Monticello, Worthington, Cascade, and Dyersville. Those four teams were probably as solid in there forever. And then it would branch, at times Petersburg would be in and out. Holy Cross come in later, teams like, you'd get up north to Rickardsville. The funny thing is there wasn't much of it south of us. When it come... Nothing toward Cedar Rapids. There was a league in Cedar Rapids. But they never seemed to mesh against each other. So most every... We were we were about the southernmost team. But there, then at one time Lowden came in. Lowden had a team. Stanwood had a team for a while. But the real core. I would say six, I would say six solid core to me would be Monticello, Dyersville, Cascade, Worthington, Farley. Farley I didn't mention Farley. And then later on Epworth started to play in both leagues. Those six teams were always, always in solid you never had to worry about them. But then some of those teams I mentioned would come in and out, and out and in. Hopkinton would be in for a while. Anamosa actually played in a few of different times but never, never caught on.

Why do you think that is? Why do you think those six? Why up north and not down south?

You know, I think The southern teams had, had their own league, but the towns, it seems to me these Northern teams, from Monticello on north had the tournament structure was the first thing. that was huge. The Cascade tournament I believe is the oldest one. And Then Dyersville and

Worthington came in. And I think, and this is before my time but I think if you go back into some history past mine or could find it. These were the first towns to come up with lights. And when the lights came in. You know these towns these were Dyersville, Monticello, Cascade, Worthington. The first four towns that I can remember that had the lights. And that changed everything you know. It used to be my dad would sit down and talk to me and Bobby Hines' dad. They'd sit and they'd tell you about... it was a Sunday league. They played double headers on Sundays. And of course there was no day light savings time. So they didn't play any games during the week. They'd say "once in a while we'd play on Saturdays." But Sundays was it. Of course the lights then made the tournaments viable. But I really think that's it that those four towns were the some of the first ones to have the lights. And there might have been some around Dubuque that had them earlier than we did but...

How about key people. Who are some of the key people in the formation and running of the league? Who were the leaders?

Every town had a guy that you always wondered if anybody would ever replace them. I mean the guy that made sure that it happened. Like I said in Monticello at least the business end of it, It started with my dad and then my older brother Al. There was always one of those in every town. Cascade, Richie Napper, He ended up the mayor of Cascade. Richie Napper even managed the Cascade baseball team for a while and weighed 570 pounds. I can still remember him telling me himself that, and he's lost half of that weight now. They made him a uniform one time at Van Ginkels in Des Moines with a seventy-two inch waist. Richie Napper in Cascade. Tom Jenk in Dyersville. This would be Tom Jenk Jr.'s dad, Tom Sr... Worthington would be the Schniers. Every town just seemed to have that going for them, you know. Petersburg had the Wilemburgs. And Rickardsville would have Lenny Tekkipe. You know everybody had one guy. And as we got older and when my brother left, I kind of took that over. But we always found somebody here but you'd always wonder, but... Even Cascade they've found new people. But you keep wondering how long it is going to go. It's, it's certainly it's not as stable as it used to be.

What players or coaches stick out in your mind? You mentioned some big leaguers maybe throw out a couple stories there?

Yeah, you know there were a lot of them. I remember, this was before my time but the name my dad and older brother used to talk about all the time in Cascade was...the guy's name was Johnny Moran. And The White Sox and all these teams they tried like heck to get this guy signed. Apparently he was a left handed hitter and played the outfield. He had a brother over there too that played for Cascade. And he decided he didn't want to play pro baseball, he became a priest. They always talk about Johnny Moran. I don't know if you, well these names probably wouldn't mean too much to you unless you looked them up, but Art Huinker from Dyersville. He came back he was in pro ball. He pitched up in the Yankee organization. He was probably as good as player as I can remember around here. He was older than me. Quite a bit older but he was a left handed pitcher. And when he came out of pro ball he was head and shoulders above everybody around here. I mean he not only could pitch but he was a great fielder and a good hitter. The sad thing is you don't remember these names, but Jim McAndrews pitched for the Mets. He pitched in the World Series for the Mets. He's from Lost Nation, Iowa. Pitched, in fact he was a little older than me and he was at Iowa... When I went to Iowa as a freshman, I was playing freshman baseball at Iowa and he was on the varsity. And we got to be pretty good friends but he ended up signing with the Cardinals and then went to the Mets. A pitcher... Another pitcher we had from... left hander Rich Folkers... That Rich Folkers, and these guys are all a little older than me. In fact I only got to face Art Huinker once or twice, but I do remember facing Rich Folkers. Who there

again he pitched for the Mets in their good days. And he was from...and these guys...most in those days because they were the hated team, most of these guys ended up pitching for Dyersville. Because they would go out and get whatever it took. And I mean they had some powerhouses. This Rich Folkers, I remember facing him in the Dyersville Tournament one time. And he wasn't very tall, a left hander. He had as good of curve ball as I ever saw and I think the first two times I faced him I struck out at pitches that didn't get within ...they got to fifty-eight foot and died. It was embarrassing. There were a lot of them up there, there were pitchers up there that... most of them pitchers. We had a guy in Monticello that we, when I was managing he got out of pro ball and he went to Springville. He was a basketball coach. His name was Virgil Erikson. He had played with the Cardinals. A catcher. I mean you could just see the difference. I mean there was just...you know everybody around here thought they were awful good but when you saw the big boys come in you could see the difference.

Are there any teams over the years that you remember being especially good?

They went in runs. It really did. They went in runs. Dyersville had the longest run that I can remember with Tom Jenk managing up there. He had a lot of pro...ex-pro players playing for him up there. Like that Huinker, and a guy from, who played for the Yankees there again was Buzz Beatty who coached baseball at West Delaware. He played a lot, and Jack Detmer was another pro player, played for the Braves. All those guys were with Dyersville.

What years?

I would say those guys were in the fifties. Because I started playing in 1960 and they were all ahead of me, but I still remember, because my three older brothers...especially the two oldest were playing against them. And boy they were, they were a hated rival, because you know they were like the Yankees of today hell, we'll just load up if they needed something. And as you know even in those days I'm talking about semi-pro baseball one of the key issues in every town was. "What about our local players are you going to go hire somebody and bump them." And that caused a lot of grief. And that's how a lot of these, not so much here, but a lot of these towns such as Dyersville. How some of these smaller towns: Petersburg, and Epworth and some of those. That's how they sprung up because a lot of these guys wouldn't play for Dyersville. They'd leave Dyersville and go play for the closest town next to them. But, Dyersville was the, was the "Big Bad Wolf" in through the sixties. And then Petersburg for a while they had a... Petersburg of course you know is five miles from Dyersville and all those kids went to Beckman. Well this Art Huinker I was telling you about was their high school coach. They won state tournament at Beckman in 1969. And six of Art's starters, couple of them my first cousins, were from Petersburg. So then that was when Petersburg started a town team baseball. And instantly they were awesome. Their field was, I don't know if you have got any questions about facilities. Well I'll save that for later. Petersburg, and then Cascade later on as you know in the last years toward the end of my day would be the real... They were one of the tougher... And Farley. Farley got real good. They had another, a guy I should have mentioned was Paul Scherrman up there, he runs and still runs the Farley team and he was signed to play with the old Washington Senators.

Let's talk about fields. What changes do you remember? Do the teams have their own fields? Do they share with local schools? Who maintains the fields?

Most the towns I think own their fields. Cascade's a little bit ... Well I shouldn't say... Cascade and Dyersville are both in Legion parks that are owned by the American Legion. And I think in those cases they, they hire people to maintain it. In Monticello we were always on the city field

down at the fairgrounds there. Whoever was the sucker and that's my fondest memories of my dad are riding around that field on the fender of his Farmall tractor. You know it was usually the manager who took care of the facility here. And the biggest change of course and that was before my time and that would have been the lights. I wish my dad was alive he could tell you ... it was quite a story how the lights got built here. They sold stock. And you know when my dad died I found some shares of that stock. From the Monticello Athletic or something... Greater Monticello Athletic Commission. They sold shares of stock to businesses and individuals for \$100. I think those lights went up here in '49. But lights of course would have been a big change. But in our day, and even toward the end of my time it was down to just one, but all the fields were skinned. There were no grass infields. They were all skinned infields, because especially in a lot of those littler towns, Worthington and some... they'd play Little League and everything they'd only have one field and they just had skinned infields. So that was one of the biggest changes. Cascade and us were the two first ones. I remember the day we went in there and cut sod from where it would be the old infield of the... where the stock cars go at the fair. It always had good grass. We went out there, and I still remember going out there on a Saturday and a Sunday with flatbed trailers and cut the sod and laid that infield in there. It was very nice to get it in there because the Monticello baseball, when it was a dirt infield was always a case of a lot of rocks. It was built on a rock, an old rock quarry. But that was a huge change the grass infields. It just, it just, now they all have them except Worthington still has a dirt infield.

And what were you going to say about Petersburg's field?

Well, a lot of those little towns. They had old fields that were... they had played a lot of softball on them. Petersburg with that great team they had, the Petersburg right field fence was 230 feet. There were all kinds of those around subtle little... just little, you know... little nuances that would just drive you.... Well you'd go to... later on when we started playing, started playing Rickardsville a lot. They had come into our league. They had a real short right field fence. Farley when it first started, center field fence was 300 feet away. You know that was a fungo for a lot of those guys you know. A lot of the parks were kind of weird in that way. Like Petersburg that short right field fence, but Left field fence would be a driver and a wedge you know. Stuff like that it was really, it was fun... For a while you used to complain about them all the time but when you think about it hell that is what it made it fun just to get in there.

I think Hoppy had said didn't Monticello's have ground squirrels all over?

Oh the outfield used to just be a... But you know it is all sand. And when I came back, I had moved back from when I was done coaching at Regis and I came back and I was here full time. I really, and then... Steve Williams stuck... conned me into coaching the high school team that first year I came back. I coached the high school for five years. And that field is when I tore into it and really made some changes. Between the school, and the town team and the city we were able to get enough funds together to like for the grass infield. We upgraded the lights. We eventually put in a watering system. You know because that field down there it is just like the golf course. That is built on a sand pit. And when it got dry you'd be playing on sage brush. I am sure you heard the stories of the football games down there? It used to be the Monticello football field. Oh, yeah. If you want to get... If there's any of them alive I don't know, but they would tell you about the greatest football game ever played between Monticello and Anamosa was played on Armistice Day down on that field where the baseball field was. Started the game and then a snow storm hit and half the people couldn't get home. Oh yeah I've heard it a thousand times. It was just a... not a very good... It was bad soil and so it took a lot of work.

What years were those upgrades?

Well, I coached when I came back in '78. I coached until '83. Then I got out of it. Then I got conned back into it about I think it was '90. But by that time we had one of the nicest facilities around but it was a lot of work. But Cascade's field I think its world renown. You know I mean it's got articles everywhere.

And you said the semi-pro team keeps that up. It's owned by the Legion.

Cascade, yes. But, they have always had...The Legion has had a guy, like Mike Gale over there. He's a legion member and a veteran. He and that Richie Napper would, I mean they'd just manicure the place just like...I mean these guys come out...These high school teams come out there and they just shake their heads. You know you don't see anything like that unless you're in pro ball. And ours at one time down at... and this one, the new one could get that way. I mean it just needs some, some really final touches done to it.

How did the Monti Cubs get their players? Are there try outs? How did you get your team lined up?

Oh it is pretty. We just...It was tradition all of sudden you'd put it in the paper "first practice would be a Sunday afternoon." That was it. Who showed up was who showed up. Of course you always knew who some of the old regulars were going to be. I don't think we ever had any things as try outs. And every once and a while you'd be excited because you'd hear about a new guy that moved to town. But that's just the way it was. Now I think today it is more of a recruiting process. In our day we had plenty of players.

We talked about compensation and you said pretty much just pitchers.

Catchers once and a while. Pitchers, catchers, yeah.

Where do the teams and the league get their financial backing? I know you mentioned the tournaments. Who pays for the ump's, players, field, etc.?

In, in most cases, because the tournaments you couldn't depend on and they didn't pay that well. In Monticello for instance it was always...We were just a separate entity I don't think we were ever incorporated. But, we would go out into Monticello sell season tickets that people would never go see a game. And every player would take so many. My brother Al would sell... one year he'd sell like a hundred and fifty of them. Or John Ferring. You know, well you remember John...He was the bat boy forever. John would, He'd go sell two hundred of these. Or you know you'd go into a business like the bank would buy fifty of them or something. So, we'd generate our startup money there. And then we always had a very successful lunch stand down there that made us pretty good money because it was all volunteer, we weren't paying any labor. And the players would have to work in it. To our benefit I mean we never had much of a tournament here. But our benefit was the fair. We'd run that lunch stand all through the fair. In the old days they used to park all around there. And the Saturday of the fair could fund your baseball season sometimes with those pits and those drivers in there. But that and tournaments and selling those season tickets and the lunch stand was a way.... I think most towns did it the same way.

You said Monti didn't have much of a tournament but you guys did play during the fair right?

That was the biggie. For us, that was our sort of ace in the hole because a lot of.... In some of these years I am talking about in the eighties especially. In the seventies and eighties there were a ton of teams. I mean you go up north and you didn't go five miles to where you'd be Balltown,

Rickerdsville, Sherrill, all had a town team. And it was a big deal to get invited to these tournaments. And it got to be pretty competitive. So that is why a lot of these littler towns such as Rickardsville and Holy Cross, Farley all started their own tournaments. We tried one here. One of our problems was the fact that we shared the field with the high school. So getting stuff but...It just never really took off. I mean there was always those three huge tournaments here. I mean the three big ones for us were Worthington was the opener and then Cascade. Each one paid a little more money. In those days \$500 to win a tournament was good money. But we had the fair and everybody wanted to play in the fair game. And in those days we'd play three days at the fair. Tuesday would be the Little League deal. And then Wednesday, Thursday, Friday would be two semi-pro teams would play. So we could always hold Cascade and Worthington and Dyersville's invitations to their tournaments in our pocket from that fair. And my dad used to say back in the day, in the forties and stuff when there wasn't a lot of tournaments. The fair game was the biggest money game of them all. And even when we...toward the end of it. It was a funny thing because they'd have... That one day they'd pay a hundred fifty dollars. A hundred to the winner and fifty to the losers. You know, so it was... and everybody of course loved to come to the fair. So it was a real... something everybody always wanted to have.

Was that \$150 per team or per player?

Per team. Most of the time...most of the time that would end up at the beer tent. Because, when I was managing we'd go to the fair office to get your money and then go to the...Because we always played on Friday because nobody was going to work on Saturday. And you were going to just take the whole hundred and fifty and...Saturday mornings sometime the rest of the team would stumble down to their cars and that was it.

When you did pay a pitcher or catcher what kind of average pay?

Oh in those days...In my day they were getting up around seventy-five. And sometimes there would be guys in these towns that the rivalries were so strong that you couldn't make enough to pay the pitcher out of your winnings you know. There'd be guys that would come up to, when you were managing... It didn't happen here much but Cascade, Dyersville, Farley, Epworth... some guy would walk up to the manager hand him fifty bucks to get a better pitcher. And then you paid them mileage. And boy they'd come from a long distance...all the way from like I said southern Wisconsin, Illinois, way out in western Iowa.

Umpires where did you usually get them? Are they paid?

That was always an expense that you had to handle. It probably wasn't much in those days, but you always had to have. But we had for years and years around here when I was playing pretty much the same...Early in my days the same two umpires. Two guys from Anamosa. Buster Shanklen and, No, Freeman Shanklen and Buster Davenport. And, uh, God they'd work all of our home games so you got to know them really well. And then later on we had a couple guys. Most of them came from Cascade Blair Gleason and those guys that are still umping a lot of high school.

How much crowd support do teams receive? Have there been better times historically than others?

I think it was like everything else there was less competition in the fifties. You know there wasn't TV or I mean a lot of TV and a lot of you know...I mean kids weren't doing the things they are doing now. The crowds in the fifties were always good. In the sixties they were ok. And every, I think every decade has just gotten lesser and lesser. And it's been tougher to...same way

to get players. There are too many other things going on. There for a while I thought softball would be the ruination of these leagues, but softball died. Bang all of a sudden. That's just shocked me. I thought it would outlast baseball.

What kind of support do the cities that host the teams offer? Are there some cities that are more supportive than others?

I think so. I think a lot of these baseball situations, the teams were run by guys, like I said Richie Napper he's the mayor of Cascade. He's got some influence. My brother Al he was always on the city council and he was on the fair board. So, and that was another...the fair board helped us with the field you know so...We usually tried, if we were doing some big project we'd always try to get it down to the team, the city, the fair, school, you know. So we had four entities, but most of those towns I think the cities got involved as much as they could. I mean they supported it pretty good those small towns.

What about any problems has the league had to overcome over the years? Any personality conflicts or anything?

You know in my era, not many. I don't remember hardly any at all. And then, but my dad used to tell stories of in his era the Cascade, Monticello rivalry, he said, half of them ended up in fights. If it wasn't players it would be in the crowd. And now since I've gotten out I heard there have been some really bad personality flare ups and stuff. You know you might find that out from some other guys down the road, but not in my era, no I didn't see much of it.

Why and how has this league and the teams in the league been able to stay viable when town baseball teams have faded in other areas?

There's about two leagues left that I know of. I mean there's actually three. This league that Monti's in and that Prairie League is still going. And then that league down there around south of Cedar Rapids is still going. I don't, I don't, I guess there is no one answer other than the fact tradition and the right guys, families in most cases: Like the Westhoff's, and the Wrights, Hoppy, and the Hines'. In Cascade you could name three families that just kept it going. Dyersville, real easy to... Farley you can usually go into those towns there is a lot of tradition and that's where it is starting to slip is these young kids don't care so much about that tradition. But in our case our families were going to pass it down and someday that'll end I'm afraid.

What could keep it going? Do we just need another family to pass it down?

It is always going to take someone that's willing to work his tail off and be willing to put up with... There a lot of headaches. It is a lot of work. And you don't...you sometimes you end up making a lot of enemies. But it is always going to take somebody that is willing to do it. I mean the other thing that I think is paramount is the high school programs have to keep going. And that is another one of the things that I think has helped. Some think it hurts but I think it helps. Iowa baseball playing high school baseball the only state left playing high school baseball in the summer. It kind of gets people thinking about it and that can kind of spill over. Granted you have to share some players once in a while. But, if you have a successful high school program you're going to turn kids out believe me. Sometimes we say well that isn't happening, but in our day we all came out of the Monticello or Sacred Heart school program. And now I know they are getting kids from the high school program. Pretty good players. Once again I think Monticello's starting to see a little bit of a renaissance. We've all went through the high school programs. And the Little League program here is pretty extensive. I think it needs some real upgrading, but it is pretty extensive. There's a lot of teams and then their starting...That's the only thing that'll

keep it going. And when it dies I think that's what's happened. The families are gone and the towns are dying.

Was the league ever in danger of failing during your time?

In my time no. I don't think there was ever any danger of it. There were always enough of us around. Like I said I was the youngest of four brothers. And, No, Never, Never...I mean it was always...Every year we were sure we were going to have plenty of players. At least, from an old manager's standpoint you didn't want twenty, you know. But you never had enough pitching, but no...

Throw me out some names of people from other towns to your knowledge that are responsible for keeping the league alive?

Oh, you know one of the teams I didn't mention that sprang up and down was Lowden had a team. Was a pretty good baseball. They got in and out of that Prairie League. That was always run by the Stoltey family. Larry Stoltey is still alive. And he is like our family had four or five boys that played. Um, Sherrill had the DuPonts. A family up there by the DuPonts would always...they were always... and Peosta those little towns. Frank Dardis who was in ah, one of the characters in the *Field of Dreams*. Frank he kept Peosta going. Lenny Tekippe has still got baseball going in Rickardsville. It would not be going without him. There are some other towns up there, like Balltown and some of those. Zwingle, I remember the Collins, Rick Collins was one. This family for years was just there, they run that baseball. Dubuque has sprung in and out of baseball but they've had some families that kept it going in there. The main families I remember I guess would be Petersburg, Worthington, Cascade, Farley, Epworth. The Featherstones in Epworth. B.J. Featherstone I don't know if you know him. He's a Sacred Heart, Monticello graduate. But he kept that baseball program going there for years. And then it'd be his nephew would come along. It just seems if you go back into some these...except in here in Monticello the Westhoffs have gone and died, but a lot of these people are being run by nephews and cousins of the old ones yeah.

What are your fondest memories of your years in the league or specific games played?

The most... thing the miss you most are just the players. We had some great times. The games are what got you together and you...and we played hard. There were no, there was no fooling around in our day. You'd come to play and it was serious baseball and it was like I said, most of us...a lot of us anyway had college and...We had guys a little before my time that played in the service and come back like Hoppy. So it was pretty serious but after the games, those were the...my fondest memory of Monticello Baseball would be John Ferring, you know, he just...he was a mentally challenged boy. His sister, I mean when he was younger his mother and dad raised him and then his sister took over. He was our bat boy for forty years. And every town around that's what... if you ask...You go to Holy Cross tomorrow and ask what do you remember most about Monticello baseball, the Westhoff name will come far behind John Ferring, and that's a fact. But you just got to remember... and then eventually as you got older and the rivalries were done. You'd sit down with teams...on the road we'd sit there around the dugouts or concession stand drink a few beers. All of a sudden the two teams would get together. And then later on I can remember a lot of times in the seventies we'd play baseball down here and everybody would go uptown to one of the...well at that time Dan Reed's tavern the old Sports Page. That's what I remember and miss. I remember some great games. I could name a few games that still stick out in my head but those times are what you really remember. I still see some of these guys once in a while today, and Todd it's just so nice to see them. They have that

Dubuque...maybe Hoppy already...they have that Dubuque County Hall of Fame. Old Semi-pro hall of fame in Dubuque County. You ought to look something up...They have an annual award ceremony. And I've never got to go. I know Hoppy and Bobby go. But all those guys we played against. The good players are in there and they all go that one night. One of these years I've got to get there. Yeah it would be a good time.

What is your hope or wish for the future of the league?

Well, I just...I want it to keep going. I'd just, I mean, I'd like these kids... The thing I think about most is having played here, and coached high school baseball here, is I think, I think it helps the high school program. It is one hand washing the other. Because, I think if you've got kids who really like baseball. And let's say we've got some kids here that maybe are thinking well I'd like to go on and play... try to play some college baseball, etc. This thing gives them something to do in the summer and keeps them playing. And that for no other reason makes it something that needs... It will keep the high school program stronger. I know some of the fun's gone out of it. And it has kind of been washed down to a different level. But there's still some good there. And these guys will, I mean you talk to guys that... who have played town team baseball. Every one of them will sit here and tell you some stories until the sun come down. Could they tell you some stories, not printable.

**Personal interview with Paul Scherrman
By Todd Hospodarsky
Date: January 27, 2010**

What is your connection with the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League?

I am league president right now. Actually I am the charter league president. I've been the president since its inception.

We were just discussing that.

With the date, it has to be in the seventies sometime and hopefully we can. Pat has those by-laws or old minutes that go all the way back to there.

What years were you involved with the league, and actually, if you want to go back even further, because you were probably playing ball before then. Just kind of tell us how you got involved with the league and Farley baseball.

If I remember right, I think it was Rick Westhoff, Rich Napper, myself, and it might have been Lenny Tekippe from Rickardsville that maybe were the four that started. I know Rich Napper, Rick, and myself were involved. And there was no... The reason that they wanted to get this going is because they wanted to start a night league of the teams that just had lights. These teams weren't necessarily interested in playing on Sunday afternoon all the time. So that was one of the reasons, one of the requirements, to get into the league originally was that you had to have lights and we kind of varied from that throughout the years. There were some teams that we thought, well, a couple Sunday afternoon games, that's not going to hurt. So, that's how it got started.

Were those teams, Farley, Monticello, Cascade, were they playing each other already? I mean, besides Sunday leagues, or not?

Not -- they probably only played each other in tournaments for the most part. I don't think any of those teams -- I know we were in the Prairie League. I don't think Rickardsville, I don't think those teams were in the Prairie League. And if they were in another Eastern Hawkeye League or another league, that had disbanded and they were looking for another league to join.

I guess maybe backtracking, how did you become involved in baseball in general, and then, I assume, I guess with other people it been from high school or little kids ball, how did you get into the semi-pro and then who influenced you to enjoy baseball?

I've been involved in baseball my whole life. I played Little League, Babe Ruth, high school, college, I signed a pro contract with the Washington Senators. So that kind of dates me there.

What year was that?

That was in 1971.

In what position?

I signed as a catcher/pitcher, but I've caught my whole life basically. That would be my position. So I didn't last very long in the minor leagues. I came back here and have been playing or managing ever since. I've just been involved with baseball. I was in the movie The Field of Dreams. I was cast as... I was cast as a player in the movie the Field of Dreams which was a huge opportunity for me. Not only did I see how movies were made, and have my names in the credits, but briefly being on the screen, but being on the ghost team. Where we traveled to Japan, we were in Europe.

I read about the ghost team going to Japan. I didn't realize. That was before I knew you obviously.

So that was just a huge opportunity for me to share the love of baseball with kids and families, and things like that.

So like who maybe influenced you? Was it your dad or...

Oh, yeah, my dad was a big baseball fan. I think he wanted me to play ball more than I did sometimes. But, I loved it, you know. Right from the start, as a kid you would play. The baseball park was only about three blocks from my house, so we would start a game at 10:00, the noon whistle would blow at noon, we'd would go home and eat, and everybody we'd resume the game at 1:00 or 2:00 and play until you know supper. So, it's just been a love of mine, and worked hard to be a good player. I don't know if I had all the skills, as many skills as you need, but I worked hard, and just the whole opportunity of meeting people, even today, as manager, you keep in contact with the younger guys, which is kind of neat. And you develop friendships. Hopefully, you develop friendships, not only your team mates, but with the teams you play. And, I guess, that's the big thing.

I guess you touched on this a little bit, and if you don't have anything to add, that's fine. What do you know about the formation and running of the league, maybe talk about the running of the league in existence today. I know from my past interviews, there is a board. If you want to maybe talk about how that all works. Just the nuts and bolts.

We basically play with National Baseball Rules, so and there are a couple of variations with high school DH. I think we wanted to do that so that you get more people in, so you have a DH. And reentry, which pro ball does not have, but there again, there is more opportunity to get people in and that is the thing. There's the by-laws, I did find those so I'll copy those for you. Looks like these are from '97 and they were rewritten in '97 and revised in '04. So there have been some changes. The format of the league has changed also with divisions and playoffs. We have a pre-season tournament that is seeded from the previous year's results, and then we have a playoff for the championship in the fall. It is governed by the managers. It's their majority vote that votes on certain things. As far as expulsion from the league, or -- hitting an umpire, things like that -- so that's kind of addressed in the by-laws. They are kind of loosely written, but it's just the spirit of the game that we're trying to.

What teams are currently in the league? And has that changed over the years?

Yes, currently I can give you those also, I have to look at the list. I can give you the current teams. Cascade, Farley, Rickardsville, Dyersville, Dubuque, Monticello, Worthington, Key West, and Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, is in the league this year. There was a Cedar Rapids team in it for the past maybe three or four years, probably more than that, that the manager had a change of career and he did not have enough time to manage it so he just got out of it and Rickardsville had played up at Prairie du Chien. They were interested, and so they joined last year. I think that they will probably stay with the league. They have to drive further than we do. We drive up there once a season and they have to come down to play their away games so they travel, but it's still not too far. Those are the current teams. It's been pretty much those teams. Cascade has always been in, we've been in, Rickardsville, Dyersville has always been in, Dubuque joined --they didn't have a team at the time that we started the league, Monticello, I can't remember -- I think the team started at some point in time after the original. Key West has

been in the league maybe three or four years. So, we are pretty open to teams coming in. We try to keep the caliber as good as possible.

That is what I was going to ask you. Is here a set number of teams, or is it based more on caliber so that they can compete?

I think Caliber and facilities too. If you would look at the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League, compared to Prairie League, these teams would traditionally be the top teams in the area and probably win more of the semi-pro tournaments than the teams in the Prairie League. So... And then there is an All-Star game every year and it seems the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League always gets beat.

I actually only know that because I just happened to catch a couple of articles in the *Dubuque Herald* on mine. It doesn't have the whole article, it only has the...yeah, I saw that the Prairie League had gotten the best of them.

The manner in which the teams are picked -- they are picked by the Telegraph. And, I would say, if you really wanted the All Star Team, and they want all the teams to participate. If you really wanted the All-Star Team, an All-Star Team, it would be loaded with certain teams. Maybe a couple of teams here would only have one person instead of three. But that's fine, it is their All-Star game and they want to promote as much interest as possible.

And it is more for fun than anything else. It's not like hundreds of thousands of dollars a year.

There is some competitive atmosphere there, but it is more for fun.

Who were some of the key people -- I think we mentioned this before, so if this is a repeat, I apologize -- who were some of the key people in the formation and running of the league? Like leaders of the league, to keep the league going over the years?

Maybe not necessarily, I mean, there are some people that have been around the game for quite a while. Lenny Tekippe from Rickardsville, has kept Rickardsville. I think it is more maybe not the league, but the powers of the local teams, to keep the teams going so that the league has participants, you know.

Has it been hard in Farley? I now that sometimes Monti has struggled to keep nine consistent players.

It is no longer a town team anymore. You know Monti. There are some teams, I guess Cascade for a while they were lucky that they had a bunch of guys from Cascade, just so happened. I think that they are going to have to start drawing out from other areas, and they do. They get players from other towns. I think that Rickardsville has Dubuque players. Farley has, I mean we look at college players there is probably only three or four, there is probably a handful of Farley players now that have ties to the town -- they hang here, or use to live here, and things like that. You know, I guess I've taken some pride in the fact that if I'm going to be president and they will still want me to be president, and I'm still having fun doing it, I'll keep it going. I want it to be...If there are some decisions that have to be made and if they don't like the way the president makes them then they, somebody else can do it. And it's not just outlandish decisions that don't make any sense, I try to be a little objective when I make decisions, so I guess since I'm the only person that... I'm a charter president, so I guess I am. If I have to take credit, I will.

Any specific players or coaches that stick out in your mind over the years the last thirty years, and honestly, if you want to go back before that is okay because I'm trying to get the feel for baseball in general in northeast Iowa. It doesn't have to just be the last thirty or almost forty years now I guess. You know players or coaches that stick out in your mind, maybe even teams, dominant teams, that jump out at you.

Well, Cascade has been dominant during the past ten years or so. I guess Farley in the late eighties. I would think that we would be considered as dominant as Cascade was in the past few years. It seems like, and if you go through the records, that will bear out the fact that Farley has made the playoffs the majority of the time. Cascade has. I think Dubuque. Some of the teams, I think struggle with leadership and being sixty years old you probably gain a little more respect from the younger guys than a guy that is twenty years old trying to manage a team. That might be a little easier for me. The Westoff's way back use to manage the Monticello team. A very competitive guys, Allen and Rick. You go back with the Dyersville people, it used to be the Jenks, Tom Jenk. I actually played with Dyersville in '69 -- the whole year. I was looking at my career maybe looking to play more games. Farley didn't have lights then. So there is a huge tradition there that might. . . On the high school level it has kept that tradition but on the semi-pro level it has probably faded a little bit because the right guy maybe hasn't been able to manage there the whole time. Lenny Tekippe in Rickardsville he has been around a long time. Rickardsville has always been one of the better teams. So, Dubuque, and they... They are a good team, they should be a good team if they draw out of a city that size. But, they still get beat. Worthington, they have probably lost a little leadership. I think they didn't have a team for a while and then some of the younger guys got it going and now some previous players that played maybe back in the eighties are trying to get it going a little better. So Worthington, they kind of struggle. Key West, John Knabel, he used to play a while. Key West didn't have a semi-pro team and he recruited some pretty decent players from the Dubuque area that keeps that team in a lot of games.

Any big names that you remember being in the league, besides yourself that maybe went pro? Or anybody that was just a really, really good ball player? That sticks out?

Pat Weber. He's been around a long time. He's got to be one of the best pitchers in the longevity he's won a lot of games and he can still do it. He's very competitive. You know, we've had some good guys. I can speak for some of the pitchers we have and some of the players. You'd probably have to go to each manager and pull some of those kids out. You know I could speak for Farley, the good players that we have, but if you are going to be interviewing some of the other teams.

I hope, I want, I really hope to hit every team, I mean every town if I can. I really want the overall view I don't want it to be the even though I live in Monticello I don't want it to be the Monticello thing. That's my goal.

The Prairie League and the Eastern Iowa League have talked about combining and playing some type of schedule, whether that will happen, I don't know but I would definitely, if I had my preference to win a league, it would be the Eastern Iowa League because it's a better league. There is probably more, what should I say, rivalries between some of these team -- Farley and some of these teams. Than in the Prairie League. It is a little more even where you could, for example, we could play some of the games in the Prairie League and there are a few weak teams that are there for the fun and they probably win two or three games a year. In all their tournaments and their league combined.

I think Rick told me that some -- are there still some teams that play in both the Prairie and Eastern Iowa?

Yes, we play in both leagues, Key West, and I think those are the only two teams right now.

How many games is that then?

We played about sixty games last year, counting the tournaments. Yeah. I think that the schedule of both leagues for us, just league schedules is thirty-two games. And then there is about nine tournaments so that is another ten games, that is forty-two. If you win two games, that's fifty-two. So, I think we, we won two tournaments, came in second in one, and two thirds, so you are playing four games in quite a few tournaments.

How do you have pitching for that?

We are lucky there. We have, pitching would be our strength right now. As far as, we have - here is where we are gathering players from other areas. There is a pitcher from Coe, Mitch Backenstead. We hooked up with him a few years ago and he is back in the area and he is pitching for us. Ray Cavanaugh from Maquoketa we hooked up with him when he was young and he is loyal to us now. Andy Seebrook, he just graduated from Upper Iowa. He is actually an employee of mine right now. He is looking for a job and I don't want to lose him, as a player or as an employee because he is a good employee. So there's three. Billy Schmidt pitches at Wartburg. We have a local guy from Western Dubuque that pitches for us. So we are pretty lucky there.

Well, you talked a little bit how you hooked up with some of these guys, but how does Farley, because I know the Monti guys do it now, get their players, do you have tryouts, do you just whoever shows up shows up, or how do you field your team?

We'll try to recruit some voids on the team, for example, we needed a second baseman and we contacted the Loras coach, and I, well we have ties with a lot of the Iowa Conference coaches. So talked to the Loras coach, Carl Tebond, Holz at Wartburg, so we tried to get some Wartburg guys, that didn't work out. And second base, the player from Loras who played second base for us was staying in town, had a job, and he wanted to play ball.

Do college coaches like that, that they get the experience, they want them to come?

Yes. I think they like it with certain teams. And I think they like probably the structure in it. I'd have to say they like the structure of Farley because I'm an older guy, I'm not going to let them screw around, I want to win. You know, they're going to play hard and things like that, so I think I have a reputation that they are going to want to play at Farley. And I think they want to play Cascade and that atmosphere so. And then there are a couple of high school players that asked from the city and said yeah, but you have to explain to those guys that we have D3 players and you are going to have to be a D3 caliber to be on a Farley team. And but there are plenty of times that we can play a Prairie League game where we are just good, mop up on that team, so they can start and they can play, give some of the guys a rest, a day off, or whatever. So, and then, it's a little bit of both, I'd say pitching is a thing that we are going to recruit the mostly.

With that, I mean it is considered semi-pro, do you ever pay? Like obviously you can't pay the college guys I know, but like, do you ever need for a tournament hire Pat Weber or someone if he is not playing?

Not anymore. That wouldn't happen with us. I wouldn't pay anybody. I would certainly give them some gas money if somebody needed that, but it's kind of a gray area in college where you

can give gas money. No, we don't pay them. For example, this Bochkenstead, he'll drive from Cedar Rapids once a week and pitch for us so we gave him a Farley jacket. You know, he was wondering if he could buy a jacket and we said sure he could buy a jacket and then I told him you're not paying for it. But in the past, for tournaments, and there are league rules that say you can't bring in somebody for specific games. There is a criteria, where if you qualify for the playoffs you have to play so many games prior to that.

That's what I was wondering, because I know, I guess like you said it's a gray area. I knew that it was semi-pro, so someone was getting paid somewhere at some point but I just didn't know how prevalent it was.

Well I think the semi-pro comes into effect when you win a tournament. So then, that team gets that money. But we don't split it up. I keep it and pay for the uniforms and stuff. So, maybe that's the semi-pro aspect of it. In the past, and that's years ago, you'd pay some pitchers some money to come in and play in the tournaments.

How about if we move on to the fields, like what kind of changes do you remember over the years? I've been told that Farley, when you guys started, you didn't have a great field, but have a pretty nice field now. I haven't seen it so, maybe even other towns that you traveled to. Are the fields good, bad, the ugly?

Yeah, there are some ugly ones. And there's quirks. Not too many quirks in these fields. Rickardsville would probably be the smallest field. I mean the backstop is from here to there and there is a net so they don't lose balls that is actually in playing territory. Cascade, Farley, Dyersville has a nice field. Dubuque's should be better. They should be able to take care of their field. Monticello, Monticello -- their field needs a little help. And it's not that old. Worthington. That's a real old field, been there since the thirties. Has a skinned infield but it has some atmosphere. Key West usually plays their games, if they play at home, it's just a limestone field that has no character at all but they play a lot of their games in Peosta which is a pretty good field. Prairie du Chien has a nice field. Some of the fields I could tell you stories about in the Prairie League. Pleasant Grove has a field that years and years ago they'd get the cows out before you played. They'd have to scrape up the cow pies on the infield. And there is no fence in, well there is no fence at all and in left field there was a creek, and the ball's live. If you want to get the ball, if you want to, if it goes in the creek and you want to give the guy a home run, fine. If you want to go after it, and there would be people coming out, you know, wet. There are stories there where... I remember where one time there was, the guy playing left field didn't throw in the warm-up ball. So he just threw it over the hill into the creek valley, you know. So the ball is hit over his head and there is this great big splash, and he's over the creek and almost instantaneously this dry ball comes back. And he never got called on it or anything. And actually at Pleasant Grove there was a time the grass was so high that the ball was hit in the hole between shortstop and third base and we couldn't find it. So, the ball is still in play and finally. Actually it was one of our people who hit the ball and I was coaching third and every time the guy on second, because he got to second, they hadn't found the ball. So every time he tried to go to third, the shortstop acted like he knew where it was, and I said, just run, and he didn't know where it was, but he finally found it when the guy was rounding third and the guy came back to third, but that's pretty classic too. But for the most parts, I don't think now, if a team was going to enter the league that we would allow them to have a bad playing field. And some of the fields might even be dangerous to play on, but for the most part they are pretty good fields.

Any big changes over the years that you remember as far as fields go, I mean it seems like maybe since the seventies that baseball hasn't changed a whole lot?

No, some of the, I mean the Dyersville field, the Cascade field, they have been pretty much status quo as far as the conditions, I might, a few of the dugouts and stuff like that. I would have to say that Farley's has progressed more than any of those throughout the years. We use to have center fields used to be 315 and the alleys 320, so a pop up to center field was a home run back in the early seventies. That's when I hit most of my home runs. But now it's 330 down the line, 340 in the alleys and 370 in center so and it's a wooden fence and we have dugouts; we only had benches and so. I would -- other than brand new parks, like Monticello's, somebody's like that -- I think, ours has changed more than a lot of them.

Let's see. Where do, I guess. focus on the Farley I guess. Where does Farley get their financial backing? Actually, maybe the league as president -- like to pay umpires? You had mentioned paying for uniforms, other than winning tournaments, do you do a fund. . . I mean where does the money come from?

As far as, I can speak for our team. Just a brief history. I remember when I was, way back in the seventies buying our first uniforms I went to the Commercial Club and one of the commercial club guys said "why would you ever why would we every buy you guys?" this was a statement, "why would we every buy you baseball uniforms?" And I said, "Well we are going to put a little advertising on it", and I was kind of embarrassed. And ever since then we have been self-supportive. I don't want to answer, well you have to answer to the park, well, I'm on the park board too. But to me, that's a benefit so somebody can't, some organization can't tell me to do this or that. So we are self-sufficient. At the end of the year, if we have any money, we just carry it over; and we do have a party. But our main fund raiser right now is youth basketball tournament in March, in the spring. So, we can for the most part raise all the money that we need and it's about a \$3,000 budget just for umpires and things like that, baseballs, bats, and then if there is anything extra we will buy uniforms from Monticello Sports.

How about the league, does it have expenses at all, much?

Yes, it is very minimal. I think it is. The entry fee is \$200 a year. And then the league pays -- and that will be in here too and I'll give you a copy of this. They pay \$15 a win for a team. And then there is the. You just get paid for the wins and the preseason tournament. And then I think it is \$75 for the winning team of the championship.

Do the teams have their own fields, do you share with local schools, who maintains the fields, like here in Farley, that type of thing.

The Park Board, the city has the field. But basically, I take care of it. It's there, it's the baseball thing, I like to do it. The field has evolved from not a very nice field to one of the nicest where we have a sub-state, district tournaments. Clark played there for a while. West Dubuque plays there, so ours is a city park that I maintain and I get extra perks for doing that. So we basically, the city provides the lights on the field for the youth program and basically the Farley baseball team, and the high school helps an awful lot, because they use the field more than we do, and so with their cooperation and we work together, the city provides the field for us. And I'm sure there are others, I don't know the specifics of all the other ones how they do that. For the most part Cascade is sponsored by the Legion, their Legion. We're self-supportive. Rickardsville has an Athletics Club. Dyersville has a Community Club. Dubuque is pretty much self-supportive. I'm not sure about Monticello. Worthington has an Athletic Club. Key West is self-supportive. And I think Prairie DuChien probably has some type of club.

How much crowd support do teams receive and you can talk about Farley, obviously, but even maybe when you travel. Have there been better times historically than others?

I think so. I think twenty-thirty years ago especially in the semi-pro tournaments there was much more interest in those because that was kind of it. Now you have parents, and girlfriends, and acquaintances who will come to the game, league games especially, so the attendance at league games is pretty small. You get into some tournaments that get to the finals, semi-finals, it'll will draw more people but for the most part it is more of a participation thing in these leagues, I would say, than a fan thing.

The question is what kind of support do cities offer the host teams and are some cities more supportive than others? Maybe you kind of covered that in the question a couple of questions ago, anything that sticks out to add to that?

Whether it is a city or an athletic club, or a commercial club, I think that, in Dyersville and Cascade you would have to talk to them, I think they give their money, if they win they give their money back to, they are not able to spend those -- I think that is the case. At least that is the understanding I've had with some of the players. You might try to sneak a check here or there but it doesn't happen. So, it seems like those areas do want a team. And for example, Holy Cross. Holy Cross has a long tradition of being in the Prairie League and two years ago they dropped. They were in the Prairie League, but it's going to be awfully hard for that community to get another semi-pro league. They even had a tournament that they dropped too, so. So for some it's a little more important than for others. I look at some of these in the Prairie League, I think there is a lot more self-sufficient teams than have athletic club boosters or something like that.

I think this might be right up your alley as the president. What problems has the league had to overcome over the years? Any big, real hurdles, obstacles that you guys have faced?

Nothing that is going to shut down the league I don't think. Nothing that ever threatened that. There is maybe a few occasions where maybe a player's gotten a little abusive to umpires, and language, it seems like there are some language problems every once in a while but I don't think the league has ever been threatened as far as not enough interest of teams. There's one, two, three, four, you know, as long as there are eight teams we're. It's probably the minimum. You wouldn't want to get below that. Probably if we got below that we'd probably bend some of the rules and get some daytime Sunday afternoon teams or go out a little further. So, it's been pretty strong.

How about any memories, specific memories, of games, like you talked about when the ball disappeared in the creek, any specific memories from league games or tournament games that really stick in your mind? Over the years that. Any good baseball stories?

You know I can only speak for myself, some of the...when you are on tournament that is always good. If you could beat Cascade in their day, and even now I think if you asked any of the teams who's the team to beat, for the last how many years it has been Cascade. And so it's always fun and there is some rivalry there between Farley and Cascade that has somewhat softened in the last few years. One of the biggest games that I, and it's a tournament game, it's not necessarily an eastern Iowa game, but Farley played, and I can't even remember what year, but we played Bernard in the finals of the Cascade tournament. And talk about fans. I mean the place was, it was Farley vs. Bernard, so the Cascade and Bernard people wanted to win, and we drew pretty well at that time so. I just remember the place was just jammed. And we won that game in thirteen innings. Like I think it was 5 - 4 or something like that. So I mean, that sticks in my

mind as one of the biggest games that I've been involved with and I've been involved with so many games that it's kind of a blur. That always sticks out and I think the thing that stays with me is the players that I've met and the friendships. I mean, you'll see someone that played for you and you can always talk about the old days. Farley always had a tradition that; I had a tradition myself that if we won a tournament during the week, that I didn't go to work the next day. So we kind of whooped it up after a victory. We can't talk about that too much.

I think it has come up in some of the other ones. I know one thing. How about the Jones County Fair, did you guys ever play fair games?

Yes.

Did you?

Those were always fun.

I was going to say, the Monti people I know that was one of there, what Rick and Hoppy both said was that was, because Monti could never get a tournament established successfully. I mean that had it was just never was a great, you now. So the fair was kind of their...

And that was good money. I think they paid out, it was \$90 and \$60, I don't know. I think I remember at that time, if you won the game you got \$90 for one game and that was huge then. And so. We'd usually always spend it

That is what they said it went right to the beer tent. Exactly.

But it was always fun, you'd start playing at 1:00 and you are done, and the entertainers were kind of around the baseball field and they would watch. I'll tell you this story about the fair that almost happened. So, filming the movie, Field of Dreams, Kevin Costner is a good athlete and we kind of got to know him. And we were, Farley was going to play at the fair, this was still going, so that was 1988 and that was kind of the twilight of that thing at the fair. So we got to know Costner a little bit and I said, "Kevin, would you want to play on our semi-pro team?" And he said, "I'd love to, but I don't want to take anybody's place." I said, "You could play first base and that first baseman, nobody would care." No he was. he said, I don't want to take someone's place. I said No, here's the deal. We wouldn't publicize it at all. You'd be in Monticello. Nobody, I forget who we were playing, we'd just give you a suit, you'd play first base. He said, "I want to do it." So, the game was supposed to be at 1:00, I said you'd be able to get back on the set at 4:00 and we had it all set up and they changed the shot from 5:00 until, well 5:00 in the morning instead of -- let's see, no they changed it from -- a day shot instead of a night shot. And, we were so close to having him play for us.

And that would have been amazing.

And the crowd would have come in so. That as an "it almost happened", But, it was always fun to play there and it was kind of a -- it wasn't as competitive. It was just kind of a fun game. Well, you wanted to win the extra money, \$30, but.

Like you said, that was a good money thing. Was there? Was it? I guess that was one of those things, the Monti guys kind of hinted that was kind of, because there are only so many games, they kind of used that as leverage to make sure they got to stay in the tournaments even when their team wasn't very good.

If you, if you invite us you are coming and as far as I know Monticello has always been in the Farley tournament. And I think the Farley tournament though, I think it was the mid-eighties that the Farley tournament started.

What is your memory as to what is the oldest tournament, and I'm not even sure who all has tournaments. I know Cascade has a tournament, I assume Dyersville probably does. I think Cascade and Dyersville are the oldest tournaments. They go back, I think, fifty years. Yeah. Maybe even more than that. They are. The communities always kind of argue back and forth which is the better tournament, the granddaddy, the greatest, they always bill it a certain way. And I think one is maybe a year or two older than the other.

I guess, let's maybe go right to the crux of my paper. Why do you think baseball, semi-pro baseball, has hung out here? You know, I guess the crux of my thesis is a hundred years ago every town had a town team. They weren't all semi-pro and didn't have leagues, but pretty much every town all across Iowa and the Midwest had a town team. And I just know from, I grew up in southern Iowa, they are all gone down there and there is the Prairie League hung on here, and this league has hung on here, what is it about, in your opinion, has it survived here when it has died, and even maybe going back to the sixties I know they've have mentioned that there was a Delaware County League with Hopkinton and those guys and that's all faded. Ryan... What's your opinion, what's your thoughts on that? Well, I think we are just lucky to have some people that really love the game and want to keep it going. So there's a Rich Napper before Pat Weber, there's well I've been around since the seventies, there was, and my dad played in the forties, so there had to be a couple people in between there that kept it going, but I think its individuals. One of the things around here that I think keeps the less talented teams playing is, because there's guys maybe with less talent but they still love the game, and there is a league around here that offers them that opportunity. They don't have to compete in a collegiate league, you know. So, I think that is part of it here. It maybe has not been, and there has been some good players - the Hoerners, you know Joe Hoerner -- and people from the Key West area that have played. I think this offers, the Prairie League offers that opportunity for some teams to compete on a lower level. And they are going to butt heads with some of the teams that are better but that aspect keeps the Prairie League going. And, tradition and people, the tradition of Dyersville, Dyersville is probably going to look for someone to keep, they are not going to lose their semi-pro team. They just made the finals of the amateur baseball tournament in Michigan. So, it's a little combination of both but you have to have that driving force.

You made me think of something that Hoppy brought up that that game in Michigan that he had played in, he had actually played for Dyersville, or they asked him to go with them. But that was years, that was in the sixties. How does that work today? To go to nationals, state, and all that?

Neither one of these leagues are affiliated with the state baseball league. One of the main reasons we aren't is because of the Dyersville Tournament. The Dyersville Tournament is always played the same time, the same week, same weekend, two weekends, as the state tournament in Iowa is. We've tried to get in there. We've told them the situation, they have expressed a little interest in us, and basically they don't want us to do it. You know there are some things that we have yet to tell them that we have this tradition of the Dyersville tournament that we are not going to drop. It's fun to win that. It's the last, well it used to be the last tournament, it isn't now, but it has a whole lot of tradition and a couple years ago we were close to getting into the tournament and

they wanted to know how we played our games. To be honest with you, I think they were threatened at the talent that we had. I really do. I think our teams could compete with some of those Division I guys in the Iowa Valley League and Cedar Rapids. And finally, the hoops they wanted us to jump through, we said we're not going to do it. We'll have just as much fun here. We don't, we don't need it.

How many other leagues are there that you know of state wide. Because I'm just not familiar.

Well, there is the Iowa Valley League which is the Norways, the Watkins, the Cedar Rapids has some, I'm not sure how many, I think it is Ladora, you know, that Iowa Valley. I think that there is a Northeast League like New Hampton, I think there are some teams up there with Postville. Des Moines has, they are in it but other than that I'm not familiar with the west. I know Clarinda, way down in the southeast, southwest Iowa, they used to have a strong team. But, there again, the better teams, it seems like the Iowa Valley League, they are more of the college guys who want to hone their skills during the summer. Where if there is a guy who is going to get on my team, all I'm worried about is winning the game and being a team member. If you go four for four and say, "Well, I went 4 for 4", I don't care what you did we lost the game. One of our players last year played for an Iowa Valley team. They needed a catcher. And we didn't have a game. And he asked me if he could play and I said sure the more the merrier. And he came back and I said how did the game go and he said it wasn't fun at all. He said their not a team. He said what I enjoy here is that you guys said hello to me you got to know me, introduced. He said hardly anyone talked to me, all they were worried about was their own base hit or super play you know. And so I think that is evident in this area a little be more too.

That probably comes from the tradition of baseball don't you suppose?

I think it has to do with leadership, some of the managers.

I think the last question I have is that I can find on here, what is your hope or wish for the future of the league? Obviously, you've been around a long time and hopefully will be around for a lot longer but -- what do you want, what do you look for the future?

I just hope we stay strong. That there is enough interest with the good teams and that it doesn't drop below the eight and hopefully we can go above. I would like to see another Cedar Rapids team in it. So we have different competition, different people, different teams to play. The Prairie du Chien team, it was fun to go up there and get to know those guys. I think that they were kind of surprised at how strong the league was. They didn't do that well. Just so it stays strong. If they want me to be president, as long as it is fun for me then I'll do it. It's not like I lose any sleep over the decisions and stuff, it has to be structured a little bit and I'm capable of doing that so. Yeah, so we stay strong and if there are some little problems address those so the league has some respect.

I never asked you, are you still playing?

No. No. My playing days are over. I've played, well, I'm sixty-one and I did in the past until last year go down to Florida and play a tournament in November with forty-eight and over, so.

I bet that was fun.

Oh gosh yes, I mean there are sixty some teams in the tournament and you get eight, nine games in in a week and so, but the mind is willing but the body is weak. I've got shoulder problems, knee problems.

**Personal interview with Dale Sperflage
By Todd Hospodarsky
March 29, 2010**

What is your connection with the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League?

Well, this will be my 22nd year of playing at that connection and that is pretty much, you know, I'm not, I mean, I didn't follow them like a lot of...I wasn't a town kid I guess, let's put it that way. So I didn't go to a lot of games up until the time I played.

When did you start playing, like right out of high school, or out of college, or when did that start?

I started my freshman year in college, yep. I probably would have played my senior year in high school. I wish I could have, but. . .

All for the Monticello Cubs?

All for the Monticello Cubs. I played...I played you know one game for Worthington, I pitched for them once. I played for a game or Rickardsville. It's just. . .

We talk about that later, some of the questions come up later is how that all works.

So...Did you manage or anything?

I did manage, and I can't tell you...probably mid-to late nineties up until 2000 probably late nineties to 2006-7, so probably about ten years I managed.

Who managed before you and after?

After me, Garrett Hankin is doing it right now. Before me; well I did it for probably three or four years. No, more than that...I probably did it for five, and then Brian Benischek did it for a couple years, and then I took it over again for three or four years. So, before that, do you want, like, who I all played for?

Yes, I was just curious. Yeah.

I started with Diz Edwards, for a year, I think. That was the only year he managed, I believe. And then Kevin Melsha for two or three. Bob Hines for a few. Mark Spensley Me. Benischek. That's it roughly.

Let's see. You kind of answered this. What years were you involved in the league? You said '89 until...and you are still playing. I've got that. How did you become involved in baseball in general? And then how did you get tied in with the Cubs?

Oh, baseball in general, I just played it at home with my siblings a lot and went through the ranks, started with t-ball.

Was there anybody big who influenced you? Dad, uncle, anybody?

Yeah, actually my mom probably played more baseball with me than anybody. She'd come out and hit me grounders, pop ups. Out on the farm. I had one of my older brothers was pretty athletic and he played some.

Did he play with the Cubs too?

Nope. He didn't even play in high school. He... I got the better end of that deal. I... they had to farm. And they really didn't... And when they did play little league, they had to ride their bike to town and, you know, they. . . So they really had to want to play. So.

That would be painful.

Yes

So how did you get tied in with the Cubs then? In college?

Just, well I mean they. . . Well, high school. It was kind of tradition that they asked any senior the next year if they wanted to play. It was kind of funny actually, probably the first time I ever saw the town team, I played against them because I was on a legion team, the Eastern Iowa Legion Team through Dyersville and Cascade. We had an exhibition game, or practice game, against the Monti Cubs here in town.

So who won?

I think, I think maybe we did. I'm not. . . It was a good game. I was the starting pitcher and that was kind of fun throwing against these guys.

The Old Guys.

The guys you read about all the time.

Right. That's awesome. What can you tell me, and I've got a lot of this information already, but just, kind of from your take, what do you know about the formation and running of the league? Or maybe when you managed it, like how was it run, you know, as far as a league?

As far as the league, there is a president and a secretary, basically. And every other... I don't know. When I managed it there were two meetings, there was a spring meeting and a fall meeting. In the spring, at one of the meetings, you would nominate a president, and vote. You know, you would try to handle it like parliamentary procedure or whatever, and, you know, you would just talk about whatever needs to be talked about. The secretary usually makes out the schedules and that was it.

Any big debates? Usually, I know one question that has come up before... different, new towns, that wanted to get in, or anybody need to get out. Remember any of those discussions, or was it... maybe during your years it was pretty stable.

It was fairly stable. I know when Cedar Rapids wanted to join the league, they... their manager, or whatever, came to the meeting in the spring and had to basically say why he wanted to be in the league and we talked about what would be good and what would be bad. Obviously having the eight teams or whatever is good but, you know, Cedar Rapids is a bit; you know, we were in Monticello probably the closest team. So that was kind of a big factor.

So did you guys vote no then or did they come up for a while?

I think, I think everybody probably voted yes. But then in a couple. . . Then they were probably in the league two or three years. And the people actually did. . . There were some teams, we weren't one of them, but some teams wanted them out of the league just for. . .

The Distance?

The distance, and the fact that. . . To me it wasn't a big deal, but they could pull any players they wanted from a big town like that.

I gotcha. Right. Is Dubuque in it now?

Yeah.

That's a similar situation.

Yeah, but nobody ever said because...I shouldn't say this on camera, but it's Dubuque county.

Right. Well we have talked about that before in some of the other interviews. Like, there is a Dubuque County Semi-Pro Baseball Hall of Fame which none of the Monti players are ever in because they are not in Dubuque County which. . . That has come up. Let's see. This question maybe doesn't pertain, because you said you didn't really watch the games when you were younger, but what memories do you have of the league or specific games that played. I guess maybe games that you played in?

Well, actually, I read about the town team probably since about the time I could read. Just in the *Monticello Express* and I followed them and I knew what it was all about. It was a pretty big deal in the paper always and you read about them and they won a lot of tournaments which you know is maybe one of the reasons I still keep playing. Because I've never won in twenty-two years of tournaments.

Never won a tournament?

Never won a tournament. We got second several times but never. . .

Any specific games, or any big memories, that like jump out over the twenty-two?

Well, we beat New Vienna at their own tournament, I'm not sure if it was, I think maybe it was the semi-finals. It was, you know, their tournament and they were a powerhouse.

What year was that?

'94 or '95. Probably in there somewhere. We actually, we didn't do it much but we hired a pitcher, and went in and beat them. They are folded now, but as long as they had a tournament after that they always made sure we played the toughest team. Because we hired a pitcher one time. But you know, that stuck out. You know every year, there is always a victory or two every year where we beat somebody we shouldn't. And to be honest that's, those are my big moments and that is why I keep playing because. . .

Where do you play when you are not pitching? Because I don't even know.

Oh, now, second base. I played shortstop most of my career but, the old arm isn't flinging it that far, so.

I know the feeling. Who are some key people, maybe not in formation because this is before your time, but who is the key people running the league today?

Well, the league, it's Paul Scherrman he gets voted in as President every year. It's just a formality, but he does. So, you know, he's probably the main one. Just he's very diplomatic and he knows how to take the criticisms and can handle the arguments that come up which seem to every year, there is always something. Lenny Tekippe has been the treasurer for quite a few

years. Well, him and Pat Weber kind of alternated for a while as far as the treasurer, but, you know, those three have been the mainstays.

Right. What players or coaches stick out in your mind over the years? As far as like really good players or coaches?

Really good players. . .

Or really good coaches if somebody sticks out as a coach?

Well, Pat Weber, I'd probably have to start with him. He is in his mid-forties and he is still, still going strong. And him, as far as being hardnosed and . . .

Win at all cost?

Yes, win, and he is kind of... whether it's good or not, he is kind of the face of the league.

Anybody else over the years that you can remember facing?

You know, Dyersville's had some good players, Jeff Nadermann again and Kevin. I'm kind of going with those guys that have been around as long as I have, you know. He's still throwing. He's been a good player. We had the Wedewers from New Vienna, they were very good. Actually I hated to see them fold because it was just tradition to go there on their dirt, a small little field with a 250 fence to the right. That was a good time, but, you know, they were good. Farley--I just got in at the end of Paul Scherrman's career, but he was a great player. Mark Pins has been around for quite a while and a good hitter.

Any major leaguers that came back for anybody? Even in a onetime deal or anything?

When I first started playing, actually, a guy... Tom Whiteman was his name, I played Legion ball with him. He is from Dyersville. I know he would come back and pitch once in a while. Tim Bogey from Dyersville, he played. He was my age. We played Legion ball together. He caught at Alabama. I know he got drafted by the Reds. Actually, he just passed away a couple weeks ago.

Really, from what? He's got to be pretty young.

Forty, yeah. So. . . Cascade's had some players, not necessarily people that had been drafted or anything, but. . .

What about teams over the years, any teams powerhouses? You mentioned New Vienna, what about anybody else that dominated for three or four or five to ten years or whatever?

Cascade probably the last five years or so or six. Now we beat them last year for the first time in...I called my brother after that because he might have been on the last team that. . . We were on together, and you know, that had been probably ten years ago at least. They went...they were like 65 and 1 one year. They played in both leagues and actually the big news...Los Angeles Times. . .

I read that article.

They did a big article on that team.

That was a McDermott that wrote it...Denny's brother.

Oh, ok.

He wrote that and they are from Cascade. I don't know how he found out about it, but he came back. I read the article.

They were, that has been the most dominate team. Every year there are three or four that are really good.

Who would you say I mean, will Cascade be the team to beat again this year? Or are they on their way down maybe from that domination?

I think they are on their way down a little bit.

Just age and stuff?

Age, and a little bit heavier, and not as fast. Dyersville, boy, they, when they have their guys there, they are the best hitting club. So, as a pitcher they are the ones I least want to face. Farley always has the best pitching. They've got three or four, three or four tha and can throw any of them and they are going to be solid. So they are in every game.

And they get some Dubuque players don't they? I was thinking Paul said that get some. Well like, Western Dubuque... Western Dubuque, and they probably had the best season last year of anyone. But they I think they still do both leagues, so they don't necessarily win the league games. Because they are throwing, I mean they are playing every day of the week so they are throwing not their aces during the league.

I wonder how they can do that. Right. I think you kind of covered this. What teams are in the league now? I remember Paul gave me this info, but I think I will just cover it here.

You said there were eight teams, what are they?

There's nine. Cascade, Monticello, Dyersville, Rickardsville, Farley, Dubuque, Worthington, Prairie du Chien, I'm missing one.

Did you count us?

Yep. Cascade, Monticello, Dyersville, Rickardsville, Farley, Dubuque, Worthington, Prairie du Chien. You got me.

It's not Petersburg?

No. Oh, Key West. Key West has a team.

And you said, like you mentioned New Vienna. What teams do you remember were in the league and have dropped out besides New Vienna? Are there any other ones that you remember playing against?

New Vienna, and then Cedar Rapids was just in for a few years. Key West was not in the league when I started. And Prairie du Chien was not in when I started. But, what, so that leaves six? Six or seven.

Pretty solid. How do the players get, how do you guys get your players, do you do tryouts? Do you do just...same team as last year? Do you recruit for new players? I guess, how do you get your team?

As manager, you start with who you had last year and you call those people, at least the ones you want to call back. You know it used to be every year before the season, about this time, we put an article in the *Express*. And that kind of fell by the wayside, you know. We didn't get much anyway from that. But, we did it. Now it is more of, you start with last year's team and you

make sure you ask the best high school players from the previous year. You do that. You know e do it a little different in Monticello because we truly do a town team. It is mostly Monticello guys and us and Cascade are about the only two that play "true" town teams.

Right. So, like, who plays for the others? We talked about Farley gets West Dubuque but what about Key West and Rickardsville, I mean, those towns are so small, do they get them from Dubuque too?

Yeah, they mostly...they funnel them from the Clarke, UD, and Loras, lots of college players from that area. Um, you know, most of the other teams, if you didn't play college ball. You pretty much didn't play town team. Or you don't play town team right now. You know in Monticello, we don't have. . . you know I'm forty years old and I'm one of the few. Nick Miller and you konw Jacob Thompson now. Most of them never played college ball. And that's, you know... And that's, you know, you are going up against that every day. Town ball is a lot different.

So, arguably then, if we are comparing it to...I'm just thinking of my thesis here comparing it you know... A hundred years ago, pretty much every town had a town team. Even today, even though there are these town teams, very few of them are actually true town teams. Because they, I don't want to say they recruit, but they take from talent pools.

Yeah, there is no way, Rickardsville is going to have ten players, and they do, they might not have anybody from the town. Now the name is just where you play your games. Your home games. I don't know what is right or wrong there, because you still want to have the league, but you know it's not real level for us.

Right. So, of the Monti team, I got the thinking maybe I need to investigate that, but the Monti team we're all town team? I mean nobody is. . .

You know, most of the year last year we were all Monticello players. You know, once in a while, like last year during a couple tournaments, we had like UNI's catcher came and caught for us for a couple times. Because... well for maybe 10-15 years we had a guy named Chuck Cavanaugh that lived in Cedar Rapids and came and played for us. He's got, you know, he plays for Fairfax you know and he knows players from there and that is kind of how you get players from other teams.. . You know you are short players for one night and they can get a couple, so you. . . They bring them along, and sometimes you want them to come around more often. They have a good time, and, so. . .

You mentioned. . . This kind of gets in to hiring out. You mentioned that you pitched for a couple teams. My question is, are players ever traded from team to team. I know they are not after talking to the other ones, but like how often are...I know Hoppy and Rick both told me that it's usually pitchers are. . . Usually when you hire someone out, how often do you do that, or how often do other teams do it, if Monti doesn't do it that often?

We...we haven't done it for several years, and it would just be for tournament games and even for us it was just semi-finals, or finals usually. Other teams, they will, if they are in a tournament and they are short a pitcher, it's just common place. Like Farley they have their tournament pitchers and they don't necessarily go out and get pitchers, but Rickardsville will, Cascade will, you know most of them, if they really. . .

What is the usual salary or whatever?

Your payment?

Yeah. What is typical?

I don't...you know I don't even know. We gave the guy a few years ago, fifty bucks and some gas money. Something like that. Years ago we did hire a... we gave him something like five bucks a strikeout.

Gives him an incentive to pitch strikeouts.

Works out pretty well. Yeah. A few refreshments after the game always. . . That goes without saying anymore. I don't know what...

I mean I don't know, is that pretty typical? Is that was Cascade pays? If they're doing it more often, maybe it's. . .

You see, I don't know because a couple of times I've done it for other teams. I love to play baseball, I don't want any money. And, if I stink, I don't want you to pay me.

Right. Maybe you ought do that five bucks a strikeout deal.

You could still lose though. I'm just like, no, I'll come play.

You could do a graduated, five bucks for a strikeout, like a dollar for a ground out, fifty cents for a pop out.

Twenty-five for a win. It like a rule breaker. .

Exactly. What changes do you remember? And I think recently maybe there haven't been as many as the older guys, like maybe in the field, regulations, and rules, anything in the league? Any big changes?

Not... I think you got me there.

Nothing big?

Nothing Big.

The older guys talked about was like when lights came in and they went to grass infields from the skinned infields, and that type of thing.

The only little change since I've been playing is the wood bats. Probably my first six or seven years (and these years are very rough). I'm thinking for six or seven years we played with aluminum and then we went ... And that was a big deal at the league meeting. There was a lot of discussion there. Whether or not to go to that. I think it was definitely for the betterment of the league and. . .

I would say so, I mean you could get somebody killed with an aluminum bat any more.

And you know, it helped a team like us that is not real strong hitting. The games are fairly close no matter what.

That's a good addition, nobody mentioned that. I like that.

It helped me as a pitcher. You know you can pitch inside now and not get hurt too bad.

Where do teams, maybe you can only talk about Monti, but if you know of other teams that would be great, where do teams in the league get their financial backing. Where do they get their money to pay for umps, uniforms, and the field?

I think most of them through a Park Board. I think like Farley does, and you know Cascade's is either through a Park Board or through a Legion, something like that. Worthington is with the Park Board I'm sure. Most of them, and that's one of the benefits of a small town still having teams, they all have their little Park Boards and they have their big tournaments every year where they make some money and. . .

The Cubs, do we do the same thing, does the Park Board?

No, we've never been. . . We've always been our own separate entity, so. . .

So where do we get our money?

For years and years, all the painful years I managed, we got everything through the concession stand down at the old fairgrounds. And when we lost that, we lost all of our funding. For a couple of years we kind of had some built up, and we just got some generous donations from individuals. The past three years now, we've... it's a pretty cool thing actually, we've just done one golf tournament at the beginning of the year in May. And in that one golf tournament we get advertising, put up signs up on the course and we charge a hundred bucks and whatever we get from the golf we make enough to run the team, just with that one, whereas before, basically me and the manager and one or two other people would spend their whole summer running the stand to make \$2,000.

Who maintains the field? I think you guys play out here at the high school don't you? On the high school diamond?

Yeah.

Do you guys maintain, obviously the high school maintains it for the high school games, but do you guys like...who maintains the field for you in the sense of chalking and all those things. Do you. . .

We chalk our own. We try and rake it, after a game, rake it if we can.

Is there a deal, where, since it is the high school diamond, since you are using their lights and their diamond, is there any, or do they just let you use it free of charge, do they charge? Up until this point, free of charge. I kind of...I was the manager in between that transition and we had always...you know the high school had always paid us a light fee and that was it, you know nothing else. It was like ten bucks an hour. You kind of estimate and they give you some money at the end of the year and call it good. The last couple of years I think we didn't even charge them, so we've kind of gone, you know. . . It will be interesting to see what becomes of that because now all we do really is chalk it and rake it when we're done. We don't really help out a whole lot with the field maintenance.

How much crowd support do the teams receive? Is it mostly family, or are their fans, and have there been better times in the last twenty-two years than other times?

Mostly family. I would say when I first started, we had more fans, fan support. We used to, as part of our fund raising stuff, we used to do a raffle every year and that night would be big. We'd get quite a few people. They'd buy their tickets and they had to be present to win you know. We might have a brat night. But that was easier because we had the stand and it was all ours and we could do what we want, kind of, down there. I hate to say it but you could bring alcohol down if you wanted. We couldn't sell it but that does attract people, especially on a brat night or

something like that. But, you know, probably, I don't know, the last five years or so in there it hasn't been good at all as far as fan base, but I've seen it rise the last couple of years.

Do you think that is because you played better or?

I think, we've been playing a little better. And I think it's more, I think we'd gotten away from having completely Monti guys for a while. So obviously less family shows up because they are not going to come from Cedar Rapids to watch Monticello play ball, so you know that made a difference. I think they are opening the stand up for us now. The last couple of years they have opened them up every game instead of just once in a while so that makes. . . You know a lot of people like to go to a ball game if they can get a sandwich, pop, or whatever.

Right. Got to have your hot dog.

We've always had the old faithfuls you know: Sid Schatz, Flee Meyer, Harvey Johnson, Bob Hines. You know they travel and go to more tournament games than some of the players go too, you know.

How many tournaments do you guys play in usually? Is it every weekend?

No, They are not on, they're not weekend tournaments.

Oh they are not?

No, they might, they could start any day of the week. You just run them straight though until you get through all the bad weather. It is what it is. And that's what's kind of neat about town team too. In fact, we don't play that many weekend games. It's...a lot of the time it's during the week. Nobody questions it, if you are supposed to play at 8:30 on a Wednesday night you go do it. You know, I don't have to go to work in the summer. But most other guys do and they will play the late game and stick around and have a few beers.

What do you do if you don't have enough guys?

You find some.

You find some somewhere?

Yep. There's been many times where you call a softball player and...A couple years ago at Cascade, it was during the fair, the Jones County Fair and everybody had tickets to the "show" and you know that would never matter in the past because the town team took priority over everything but we went, that night we went, boy that, two guys that had never played town team. Ben, who hadn't played all year and he is probably forty-five. A couple others that when they were there they didn't get to play a whole lot and you just. You don't. It's like a \$100 fine if you miss a league game because of that. And if you skipped a tournament game because you didn't have enough players you'd never get invited back, and so. You know, you just can't chance it. Especially not having the tournament, we are at their beck and call.

Did you guys ever have, did you ever try to have a tournament, that you remember? I know when you were younger you probably did the fair game.

Yes, when I first started playing we still had two games during the fair like Wednesday of the fair. And that was a big deal for teams too, they loved that. But we have never had in the twenty-two years that I played, never had our own tournament. It ended right before that. They just weren't making any money off of it and...

Isn't that weird that you can't...I mean you can do it, I mean like Cascade's is how old and...

And now we would never be able to without beer sales. I mean you just wouldn't. There is most of your profit right there.

Have there been any big problems that you remember that the league has had to overcome over the years? Any big crises or...?

I'm drawing a blank there. Had to have been some. I know, here recently Pat Weber got into a little trouble playing against the Dubuque town team. He was. Well, we weren't there, so it was here say.

Anytime you have strong personalities you are going to have conflicts.

And there are three or four that are real strong and so that was a big deal. By and large it runs pretty smoothly. Sometimes you know the scheduling. You know, some teams want you to, like Rickardsville, he has his best players, Dubuque Senior's head baseball coach, so he wants to schedule around Dubuque Senior games and that kind of gets. You know Pat Webber was a high school coach and he was scheduling around his you know so that gets a little dicey there. You know, people would cancel games.

So, you guys don't play on a set, every Tuesday night type deal?

No, we used to more, you know they'd ask you to make out a schedule and what nights, and we'd always play on Sunday nights. That was like religious that Monticello played on Sunday night. But the players have changed and they don't want to play on Sunday night. It was more of a family thing on Sunday night and now it's you know... I've been a married guy for years, so it's just not a big deal now. Now we have maybe one or two more that are married but. No kids right now or anything like that so.

So you are the old grandpa on the. . .

Yeah, it's been that way for a while unless Spence comes back.

In your twenty-two years has the league ever been in danger of failing or had Monticello Cubs ever been in danger of not fielding a team? Again, my thesis is that everybody's town team seems to have failed at some point in time. Not everybody's, but so many.

Right. I don't think, since I've been playing I don't think the league has ever been in question. You know, Monticello, there for a few years, you know, who are we going to get to play? I mean, usually at the beginning of the year you like to start with a solid base of nine or ten. You just think what are we going to do? And, actually, when I got out of the coaching that is kind of tricky there too because I was not going to coach no matter what. You know, and if Garrett wouldn't have taken it, who's to say if it would have ended right there.

So, I was going to ask you, who do you think is responsible for keeping the Cubs going and you know who is responsible for keeping the league going, when it has failed in other places. I learned there used to be a Delaware County League with Hopkinton and Delhi, and Ryan and those teams and then that whole league went away.

Well, it's...as far as team, like Monticello, it is definitely the coach. I mean, it is a huge time commitment. You've got to be willing to do it and like I was to the point where I just couldn't or wouldn't anymore. But now Garrett he is starting a web site. You know he is really into it and so you get somebody like that and that keeps it going for the next generation.

Do you think there will ever be another Hoppy of Westhoff that keeps it going for forty years? Or is it going to be just like five years at a time like what it has been for the last twenty.

I don't know because I'm probably the closest thing to that, but like I said, I couldn't stay coaching. Yeah, and actually even those guys they didn't coach all the time, it was periodic. And like Hiner played forever but I don't know if he actually coached, at least not while I was around. But, you know, I think having guys like me around does help as far as keeping....

Longevity.

But you know Garrett he does a great job and as far as the league I think having Paul there all the time I don't know what will happen you know when Paul and Lenny aren't there anymore to run the league. Because they can, like you said there are such strong personalities, if Yipe was running the league I don't think there probably would be a league because people would get fed up with him.

Right, it would be fraction.

They can kind of handle it a little bit and like I said he's into politics you know, Paul is...he knows how to handle that stuff.

Why and how do you think the league and teams in the league have been able to stay viable when town baseball teams have faded in other areas. What in your opinion why has Monticello, Cascade, and Dyersville and those six key core teams been able to last for literally...the earliest I found for Monticello is 1903 score, something like that, so they have had a town team over a hundred years and they probably had it before but it was in the, I found one in the paper and I think they won the championship. Spensley has a picture in his office like 1907 or something like that.

Oh, really?

You know of the Monticello team, and I know the Monticello Cubs. I actually found the actual tournament for the Cubs in the 1932, was the earliest I could find, so they've even been the Cubs for eighty years. So, in your opinion, why here, why not Ryan, why not Riverside, IA, where I'm from and stuff.

I don't know. I think part of it was. Like in your area did they have such a thing ever?

They had a town team. Yeah, but they faded at some point in time, usually after the fifties at some time. Or forties, you know, some time, sixties, seventies.

I don't have a good answer for that. I think when you are in these smaller towns, you have less to do. I mean that's why Cedar Rapids probably doesn't have a team anymore. You know there's other things they can do. The really good players might go play somewhere else, but in this area, which I think is why it's harder to keep teams going now because it's just a different mentality now. Even the real good teams, even the best players aren't there every night. I'm sure talking to Hoppy they always had their nine or ten, they were always there and like Hiner went to his daughter's wedding and went and played ball that night. He just wasn't a person to miss and... You know, now if somebody has a bachelor party or something, you go to that, or it's just, the commitment isn't there as strong even in this area now. I'm definitely seeing that. As to why here and not other areas, that's tough.

Last question, what is your hope or wish for the future of the league?

My wish is that it keeps going. Because, I want to be able, long after I'm done playing, I want to be able to go and watch and stay in ball that way. I think you know I want my kids to be able to play too because I think... I've met tons of people that, really good people that I wouldn't have ever met and I want they younger people to have that opportunity and it's really good baseball. It's not like you're you know out drinking beer in the dugout and that kind of thing, its. You know, everybody has a good time afterwards but during the game it's serious. I think kids sometimes these days they need that something. It's not a video game. It's still something to do when your -- keeps you active when you are out past your college years or whatever, so. Well, that's what I want.

**Personal interview with Wayne Schnier
By Todd Hospodarsky
Date: November 10, 2010**

What is your connection with the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League or any other names that you know it of?

Well, I manage Worthington, semi-pro baseball team. I actually grew up in Worthington, played for Worthington back in the mid-seventies to early nineties. Moved to Dubuque and after my son and daughter got finished with high school sports then I came back to manage my old team.

And how long have you managed it?

Four years, this will be my fifth year.

How did you become involved in baseball in general, and then, like with the Worthington team, and who influenced you?

I became involved in baseball because my dad was a huge baseball fan and player, he played for Worthington, managed Worthington.

What years would that have been?

I know he played I think it was from 1955 until well, I actually played with him, he played about forty-four years so I think he played up until about 1985, '87, somewhere in there so.

Forty-four years is a long time to play baseball.

I think he retired at age forty-five I believe. That's how I got involved with baseball and he's one I followed and I always had utmost respect for. He's in the Dubuque County Hall of Fame now. He was a good ball player.

What do you know about the formation and running of the league that is in existence today?

I don't know when the actual Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League started compared to the Prairie League because when I was involved originally when I played there was really only one league, it was just kind of everyone together. So as far as the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League and the Prairie League two separate leagues I honestly can't tell you when that actually happened. Some of the other guys who have been involved longer will probably be able to tell you more.

Why don't you explain the league, how many teams were there throughout your career.

What teams and any changes in teams that might have occurred over the years.

Right now the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League has nine teams. Most are local area teams, but the only one outside the area a little bit was Cedar Rapids who was involved with the league for a few years and then their team disbanded last year. So Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, asked to get in the league to get some competitive baseball for them. So they joined the league last year. So at this point there's really nine teams in our league. Dyersville, Farley, Cascade, Worthington, Monticello, Dubuque, Key West, and I know I'm missing someone in there, but those are the primary Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League. Then the Prairie League again has a couple of the same teams of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League but I think eight other teams from around the area too.

Well, northeast Iowa right?

So really there are about seven teams, local area teams.

Has that been pretty consistent? I mean, you mentioned Cedar Rapids teams, I'll go all the way back to the seventies or if you remember your dad's teams in the fifties pretty much the same? Any big changes?

There use to be a few other smaller towns. Maquoketa had a team. They disbanded the last few years. Holy Cross always had a team for years until they just disbanded here about four years ago, three years ago. Otter Creek use to have a team. I remember my dad going down there, me being bat boy, you know playing Otter Creek. Placid's been around forever it seems like too, they were always one of the teams, but for the most part most of the teams have stayed pretty much the same. Luxemburg just started last year. They were previously Petersburg which previously was some kids from Placid. Bankston just started a new team this year. A bunch of high school kids wanted to play ball so they got involved, got a team together and they are in the Prairie League now too.

In your opinion, how can teams... Bankston is pretty darn small. How does a town, I don't know if I'd even call it a town, how does an area like Bankston hang on to a team? Or even Worthington, Worthington's not that big.

I guess we'll find out about Bankston. Like I said, that a first year. Just some high school kids who were high school or just graduated from high school and wanted to keep playing baseball. They just formed a team. I think they just threw some shirts together and hats and got a few bats and balls and decided to join the league just to play ball. You know Worthington, like I said, I think we've been one of the original founding teams from eastern Iowa in this area. I think we've got sixty-two years in right now. It is, it's hard to keep it going. The population base keeps dwindling. Kids aren't as committed as they were when I grew up. Just a lot more interests. I think the hardest part is getting the bodies there, and having the numbers. Because when I grew up, when I first started playing we'd have sixteen, seventeen, eighteen guys on the team. We'd bide our time on the bench and just love to show up and play and play catch and practice. Now a days if the kids don't start they find something else to do. So it's hard.

Who were some of the key people in the formation and running of the league either when you started or today whatever you can remember, or leaders who have kept the league going?

Paul Scherrman has definitely been around for a long time. He manages Farley yet. He's been involved in eastern Iowa baseball, for probably, it's over fifty years now -- somewhere in there. Well, not fifty, I'd say at least a good forty-five years or forty years. He's one of the key players. Lenny Tekippe from Rickardsville, he's been involved in the league for a long time. John Knabel is a very passionate guy from Key West who revived Key West baseball about eight -- six, seven, eight years ago. Got them back playing again. The Cascade guys, you know, Loras Simon he's been around for a long time. I used to play against him and now he's managing Cascade. I'm just trying to think. You know, Worthington, Gary Langel he's just a year older than I am but he's been involved with Worthington baseball for, this will be his 25th year as the tournament director. He's managed, he's coached, he's run the tournament, and I can honestly say without him at the helm of Worthington basically keeping things going, we probably would have folded a few years ago. He's very keen and instrumental in our team. But he also is involved in the league, he does a lot for different tournaments, helping out and things like that too so. There is a handful of key people but I think every individual manager has a lot to do with it too.

What players or coaches over the years stick out in your mind? For example, just from some of the other interviews I've done, any maybe people that went on to the pros or came from the pros or college people, anybody big?

Now, or back when I was...?

Any time.

Well when I was bat boy, my dad managed, Jim Van Scoyoc from Norway. I'm sure you've heard of him. You know the movie and stuff, The Final Season. He used to come and pitch for Worthington in the tournament games. He and my dad got to be good friends. He was one of the better pitchers around. Eddie Sawville use to come and pitch. I think he's fifty some years old and I think he's still throwing in the upper eighties if he wanted to. He coaches, I think Wilton, or is an assistant coach down there. Paul Scherrman definitely, he had a chance for the Washington Senators when they were around. Paul used to play for them. Lenny Tekkipe was a good ball player in his younger days, a catcher. Joe Burger from Worthington. My dad. If you look at the Dubuque County Hall of Fame inductees, and whose involved, I think they are a lot of the key players from way back when. I'm just trying to think, you know, today's players, it just seems like, maybe because when you are a kid, as a bat boy, the pitching and things seemed a lot better than now, Maybe it's just because of that age you are more influenced by things, but I think the top level has dropped off from when my dad's generation played. But, it's still good baseball. But I just go back to the sixties and seventies when I was bat boy and early days of playing and it seems like it was, I don't want to say better talent, but maybe more competitive... they took it more seriously is what I'm trying to say.

Are there any teams over the years that you remember being especially good, any like dynasty type things? I've heard Cascade's pretty good lately.

Cascade's been. New Vienna had good teams, you know, they were one of the great teams too back in the, I believe it was the eighties or nineties. Of course, they ended up folding too, but they were one of the powerhouses too. Dyersville has always been good. Cascade, Farley, your typical around the area teams like that, they have just always been consistent. I don't ever remember them having a down year really.

Being that Worthington is so close to Cascade, did you ever lose, like somebody wants to go to a better team? I don't know how good Worthington is I don't have your stats.

Worthington, when my dad played, and when I played in my younger days, Worthington was always there. We won three or four tournaments a year. We were always in the semi-finals or finals, but, like I said, the last few years just haven't been that way. What was that question again, part of it?

I just asked about like Worthington whether they lost players ever. Did anybody say like "Cascade's better so I'm going to..." Because they are so close, I just wondered. Or Dyersville?

We use to have players start with us and then go to Dyersville. It seemed like we were the farm team for Dyersville until they were good enough and then Dyersville would get them to play for them. That seemed to be about the one place where we did lose some players was to Dyersville. That was the one.

What separated the really good teams from the others in those years? Obviously there is always competition, you know, somebody's in second place but...

What separates them or separated them? I think the feeder system has a lot to do with it. You know Dyersville has Beckman High School, Cascade has Cascade, Monticello has a high school. Epworth can draw from West Dubuque the same way Farley can. New Vienna would draw from Beckman in those days. And again, I think the population had kind of decreased, as far as the kids coming up and playing. Like Worthington, Worthington had to produce some great ball players because they went on and played high school at Beckman or even college, at the college level. Right now, Worthington, we're having a hard time fielding Babe Ruth teams and it doesn't leave you anything to build up the town team basically. But I would say the feeder system as far as the school program has a lot to do with it. Worthington doesn't have one. We don't have anybody to draw from. So we're trying to maybe trying to pick that West Delaware market if we can. We got a couple of kids from there but it's still tough.

How does the Worthington team get their players, are there tryouts, do they, I guess, how do you recruit?

Basically it's whoever wants to come out can come out and play and practice. We really don't have tryouts. We're trying to find nine, ten, twelve guys to play.

Back when you had eighteen or so did you, you didn't cut anyone out because you had a team sitting on the bench.

No, if you came out and wanted to play, there is always a uniform for you. No one ever got cut. And I remember some pretty bad ball players but they still showed up and just to play catch or take batting practice whatever. You never cut anybody. Right now its whoever wants to come out and play can play. I'm drawing a few kids from Dubuque just from my son's age who want to play ball yet and try to fill out a roster.

Were players ever traded? I think what has come up in some of my other interviews they weren't traded, but you talked about Van Scoyoc coming up and pitching. I guess how does that work, you know, when you get outside help out of your normal team? Just kind of go through that process.

For Worthington, I don't know about other teams, but for Worthington, I know it was more tournament pitching. The tournaments were always a huge thing. We'd bring them in and pay them whatever it might be, \$50 or \$75 a game for them to come in and pitch just because they are prestigious tournaments and you want to move up and play and maybe get some of that top four prize money or whatever. I think it's just a pride thing too. To say you are one of the better teams for that given tournament but it never really had an effect on any of the players I remember because everyone was just kind of knew. Hey, they wanted the same goal -- to get that championship.

Did all the teams do that? And not just Worthington?

For the most part.

I was wondering if Dyersville would need to do that since they.

Yeah, they did and they still do. You know, Cascade is probably one of the few teams that doesn't because they've got the talent and they've got the bodies there too. Key West for the most part no. I'd say for the most part though most teams will bring in a pitcher for a tournament time. Not all, but most for tournament time.

Normal players don't really receive any compensation do they?

No.

Do you remember any other players or hiring any other players like you need a catcher or anything, or was it just pitching for Worthington anyway? Or anybody else, I guess.

Well, as far as compensation wise, it was just a pitcher. If I needed another player to play a position or something I would just ask and they would basically play, I wasn't about to pay anybody to come and play. I notice the other question too or the nice point about town team baseball to semi-pro baseball, because a guy I work with plays for Farley right now, he use to play for New Vienna and he said one of the biggest things he remembers too, the biggest change over the last ten-fifteen years was town team baseball to semi-pro baseball right now. Because you do get different levels of players, not just from your home town, so that was one of the big changes over the last ten to fifteen years, the town team was semi-pro.

What changes do you remember say like in the field over the years or any regulations either in baseball that you remember as a player or even in the league if they have changed any big rules or anything?

Well, from when I first started out playing earlier, or when my dad was playing, no. Designated hitter rule came into effect later. That was one of the things. As far as any big rule changes, off the top of my head I'm drawing a blank about rules. Field wise I think definitely the field conditions have improved over the years for the most part in most places. I think taking care of the fields, getting people involved in field maintenance has improved over the years too.

Who takes care of the Worthington field? Monticello, I know, is a high school field so really the high school kind of takes care of it all. And I know Cascade has the American Legion, you know, I guess what I, I'm not familiar with Worthington's field, what's the situation there?

Basically, we have an athletic association which is just the coaches of the various town teams (girls softball Little League, Babe Ruth) sit on an association. We're basically the ones in charge of the field. You are in charge of getting the field ready for your games. Any field maintenance we'll get together and have a spring cleanup, put the, we just got a new wind screen and stuff, we'll put that up. Typically it's Gary Langel and I and we'll get a few of the players that do that. But as far as taking care of the field itself, basically it's down to the coaches who coach the teams. Taking care of it themselves.

Does your team, I guess, financially, does the city offer any support with that. Or do the teams chip in or how does where do the money come in to do not just the field but maybe for your uniforms, all that stuff, where does that?

Again, that's the athletic association. Our basic fund raisers throughout the year are our individual tournaments. The Little League tournament, they have a tournament that runs over a couple weeks period. I don't believe girls' softball had one this year, but then, and the town team. So basically the little league and the town team tournaments basically bring in the money to support the season for the next year.

Do you pool that or do you keep it separate?

It's all together, all pooled money. I don't know what Little League charges their players to play. It might be \$15 fee per player. Town team it might be \$15 or \$20. Town team is different than when I played because when I played, we just went out and played we didn't pay anything. But

right now I believe it's twenty dollars a player to play. We'll provide the jersey. You buy your own pants, socks. Buy your own hat. We'll have hats made up, but you pay for them as well. So really the only thing we provide is the jersey top. The twenty dollars helps to offset umpire costs, some new uniforms whatever it might be. If you have a bad year, in your tournament. Another thing we did this year because of the rainy weather, you know we've got an all dirt infield, so when it rains it's tough to get it back in shape. Some of the coaches or people from the athletic association after the Little League tournament got rained out a few nights in a row, that's a big fund raiser, decided to make their own tarp, so we got pieces of canvas from Farmtek in Dyersville that was on sale. We all got together one day and laid it all out in the outfield, pieced it together with double sided tape, got it all together and we ended up making our own tarp which saved a couple nights of Little League tournament. And a couple nights at the town team tournament. So, every little thing helps. It all saves some money in the long run.

Yes, with the weather lately it's been crazy.
Just need volunteers to put it on and take it off.

How much crowd support does Worthington get or are there teams that you travel to that get better support or worse support or do you remember as a kid or a grown up playing historically times being better.

Well, I'll tell you, growing up, being a bat boy, even just starting out playing in the mid-seventies, the crowd support back then was so huge, especially for tournaments. The first round tournament games the bleachers would be three quarters full. Now, if you can get a quarter of the bleachers full on a town team first round tournament game you are doing well. Championship night back then, you had to get there early in order to get a seat. Queen's night in Dyersville use to be standing room only, you got there very early to get a seat, now you can just come and go as you want. There's plenty of room. I think it's just, I think the economy has a lot to do with it. Then again I think, you know, soccer's been huge over the last few years, has taken a lot of attendance and even players away. Kids have so many things to do now. You know back then, we grew up with baseball. And that's what we did. We lived and breathed it. We practiced, we practiced every day, we played at home, we played catch. When dad would come home from work we'd go out and play catch, he'd hit fly balls, grounders whatever. Now, unless you see an organized practice somewhere, you don't see kids out just playing baseball. So, it's a different atmosphere and a different climate. Back then it was huge. It used to be so much fun. I loved going to games and huge crowds, have fun. It was just like a carnival atmosphere. You know Dr. Max and Mombo used to come to the Dyersville tournament all the time one of those nights. It use to be huge. So now you just try to think of different ways to try to boost attendance for your own tournament because it is a major fund raiser. So we look at the pairings for our tournament, try to find out who might draw, you know we know who draws a little bit better. So you might try to figure that, get them into that top four so you can get better semi-final, final nights. And it just so happened this year that our tournament worked out perfect, because we had Cascade, Dyersville, Farley, and us, final four teams. All the surrounding area and so this is one of the better years we had in our tournament too.

What problems has the league had to overcome over the years? Anything stick out in your mind?

Problems? Well, again it is kind of going back to just the last couple of years. Last year was one of the biggest problems with Prairie du Chien joining the league. They joined two years ago, this last summer was their second year. Well they ended up having a hard time getting travel players

so I think they ended up forfeiting the last six games of the year. That has an effect on everything too. I'd be shocked if they decided to come back next year just because of the way this year panned out. But as far as any major things happen that's probably the biggest thing that I can remember the last five to six years. Other than that it's been business as usual.

Was the league, in your opinion, ever in danger of failing? We've had teams drop, teams in danger, what's your thought?

As far as the league failing, I don't think so, just because of our two leagues now, Prairie and the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye. Eastern Iowa Hawkeye is probably the most stable league because it's been the established teams that have been around the longest. Prairie League, I know they have had some teams come and go from there and again Eastern Iowa has a couple of teams that play in both, so I don't think it's ever been in danger of failing. I think with so many area town teams I think that if something would be a problem or look to be on the verge of failing, I think there are enough teams to maybe make up something to get them to play in a couple different or maybe four in one. I don't remember it being on the verge of failing.

What memories, specific memories, do you have of the league or specific games played in or, since your dad played you could go back to your dad's time, any specific, you know.

I guess when my dad played I guess there are just two games that stand out. One was our loss and one we a pretty easy win. I guess one was the Dyersville Tournament, semi-final night, a huge crowd, I'm a bat boy and Worthington is winning. I think 3-1 the last inning with 2 outs and nobody on base. I'm the bat boy and I start bagging up the equipment, which I heard was bad luck. Well, Farley ended up scoring three runs in the last inning to beat us 4-3. And I still remember my dad had a key error in that game too and it just kind of all fell apart for me. So I learned never to bag equipment until the last out is made. The other one was again the Dyersville tournament first round playing Monticello. Worthington ended up winning that game 19-2 in three innings and Monticello just didn't come out. They had basically quit. So those are the two big games that I just remember all the time. I don't know what it is but it's just those two games that stick out in my mind. It's kind of weird.

This kind of gets to the crux of the whole thing, why we are doing this. Why and how have the league and teams in the league been able to stay viable when town baseball teams have faded in other areas? Obviously an opinion question, what do you think?

Well, eastern Iowa is still a strong baseball part of Iowa. You know, look at the high school teams. You know, it's still very well represented, even in the state tournaments. West Delaware is strong. Beckman. Cascade. Dubuque Hemstead. Wahlart. Senior. And West Dubuque. Those are areas with strong baseball in eastern Iowa. And eastern Iowa has a respect around the state. So, the kids are still there but I think it takes an older group like myself or my dad or some of the guys I played with to keep it going, to keep things together. I guess that is probably one of the biggest fears of ours in Worthington is, you know, when I retire, which I said I'd coach until I'm fifty which is this next year, so it might be my last year. Or Gary Langel who has kept Worthington baseball going for twenty-five years at the tournament. We decide to leave, who is going to take over? We are trying right now, to groom...to find somebody to do that stuff. So, it does bring a challenge with the younger generation, who wants to step up, because these guys, I call them kids because they are eighteen, or nineteen to twenty-four year olds, you know they show up at a ball game or at the ball park and, you know, geez the field's ready to go. You don't realize who gets it ready, who chawks it, who drags it, who carries the equipment, who buys all the equipment at the beginning of the year, who supplies the uniforms. There is stuff that goes on

behind the scenes that a lot of these guys don't know about. So it's just, whose going to be responsible enough to take over when we do decide to give it up. And, somebody I have to mention too that has been huge in Worthington baseball too is Sue Burger. She's our concession stand person who cooks all the food for games. She is there every game. She opens it up, she works it all the time. I think that's, she basically does this full time in the summer along with her regular full time job. Yet she doesn't want anything for it. Without her, or people like that, Worthington baseball probably wouldn't be around. You know, I see numbers declining in other teams. Dyersville, with Beckman right there, they still seem to have a hard time finding nine ball players. Cascade, I noticed over the last two years their roster has gone down quite a bit and they brought in a few players from elsewhere to kind of fill some holes. Farley has been one of the more consistent ones but they still bring some guys from the outside in too. So I don't know what is going to happen in the future. I hope it keeps going but we need some young blood to step up and take charge. I don't know where it's going to go. I don't know how long it's going to last, I'd sure hate to be around and see Worthington or Farley or Cascade give up baseball because it's just been a part of my life ever since I was knee high to a grasshopper.

What is your hope or wish for the future of the league? You kind of got into it there, touched a little bit I was wondering if you have more in depth.

Like I said, my hope for the league is to continue to have the seventeen teams that are here now or sixteen or whatever it might be. But again, we need a younger group of kids or young adults to step up and start taking some responsibility because the Paul Scherrmans of the world, the Lenny Tekippes, myself, Gary Langel, Herman Simon?, Loras Simon, you know, Pat Weber, you know, John Knabel. Some of these guys are coming to the end of their careers. We need people to step up. We just don't know what is going to happen. I've talked to other people, and they don't know either. The reason Lenny Teacup stays around is because if he leaves no one else is going to take it over. You know Paul Scherrman has been there forever. He may have some guys in their forties who might take it over but that's not a given either because you know everybody has families too. It's a tough situation. I hope it stays around because like I've said, if it does fade I hope it's after I'm gone because I don't want to see it go.

Well, that has kind of been the whole crux of my thing is that -- I come from southern Iowa originally, so it's all gone there for the town ball. And so, and actually I moved here sixteen years ago it blew my mind that they still played and I really didn't know much about it. It was just foreign to me and I really enjoyed this and obviously for me being in Monticello the last sixteen years the Cubs have been the thing. But the whole league kind of fascinates me because some of these teams are so darn small.

Yeah. Bankston only has maybe seventy people. I'm not sure how they started one. Worthington is 350-400 people. We are probably the smallest one. Epworth - Epworth is kind of in trouble right now too. So, we just don't know. But I talk to people to and I tell them I coach baseball, a town team, well they always think you are talking softball. Because that is what they have in their area, or outside of Iowa. No, it's baseball. Really? And we talk about it and every town has a team and they just can't believe it. Because they don't have that.

Have you noticed softball slow pitch affecting baseball, I mean because you've been in since slow pitch kind of, I would say, got kind of big in the seventies and eighties?

And that's a good point because it has affected. Young adults, kids that start out playing baseball, if they don't think they are getting enough playing time, you know softball is something they can

hit. They'll say they can't make the game but they will go play slow pitch softball. Yeah, it has taken bodies away from baseball because they play softball. No doubt about it.

I play slow pitch. For me, it was because baseball wasn't around. When I moved to Monti I suppose I could have baseball, but it had been a while. I felt a little rusty. But it was one of those things, you can go out there for an hour and be successful.

Right. It's a faster paced game. You can hit the ball. But that is just one sport that I just never really enjoyed. I played it a few times but I just never got into it because I'm a baseball guy. I did the modified and took batting practice off fast pitch, but the slow pitch I could not, I just do not like it. But, everybody's got their own opinion. Everybody likes something different. We have lost bodies to slow pitch softball.

Is there any last thing you want to add, throw in? About anything.

Well, just know that I think every town is a little different. I don't know if you talked to Paul Scherrman on how they operate or anything but I know they fund their own team. They do their own fund raisers. Again, we've got the association where we, the tournaments make up the money and that way they keep it going. Cascade, as you mentioned has the American Legion that helps support. So I think it's just over the next few years especially with the economy the way it is and the way I think it is headed with inflation and things coming down the road, I think it's going to make it tough, especially when you are traveling town to town, gas money and everything it all adds up and we just go down. I think that we might lose a few more people just because of the money situation. It's going to be hard.

**Personal interview with Dick Schnier
By Todd Hospodarsky
Date: January 12, 2011**

What is or was your connection with the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League or any other names of the league over the years?

Well, I played in it and I managed in it for many of years.

What years did you play and manage? What year did you start and when did you retire?
I started playing in 1956. I played and managed until about 1940, I mean 1982, I think.

That's a good stretch there.

Yeah

How did you become involved in baseball in general and specifically...like who influenced you? What got you interested in baseball back in the day?

Well, my dad was a big baseball fan. Plus my older brother played. He's five years older than I am. He played baseball all the time and that kind of got me playing too.

Were they involved with the league at all? Did they...

My brother was, yes.

Did you play for Worthington the whole time?

No, I played for. Well, I played for Monticello one summer. I played for Dyersville a couple of years. And on Sunday...we played mostly night games when I played with Worthington. So on Sundays I'd play with a team in Delaware County League. I played with Hopkinton a couple of years, and Earlville. And I played with Ryan one year. So I got around a lot.

What position did you play, just out of curiosity? It just dawned on me I never asked your son or anybody else what position you played.

I pitched most of the time and I played third or first.

When you weren't pitching?

When I got older I played first base.

And you said your dad played? Did he play for...

I don't think Dad played. He was just a fan --of sports. He encouraged us to play sports.

What do you know about the formation and running of the League that is in existence today? And actually if you want to go back, and maybe it's better to go all the way back, you know, in the forties and fifties. How was the league run? How did things work? And if you want to speak specifically to Worthington, because obviously I've asked that question to Hoppy Wright and some of the other guys so they kind of told me how Monticello ran their team as far as fund raising or whatever.

Well, it was the Maquoketa Valley League back then. Are you doing this on the Maquoketa Valley League?

I'm actually. This is. I should explain. Actually that's a good question. My thesis is you know if you go back 100-110 years every town had some sort of town ball team, of adults that played each other. And, over the course of the last century, it's kind of faded. Like, Riverside doesn't have a team. Hasn't had one since I can remember. Probably died off in the forties and fifties or something. But, for some reason, and if you look state wide, really northeast Iowa is about the only place that this semi-pro, town ball, whatever you want to call it, still exists. And we actually have two. The Prairie League is still kind of hanging on. The Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League has been pretty good. And I know it's changed over the years, you know, teams have come and gone, the name's changed. The Delaware County League was around and it kind of like you said died out. So I guess that's the thesis, and so, even though I live in Monticello, I didn't want to focus just on the Cubs. I wanted to know how is this area in the state been able to hang on when it's really died everywhere else even in the big towns. Des Moines and Cedar Rapids really don't have much.

Yes, it is amazing that it has hung on as long as it has. It's dying out. A lot of towns are folding up their baseball now. I hate to see it coming. I don't know if they can hang on much longer or not.

Right. And that's kind of my thought process. I know Petersburg and New Vienna, those towns that really, I mean, theoretically should never have been able to hang on to a team as long as they did just size wise. I know they are not around now but it's just amazing to me that they have been able to. And so that's my, the whole crux of my paper but I kind of have to build the foundation. So I guess maybe go back to the forties and fifties and whatever you want to talk about. You know, how did the league work then compared to now or in the eighties when you left. I don't know if you follow Wayne's team much. Oh, yeah, I go to all his games. My grandson plays with them so... Well, back then you played baseball because there wasn't that much else to do. We didn't have all this stuff that they have now to do. And that was a great motivator for a lot of guys to keep on playing. And I don't know how it's changed much. That was a big change. Another thing that changed a lot was consolidation of the schools. Where every small town had a high school, and they had a baseball team, a high school baseball team. So when they all went together in different places that eliminated a lot of baseball teams.

So it was kind of like a feeder system that...

Yeah it is. So that took a lot of kids away.

Because I'm not from around here, when did Worthington...did they have a high school and when did they lose that?

I don't know when it started. I graduated from there in '57 and it was there. When did they quit the last one? When Beckman started. Beckman started probably in '70 maybe '72. Whenever Beckman started. That was the end of our high school.

I never thought about it but, Sacred Heart used to have a high school in Monticello. And that is closed so that eliminated another feeder.

Well sure, Earlville they had a high school. And Petersburg, New Vienna, Holy Cross. Another thing, Holy Cross dropped their baseball team what was it, last year. The first year they never had one. I never thought they'd drop. Boy, they were a baseball coaching town. And they just couldn't find nobody to run it any more.

I was going to ask you, what was your theory on why they dropped. You know some of the towns I'm sure the population just doesn't allow it or whatever.

Well, I was talking to Hank Lucas up at the rec center the other day. He's a big ball fan from Holy Cross. He said they just couldn't get nobody to manage the team anymore and the kids weren't interested in playing anymore. They couldn't find enough players. So they just. They've got a nice ball diamond, nice lights. Of course, their Little League they still use it. But it's too bad.

Too bad, exactly. So, did you manage the Worthington team? I don't remember.
I did for about eight or ten years probably.

So, how in Worthington, how did you, I guess, manage the team in the sense of how did you recruit players, you know, how were practices run? How were, or did you practice? How were...when you went to the league meetings, how was that all organized? Maybe what teams were in the league? Start there.

Well, it was Maquoketa was in it. Lowden, Winthrop, plus Cascade, Monticello, Dyersville, Farley. Some years that thing ran. Maquoketa Valley League ran for a while. And then it quit. Then we started it up again and it ran for quite a few years.

When it quit, since the towns still had the teams, what do you think made it quit. And what made it restart? Was it disorganization?

It was dissatisfaction with the league I guess. A lot of teams weren't playing their league games and there got to be more tournaments. Then people that came were more worried about the tournaments than they were about playing their league schedule. We put a fine on the teams. I guess they have the fines now. You don't play, you pay. That helped a lot I guess.

I got the vitals from Paul Scherrman and I was reading that.

Oh did you. Paul probably remembers about as much as I do though he's not quite as old as I am but. And there was...softball affected it a lot too back then.

Slow-pitch?

Yeah. These guys that should have been playing baseball you know they could hit pretty good. They noticed they went to play softball they could probably bat .300 or .400, .500 or something. And so they went to play in that instead of really concentrating on baseball. I know that use to get me so mad, guys would quit and go play softball.

What years would that have been? seventies, eighties?

Yeah. It was born in the seventies or eighties. Yeah. Earlier there was no softball teams. That got pretty popular so that took some kids too.

Right. Who were some of the key people in the running of the league back then outside of yourself? And I mentioned Paul Scherrman obviously. Any other big names that really were leaders to keep the league going? Any of the leagues that came and went?

Well, Tom Jenk's from Dyersville, he was in there forever. He's still coaching the high school team. Assistant coach. And who was this guy from Maquoketa, he was a big coach, basketball coach down there. Fleming?

I think you are right.

He was. I remember he was one who helped us get it started again. He was the secretary that year when we got it started up again. And these guys from Lowden, they wanted to play in a league awful bad. Who was the guy's name? Scheeper, Walt Scheeper? And Winthrop, those guys they wanted to get in a league again. Baseball out that way was kind of folding up you know. They didn't have too many teams to play unless they got in a league with us. That kind of helped it to get started again. And then the Delaware County League, that was one of the oldest leagues around that kept on going. And finally that went down too, went down the tubes.

Right. Who was in that league, do you remember? I'm sure probably Manchester, probably had a team I would imagine.

Hopkinton, Ryan, Coggan, Central City, Winthrop was in it the couple years when I played there. They played in that league too. They played in both leagues.

Kind of bordering this league and one west for that basically. A little overlap but

Yeah. Started at Hopkinton, Earlville was in it, and other teams that way. And the Reformatory was in it one year. Yeah, it was a good league though. They played all Sunday afternoon games you know. I liked to play a lot of baseball so that one year Rick Westhoff and I, and Davey Schemmel. Who else played for us? There was four of us. Greenwald. Greenwald played too with us. Do you know Dave?

I don't know Dave.

I thought maybe. He'd be about your age. Maybe older. I guess he'd be older. You're pretty young. But we had a lot of fun that year. Played the top ...

You must have played a lot of baseball.

Ducky Huber was managing.

I know Ducky's son, Brian.

Oh yeah? Nice kid. Ducky was a nice guy.

How about players and coaches that stick out in your mind? You just named a few but you know over the years either really good players that you saw play or played against?

Coaches that you might have coached against or coached for?

Well, every town had their pretty good players you know. It's hard to start naming people. And years ago we hired a lot of pitching you know. You get in tournaments you probably go with your own pitchers for a couple of games. Then for the semi-finals or finals we had a lot of them that we hired pitchers.

Where would you usually hire out of?

Oh God.

I mean I just don't know if you went as far

One year we had a guy just out of Chicago that came to the Cascade tournament to pitch for us.

How did you hook up with him?

I don't know. Somebody through college or something. And he lasted about two innings. He got knocked out. I remember I had to come in a relieve him. We finally wound up winning that

game. He came all the way from Chicago for nothing. But most of the guys were from colleges around. Platteville, some player...Platteville had a...they were in the league a few years. Platteville, Wisconsin. They were pretty good all of the time.

So, what would you usually pay a pitcher to come in? What was the typical payment?
Oh, \$40 - \$50. Got most of them.

Did you ever get paid? To go play for somebody else or did you just...
Did I?

Yeah.
No, I never got paid. I wasn't good enough.

Well, it sounded like the Chicago guy wasn't good enough either.
No. No, he wasn't.

Any big players like anybody that went to the majors? Came from the majors? Went to the minors? Anybody you remember playing?
Oh, Jim McAndrews I remember he pitched around here. I batted off of him. Eddie Watt, Joe Hoerner. He was in the majors for quite a while. Paul Scherrman played in the minors. Ron ...from Holy Cross. He played in the minors until he got in that car wreck. Who else was there? There was a lot of these pitchers they brought in that played in the minors at one time or another.

Are there any specific teams over the years that you remember being especially good? Like especially a specific year or a little stretch of years that just had a really good team?
Well, it was nothing like Cascade is now, you know, they're just dominating everything with all those good high school and college kids. Nothing like that. Well, we kind of took our turn. Farley was always tough. We had a pretty good team there for four or five years when I was younger.

What years would those have been?
Oh, '58 through '63 something around there. And Dyersville was always tough you know. They're the biggest town so they've got the most players to pick from. That's quite an advantage.

What do you think separated those teams from others? You said they kind of took turns. What made. When Worthington was good what made Worthington good those years? Was it pitching? Hitting? Coaching? Luck?
The year we won most we had about four guys from Loras College play for us. That helped a lot.

Right. That would do it.
Yeah. It was fun pitching for that team. They gave us a lot of runs. Well it kind of runs in streaks you know. Farley had some good teams. The kids all stuck together with it. I don't know if they were lucky enough to get jobs around here and I think it's. That's the trouble with Worthington where kids might be good a couple years and then they have to move out and get a job you know.

So the years you were good were. You said you had those Loras players, were they just driving down from Dubuque were they...or did they have like summer jobs around the area or what? How did you end up with them?

No, they just came up. They didn't get paid at all. The only ones we ever paid were pitchers. But no, they were on the Loras team and they just liked to play ball.

How did you end up connecting with them. I guess my question is why didn't they play for Holy Cross or Cascade or anybody. I mean there's a lot of Farley's on the drive.

That's a good question. I don't know how. Jim Digmann was the managing then and he got them. I don't know what his connection was with those guys.

He had some sort of connection?

He must have knew somebody from Loras. Dick Breitbach, Tiny Potts, Rocky Schultz, good ball players. We had a lot of our own local guys that were good ball players too. They weren't quite that caliber but...

Well, thinking about it, this question just popped in my head. Being Worthington is located right behind, or between Dyersville and Cascade, which are two kind of consistently good teams, did you ever lose players, was it hard to keep players in Worthington, or did they get tempted to go?

Well, we lost two Digmann guys. Well, I played with Dyersville for a couple of years when Worthington was having trouble getting a team there for a while. So, I played with Dyersville for a few years. And Jim and Dale Digmann, they went to Dyersville and played. And Bob Faber pitched for them a couple years. He was a good pitcher. He always played with Worthington. There was a few years in there when Worthington had a little tougher time to get players together. That was before I started to manage. I was a little younger then and I didn't really want to start managing.

Yeah. I can understand that. I think that is a common theme from what I've talked to some other people.

It's a tough job. Wayne's finding that out. But it's a good thing to do and it's keeping the team going.

Exactly. And that seems to be another theme I've kind of heard from everybody, from Rick Westhoff and everybody. If nobody's willing to take it up then that's the quickest way to get the team to fade, if nobody is willing to do it.

It's going to happen to Rickardsville too. I don't know, if Lenny Tekippe quits, and he's talking about quitting pretty soon. But he says he knows if he quits it will fold. That's why he don't want to quit. But he's getting tired of it too.

Let's see. We already talked about compensation. You said you only paid pitchers. There wasn't any other situation when you paid anybody else to come in. How about. What changes do you remember over the years? Maybe in fields in the league or any big rules or regulations that came around. Any changes that you remember changing the league?

Well, the biggest change was when they switched to aluminum bats you know that made .300 hitters out of guys that couldn't bat .200 with a wooden bat. That was a big change.

Being a pitcher I assume you were opposed to that.

Yeah. And, bigger gloves. Man alive, when we played the gloves weren't that big. Now the outfield, it's pretty hard to miss a ball when you've got a big soft spot. Those are probably two of the biggest changes.

Where do you, let's talk, you can kind of talk about Worthington if you know something since you played for so many teams. Where do teams in the league generally over the years get their financial backing? How do they pay for their ump's, their players, their field?

Oh, we had. Worthington they had a commercial club you know, a bunch of senior citizens. They kind of managed the ball park after we built the new one. I'll give you this after a while to show you all about the ball park and stuff. And um, they backed us. They paid for our umpires and the lights, bats and balls. We had, back then you had to pay a \$50 entry fee to get in a tournament. And when you played your first game they'd give you the \$50 back. And at Worthington they'd always give each player a free pass to come to the rest of the tournament when their team got beat. Well, we gave them to everybody, everybody that was in the tournament.

Everyone who was in the tournament?

Yeah.

Was there any kind of support that the city of Worthington gave or any help either, you know, with the field, with the running of the team or any financial or other, any kind of support at all I guess?

Well, it's kind of hard. You know, the commercial club was kind of the town. I don't know how you would distinguish between the two. They paid for the lights. And they ran the tournament at Worthington, which is where they got their money from. Back then you could make pretty good money out of tournaments. And we still do pretty good on the tournaments. Better than most towns.

Right. And Monticello doesn't even have a tournament.

No, they dropped theirs. They don't exist.

Do you think compared, since you played for some other teams. Where some towns more supportive than other towns? As far as either financial support or whatever, maybe just even fan support.

Well, when I was playing in the fifties or even sixties there was a lot of fan support. You know the tournaments, they were a big deal. Dyersville would give a car away at their baseball tournament. Yeah. And that got good crowds, good support. But it really died down in the last twenty-five years I suppose.

Any theory why?

Too much other stuff going on. Years ago the parents didn't do anything besides maybe go to a movie or something. You know now they all play golf whatever else they can do. A lot of the parents played ball until they are fifty years old. A lot of other stuff to do. That's what happened to things.

Do, did, again, you played for several different teams so you can talk about whoever you want but obviously Worthington has been your focus, but. Did Worthington have their own field, did they share it with local schools, who maintained the fields, chalked them etc.

Well, yeah, we had our own field. And we had to share it. It's the only diamond in town, we don't have a Little League diamond, high school diamond or anything. So, everybody plays on there. So it was kind of. We could only schedule our games. I think we had Sunday night and Tuesday, maybe a Tuesday when we played our games. And the other teams from the town had the other nights. And whoever had it, they had to drag the diamond themselves and take care of it.

So that would probably be the manager's job?

Yeah, 99% of the time it is. That's another thing it's hard to get a manager.

Have there been any problems that you remember over the years that the league or specific teams had to overcome other than to try to stay viable? Any big issues that came up? That you remember causing conflict or, I don't know what the word is I'm looking for, dilemma?

Oh, I don't know. We had... years ago we had to turn in a league roster, before the league started, the players you were going to have. That kind of eliminated, if you are close to winning the league championship you didn't bring in a bunch of ringers to play. So that was always kind of a sticky point.

Was there anybody who did that? Like tried to bring in ringers?

Oh, they did before we made the rule that you couldn't, that you had to turn in a roster. Then everybody, well they'd try, or they'd do it. I don't know, I guess that's the main thing. I don't know what else.

In your opinion, was the league as a whole, and we know it's changed names and it's kind of come and gone, but was the league ever in danger of failing all together, like the Delaware League, or the Prairie League? Well, the Prairie League is still around. Or like the Maquoketa Valley League. As a league, do you think the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye has ever been in danger of folding completely or was it always going to hang on?

Well, it's been a pretty strong league over the last years. Now, the teams are starting to drop some out you know. Holy Cross. Sherrill dropped out. They used to always have a baseball team and tournament. They had lights up there. They dropped out. I don't know if they can keep on. Depends on how many kids want to play ball. I don't know how many will want to keep playing. I know Worthington has been having a hard time all the time to get players. We're lucky, we have to scrounge a few off from Dyersville that can't play or Petersburg, you know. That's about all you can do. Not many kids from Worthington say make the Beckman ball team or the West Dubuque ball team. So maybe lucky if one makes the thing in a couple, two or three years. So you've got nowhere to get the ball players from.

Right, you lose that feeder system. Are there certain people in your experience that are specifically responsible for keeping the league alive over the years? Anyone specific?

Well, I'll just throw out Paul Scherrman, he's been thrown out before by people just because he's been around for so long. He's been the president of the league. Anyone else?

Yeah, he helps keep it going, keeps Farley going. Well, Lenny Tekippe -- he's a big, a good promoter of it. At Monticello, I don't know those guys any more up there. Years ago it was Hoppy and Jim Wright. Westhoff and guys you know. They all -- Gordy -- they all kept it going.

Cascade - there were guys there. They've got all those good college kids now days that play. Years ago they used to have some pretty good older guys that ran the. Of course they have the Legion there that runs the park. They have good support there. I don't know too many of them now anymore. They're too young for me.

I guess my next question is kind of the crux of what you know my whole paper is about. In your opinion, why and how has the league, and teams in the league been able to stay viable when town baseball teams in other areas have faded? In Iowa and actually all across the country there just isn't, baseball isn't what it was 110 years ago when every town had a team.

I can't tell you that. I don't know why it stays around here the way it does, and why it folded out in the other areas. I know Cedar Rapids, they used to have. They still have a league down there though don't they? Norway and those teams?

I think they do from what. I'm trying to think who I even talked to, if it was Rick Westhoff or who it was. If they do, it's not in good shape let's put it that way.

No, it ain't like it used to be when Jim Van Scoyoc had Norway's. Well, he played with us too, Jim did. He made me a couple baseball bats when he played with us. He's a nice guy. I don't know. They still have a league though. I see it in the Gazette all the time. But I don't know why it stays around here to tell you the truth. I don't know why it folded in the other places.

My last question is and then we can take a look at that. What is your hope or wish for the future of the league?

Well I hope these guys want to keep playing baseball. It's not looking good. We're losing, like I said the high schools, we lost our feeder program there. And another thing, Babe Ruth teams...Dyersville used to have three Babe Ruth teams, last year they couldn't even field one. They had to go together with Worthington in order to field a Babe Ruth team. And they always had three.

So the youth's interest isn't there for some reason.

That kills you right there. When a town like Dyersville can't even field a Babe Ruth team by themselves. And years ago there used to be a Maquoketa Valley Junior League that I played in until I was old enough to play on the town team.

What age group would that be?

That was up until eighteen.

Sort of like a high school aged team - that thing?

Yeah. Once high school was over with in the spring it gave us some place to play. That was a pretty good league.

Who was involved with that league? What teams? Or was it pretty much the same, just...

Well, there was Petersburg, New Vienna, Bankston, Cascade, Farley, Holy Cross. They was good. We had two divisions in it and then the divisions would play each other for a championship. It was a good way for kids to play ball. But I don't know if they have that anymore. I doubt it. If they don't have a Babe Ruth, they don't have that. We never had a Babe Ruth but we had the Junior League and that the Maquoketa Valley Junior League, that was pretty good. That's about all I can tell you.

Kind of a Paul Harvey and that's the rest of the story. I guess, I'm more than willing to look at that and if there's anything you can think of that you want to throw in at any time while the camera's on, you know, about the league, about people, about anything.

Well, it was really fun playing all those years. I got to know a lot of good guys. A lot from Monticello, all over the whole eastern Iowa I know guys that played that long. It was. I enjoyed it.

Personal interview with Leonard "Lenny" Tekippe
By Todd Hospodarsky
Date: January 13, 2011

For semi-pro stuff, Minnesota, like you said, has more of a state wide organization which was new to me, but just that, like I said, it's fading nationwide it seems like these town ball teams...

There's areas where it's not around at all. Huge areas. It's rare to have it around and you know we definitely, eastern Iowa, we're not, yes eastern Iowa I guess you could say has a pretty good number of teams yet.

Especially north, I mean when you think about it, it kind of focuses in this little track.

I mean, we can play, we've got about eighteen teams left. And so if you are in Dubuque, or in Dubuque County, you can play against eighteen teams and not have to travel more than 45-50 miles. And you know, I get contacted all the time. There is a guy down in Slater, Iowa, who keeps wanting us to come and play him and them to come up here and why won't the teams do it. And I explain we can play fifty games without leaving home. It sounds like fun to go to, Slater is by Des Moines but you know, it sounds like fun to go there, but to get a commitment to go there for...you'd need a two day commitment. Other than just as a road trip for guys, it doesn't... there is no reason to play them.

Now do they have a league down there or is it just a team that

Yes, there's a league in the Des Moines area.

Is there?

Yeh. He's been contacting me. You were talking about like the state organization, Iowa has always been real weak on that, but he's trying to get something going. And he's given me some information. There is more teams in Iowa than I thought there were.

Like I've said, I've looked online a little bit and I noticed there were some things going on in Des Moines, but I couldn't tell if they really were in the same realm as what we are doing here.

Yeah, there's two things that happened. There's the town team stuff and then a lot of guys got into the senior league. And that started out as like an over forty or over thirty. Well, now they keep lowering it because to get enough guys. I think you've got to be over twenty-seven now. But.

Which isn't very old.

Not really, but those teams really don't compete well with these teams. You know, they think they do, but. You know, we had a team come up from Des Moines. A guy that used to live in Dubuque, he wanted to bring his team up and they were really good, and all this. This was a few years ago. They came up and wanted to spend a weekend, so they played us, Farley, and Cascade. Farley and Cascade just kicked the crap out of them. And we beat them comfortably. We weren't as good as Farley and Cascade. But, we had a kid pitching that was, he was a, he pitched for Ashford down in Clinton. He just got back from college, it was the end of his college season. But, Ashford is an NAIA school, and not a good one, and this was not a great pitcher. But he struck out like fifteen against them, and they were like, Oh, we'll never see a pitcher like that all year. Well then, you guys aren't very good. But, it's different. There's an awful lot of

guys in our league in that 18-26 age bracket that are just better athletes. And there are good forty year olds. There's Dale Sperflage and stuff but they are the exception. They are not the rule. Most guys, if you are not a professional athlete by 25-26, you're starting to lose it. And even a professional, what 33-34.

What is, or has been, your connection with the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League? And any other names that maybe the league has had over the years you've been involved. I started playing with Rickardsville in 1972 when I was seventeen and I've been associated with them as a player or manager ever since. My playing days pretty much ended when I was about forty, for the most part. The Eastern Iowa League actually started in 1975 so before that we were in a different league.

OK. And what league was that?
It was called the Maquoketa Valley League.

What, I guess, if you can remember, what teams were in the Maquoketa Valley League? What teams were in, I know what teams are in the Easter Iowa League today because I've talked to Paul Scherrman, but maybe back then, when it switched over. Were there the same teams, similar teams, lost some teams?

There were some of the same but the Maquoketa Valley League had been around for years. But, in the early seventies baseball was actually struggling quite a bit. Quite a few teams were dropping. A lot of guys were switching, playing slow pitch softball, and my first couple years in the league, the Maquoketa Valley League, only had a few teams. Dyersville was in it, I believe Worthington was in it, Guttenberg, Rickardsville, Dubuque had a team in it. And, I believe that was probably the only teams. It wasn't much of a league. And so it folded after the '73 or '74 season. And then in '75 some guys got together and started the Eastern Iowa League.

And back then, it involved pretty much the same teams that are in today?

Well I looked it up. I keep all --- I'm kind of a history nut. I looked up...in '75 we started the league with seven teams. There was Guttenberg, Dyersville, Worthington, Cascade, Monticello, New Vienna, and Rickardsville. And the year before that, I'm assuming Monticello was probably playing in the Delaware County League or something. Because they weren't in our league. We always, everybody knew about Monticello, and they played in all the tournaments, but I don't think they were in our league until '75. So, there were seven teams that first year.

You have kind of mentioned what years you were involved. When did you start managing?

I was one of the youngest guys. My team, or my town actually was going to drop its team after '74, Rickardsville. And, well, they did -- actually I played in '72 and '73. In '74 I don't believe there was a Maquoketa Valley League. The Maquoketa Valley League was '72 and '73. '73 was its last year. '74 Rickardsville didn't have a team and I went and played for Key West in the Prairie League, and Rickardsville played in a few tournaments that year, just played a handful of games, so we kept "the team" a little bit. In '75 Rickardsville wanted to get a team back together and I was playing college ball at the time so myself and an older guy kind of put the team together. And he was supposed to be the coach, but I ended up doing it all. And then in '76 I was the "official" coach. I was twenty-one and playing college ball.

That is young.

Yeah, but when we restarted our team, we restarted it with all kids. So, it wasn't like I was trying to coach a bunch of thirty year old guys. I was one of the oldest guys on the team at twenty-one. We actually, in '76 we had a real good group of kids in high school then and we started over with a bunch of 17-18 year olds and about three of us were twenty-one.

You guys were probably pretty good for a while then.

We had a nice run, yeah.

How did you become involved with baseball as a kid and maybe who influenced you?

Probably my father. He was the, he was a big fan and supported, a supporter of the local team and stuff. And, when my brother was about ten they didn't have little league baseball over there in our area. So my dad started Little League baseball in northern Dubuque County. You know, I'm sure it was around other places, but he started the league, and that league is still around. But, you know, he coached my older brother and stuff. He was just a real baseball enthusiast and I always followed along. I was five years younger than my brother but I was always, always on a ball diamond, always at a ball game. My dad went to all the tournaments and stuff and from the time I was old enough I probably went to more tournaments than my older brother did. I just never missed a game.

Did your dad coach any Rickardsville or get involved in any of the semi-pro or even high school?

No. He worked in the packing house in Dubuque. He had nothing to do with high school ball ever. He just had to do with Rickardsville and mainly it was the Little League and he was with that for five or six years and after he got that well under way he just kind of stepped aside, he had a big family and stuff. His association with the men's team, or the town team, was when he moved to Rickardsville. He came from Winneshiek County, Fort Atkinson, Iowa. He had been a big fan there. And he was their umpire. Each town would usually bring their own umpire back then - we are talking in the late forties, early fifties. You'd bring your umpire along and stuff. So, he never played much ball. But, he always was with the town team. I think he kind of. He never coached it but he would help organize it. He was one of the guys in the off season who would help with the fund raising and all of that. But he just had a real passion for baseball.

Maybe talk a little bit about the formation, when the league, and the running of the league as a league. You know, back in the seventies, obviously, I got the by-laws from Paul so I kind of understand how it is run today. Was it much different back then?

It was probably something pretty similar. Actually what happened, was in winter or early spring of 1975 like I said we tried to get a team back in Rickardsville and we went to the Prairie League meeting. That league is still around. And they wouldn't let us in. I guess they had enough teams, or they said we were a bunch of kids and Rickardsville wasn't going to be a viable team, that they just didn't, wouldn't let us in. So, then we went back to Rickardsville and the older guy who was encouraging me and was going to do it with me. His name was Bill Sam, he is dead now. But all these guys you've talked to would all, if you mentioned his name, they would all know him. He was a character. He's like, well there's got to be other teams that want to do this. He started making the phone calls. He was the kind of guy who would push and push. And he got hold of Tom Jenk in Dyersville. I think the year before when there was no Maquoketa Valley League, teams like Worthington, Cascade, and Dyersville had all gone and played in the Prairie League. And they weren't real happy with it. Back then the Prairie League was all Sunday afternoons,

and they all had lights. And they're like, you know, fine, we'll have our own league, you know, so. Bill Sam was the guy who started making the phone calls and he got those three teams I think, I think they all dropped out of the Prairie League to come back, to come to somebody. And then, Monticello, he knew Al Westoff pretty good, Rick's older brother, and I think that was his contact here. And I think Monticello was like, well yeah we'd like to play in another league. Or, we'd like to play in a different league. And then Guttenberg, he picked them up because when the league had folded that next year of '74, they had gone up to play in the, in Wisconsin. Or they had played in like New Albin, Iowa, Lansing, there's a who league, that league is still up there. That was mostly a Wisconsin league and for them it was a pretty good drive. So, they were interested. And then New Vienna was a new team that formed at the time. They were new that year, and so. He got seven teams together and I think Richie Napper was probably the secretary, and Tom Jenk Sr. was the president, and that was the start of it.

You mentioned some names there, the next question is: Who are some key people in the formation of the running of the league? So you've mentioned some of those. But you could also maybe talk about who have been leaders throughout the years in the league that keep it going or that maybe have helped make it strong.

Well, I think those were the guys who really started it. By the late seventies you know some of the older guys had stepped aside a little bit. And myself and Joe Burger were actually the officers like in '78. We were both, Joe was from Worthington, and we both had graduated college and stuck around. We were both about twenty-four or so. And then they actually reorganized the whole thing in '79 there was a "reorganization" that happened. And people like Paul Scherrman and I'd say Westhoff, Rick was probably involved, Richie Napper was probably involved. Then over the years, Paul Scherrman's probably been an officer almost every year for the entire life since '79 I would say. He could probably verify that. I've been an officer off and on over the years. In recent years I've gotten out of it. My job here makes it, you have to choose your commitments you know. I continue to coach Rickardsville but I haven't been a league officer for a few years. There's been other guys. Pat Weber from Cascade has been a league officer for quite a while now. I'm sure there have been other guys but for the most part probably Pat or I have been secretary for, one of us, secretary for quite a few years now. And Paul has been the president. You know there only the two officers running it.

What players or coaches over the years stick out in your mind? Really good players, maybe guys that have gone to the majors, or come from the majors, anybody?

There are very few major leaguers. There are quite a few guys that have played minor league ball. Obviously, Paul Scherrman's probably one of the best. And because he kept in such good shape he was good for a long, long time. And just all around great defensive and offensive. There's just been a ton of great players. Bobby Hines was as good a hitter as has ever played around here. Tom Jenks Sr. obviously. But then there were other guys like. Dyersville has had a number of guys but a lot of them went pro ball and didn't come back. You know, the Nick Ungs, Ronny Hess, Tom Wagman, guys like that. I mean there have just been so many. Frank Dardis from Peosta was a great pitcher in his day. Hank Lucas from Holy Cross, now some of these guys are from Prairie League towns. Hank Lucas pitched in the Dodgers organization. His big claim is that he was on the same team in the minors that Tommy Lasorda was the pitcher and all the Dodgers that played together for ten years, Yaeger caught, Cey played third, Russell short, Popes second, and Garvey first. Well, they were all together in the minors, too. And he pitched on that team.

That would be a good claim to fame.

Yeah. He would go into Chicago to Cubs games and he's got pictures where they take him into the locker room. You know, they remembered him. Sounds like they were a pretty classy group of guys. Of course, then they stuck together all through the minors and ten years of majors. But I mean, gosh, there's so many great players. Obvious in recent years statistically probably nobody will out do Pat Weber statistically. And I mean he's a good pitcher and he's been on great teams. You know, it doesn't hurt to have talent around you. But he's also, he's done it, he's as good as anybody. Now he's forty-four or forty-five and he's probably. Last summer he didn't pitch as well as he had, but. He's a fierce competitor and statistically there is probably nobody that's got, that won that many games for that many years like he did. But, I mean, gosh, there's just so many guys. Dave Reittering from Dyersville was a lot older than me. He pitched in the Cardinals organization. Unbelievable twelve to six curve ball. Probably one of the few guys I can remember that I don't think I ever got a hit off of. Of course he quit after he pitched to me about twenty times. If he'd kept playing, I'd have gotten a hit eventually. But he was, he just had that classic overhand twelve to six curve ball. He was great. You know here's just too many guys, you can't think of them all. Going through, I guess out of Cascade, I'd have to say that the best player had to be Pat Weber just because of the longevity of pitching. And that's saying a lot when you have all the Simons and all the guys that went through there. And Dyersville had fantastic players. And Farley has had some fantastic players. Scott Harris is pushing fifty and he is still playing. And I mean he was a really good player. Holy Cross in the eighties had some great teams with Hank Lucas and Jerry Roling. And, of course Dubuque had some great ball players. Pretty much if you go through that Dubuque County Hall of Fame about half of those guys are super players. And the other half are guys who just played long enough that. If you played long enough you got a chance to get in.

I never asked you what position did you play?

Well, actually I was not a good defensive player. In college I played some first, third and DH. But I played everywhere. In high school my junior year we got second in the state. And I played left field which, I wasn't an outfielder but I could hit. And, my senior year, almost everyone graduated, that I caught. Playing semi-pro ball and coaching the team for the time, I was twenty-one, I pitched a fair amount but no one would remember me as a pitcher. But, being the coach of the team, and playing a lot of games, but I... I played every position. But my best position was first base, but it also seemed like every team I was on had a good first baseman so I would play third base too. There's a guy about five years younger than me at Rickardsville who's in the Hall of Fame, the Dubuque Hall of Fame. And, you know I always played first until he came along but he was about 6' 4" and just, I mean he just had some advantages over me. So, as coach, you know, I never cared that much where I played, if I got to bat. So I just moved myself ...

As long as you are in the lineup.

To keep this kid, because this kid was a great ball player. And at 6'4" he was much more suited defensively at first base than I was. His name is Jack Lehman. He's in the Hall of Fame. He's another nice player, but. There's just so many players, you couldn't possibly name them all. And there were some great guys that played a few years like -- Farley had John Ackerman pitch for them when he got released from AA. He pitched for them for three to four years. He was phenomenal for our league. His first year back, I think he went like 21 and 1. Pat Weber beat him 1 to 0 one night. And the same year that he was 21 and 1 he saved like twelve games. Because he was just a big strong kid and when he came out of the minors he was in fantastic

shape. You know, he could start every four days and relieve in between. He was just that, you know.

How about teams, any teams? You mentioned Rickardsville had a little run there. Any dynasties?

Yeah, we've had some successes. Well, you know, when I started, the best teams were probably Dyersville, Holy Cross. And then, you know, over time different teams. Dubuque has had several good teams under different names. In the early eighties Kieler, Wisconsin, had a good team in the Prairie League. And, I actually played for them in one league, and played for Rickardsville in the other. So that was a lot of fun for me because I got to go all over Wisconsin playing some state tournaments and stuff. But, Kieler had a good run in the eighties. Cascade is always good. But the last...probably the last eight to ten years they have dominated -- for about eight to ten years now. They were always good, but they were never dominant until. But they have had, they've had the longest stretch of dominance that I've seen anyone have. Dyersville probably you know has fallen off somewhat but from the seventies into the nineties they were good. Farley's been good probably since the early eighties with Paul Scherrman coaching them. Farley had some dominant years when they had Ackerman. Paul Boffeli was UNI's number one pitcher. He was the same age as Ackerman. So when they threw that one two combination out there, threw in Harris and Scherrman and those guys. In the eighties, they have always been good, but in the eighties they dominated. Rickardsville has never been dominant, but we've probably always been, we're always in the top one third of the teams, you know. We've had years when we won the league. We've won almost every tournament. We've never won Cascade, but we've probably got second about four times. We've won Dyersville, we've won Worthington a few times. We've won our share. I think in my years of coaching we won the league championship three times and we probably won thirty tournaments around the area. Not dominant, but better than average.

What do you think separated, and actually maybe you've touched a little bit on this, but what do you think separated those teams from other teams? What makes Cascade so dominant the last eight years?

Well, Cascade is probably the exception. Usually pitching is what makes teams dominant. And, while Cascade has had really good pitching, they were so dominant that almost anyone could pitch for them. They have had guys you know there were a lot of games where they will just out hit you. I don't mean to take anything away from Pat Weber. He's been a great pitcher. But at the same time, a lot of guys that pitched for them that weren't that good, they win too. But then Pat usually matches up with the best pitcher of the other team. But, it's usually pitching but in the case of Cascade, they just had. When they got, when they really started to get good, three of those kids had started for UNI and the fourth one, Micah Green, three of them started in the infield and Micah was 8 - 2, he was their number one pitcher, number two pitcher, up at UNI. So, for a town the size of Cascade to have four kids starting Division I, and UNI was good that year. They came like one game from the World Series. It's just phenomenal, and those kids never made it to the state tournament. Which, but that's luck too. They ran into Nick Ungs who is still playing pro ball. They got beat by Nick Ungs. He beat Micah Green in a tough game. But they've just had unbelievable talent over there.

But over the course of time usually it pitching?

Pitching will usually do it, yes. All things being equal, I'd rather have pitching.

Right, I can understand that. In Rickardsville, I guess we have talked about, maybe some teams struggling to get players, but how do teams get their players, how did Rickardsville? Do you put an ad in the paper? Do you just call up the guys from the year before? Do you do tryouts, or is it just pretty much whoever wants to play?

Do you mean now?

Yeah, now. Or you can look at over the course of time too. What did you do back then, and what do you do now?

Basically, you, in the small towns they start with the kids who grew up in the town, will end up playing. And, I mean years ago we had enough people right from Rickardsville to have enough players. If you don't have enough, then it's, somebody knows a guy from Dubuque, or like in the case of Monticello, you have a kid who plays in college who maybe has a college buddy from Cedar Rapids or whatever. You know, it's usually a thing of, you are from the home town or somebody from the home town knows you and asks you. And, there's a little bit more that goes into it I guess. If you need a player you might try to find the best player and that... Like in Rickardsville's case, our best player for the last fifteen years has been Tim Felderman. And he's from Dubuque. We had a college kid, we had a local kid playing for the University of Dubuque. We needed a player. He's like, our shortstop is pretty good and he's from Dubuque and he wants to play. So, he came out to play and, yeah, he's been our best player ever since for probably 15-20 years. And, he's the head coach at Senior High now. So, over the years if we need players, you know, we'll get a kid out of his program. So, we've had a number of kids from his high school program play with Rickardsville. I think it is always something like that. Paul Schuermann at Farley has a connection with the Loras coach and if they need a player, a lot of times it's a kid from Loras that ends up with them. Cascade, of course, has a lot of connections. If they need a player sometimes the guy has a UNI connection. Usually, any more if you go out to get a guy. The league has changed a lot. They have to be better to have an impact. So a lot of times of you go out to get somebody you want a college player. So, it's who you have a connection with in college.

This has kind of come up in some of the conversations. Is there any kind of compensation that players receive ever? I know it has come up in other interviews, usually it is pitching for tournaments is about the only time that. Can you speak from your point of view?

I don't know if people really "pay" pitchers anymore. Now it might be more a matter of gas money kind of thing. Because, the finances have changed. Tournaments, like the Dyersville tournament, is \$500 for first place. And, it used to be that if you had a guy and you offered him \$50, I mean. Rickardsville used to do this when I was young. You know, Billy Sam had a connection with some people in Madison, Wisconsin, and if he wanted to get a pitcher for the Dyersville tournament, you could get a guy who maybe pitched for the University of Wisconsin or you could get a guy who was a school teacher in the summer. You know, we are talking thirty years ago. If you give him \$50 he'd come from Madison to pitch. Now if you give him \$50 he would say that won't pay for my gas and beer. So, back then you might give a guy \$50 and he was glad to. If he wasn't working in the summer or whatever. And there were a lot of guys who were, you know, coaches, school teachers who really didn't work in the summer that steady. And you know for \$50 bucks it's yeah, you know. And the problem was, back then, \$50, \$500 for first place, maybe it made sense. Now, to pay a guy enough to make it worthwhile, you'd probably have to pay him \$200 and it doesn't make any sense to pay him that. So, it's still, if somebody is paying it's usually for a pitcher, and I only know of one guy who I think gets paid decent anymore and that's Dave Schenck. His name probable came up. I don't know what

Balltown pays him but. I'm sure they pay him, and like last year Worthington had him pitch for them in their tournament and I'm sure they paid him. And Dave would only come if you paid him. But, maybe he's getting \$100 or something. But, you've got to really want to win the game for \$100. Because, you're not going to make any money doing that. But, you know, in the old days, you could get some... And that was part of what people use to go to the tournaments for. Because, different towns always had a reputation. This team brought in Darrell Rothrock from Independence, and this team always brought in this guy from Madison. Some of the names, there was guys like Eddie Sawville from Wilton, Iowa. Farley use to get Bob Step was like an All Big Ten pitcher at Iowa, And there were ex-pros around who would come. It was exciting when they would come.

It sounds kind of fun.

Yeah, it was. But, just financially it doesn't make sense any more. If you were going to pay them now, you couldn't pay them enough to make it worthwhile.

What kind of changes do you remember over the course of the years? We talked a little about the league changes, but maybe in how the field has been, any kind of regulations, or changes in equipment, or styles of play?

Well, when I started playing there were wooden bats. Then in the mid-seventies aluminum bats came around. We played with aluminum bats for a long time and then the aluminum bats got so high tech that the scores got out of hand and people were going to get killed. So that was kind of... Pat Weber of Cascade kind of led the way of going back to wooden bats. At first everybody was like, well we can't afford it, you'll break too many. Cascade had a tournament, had their own tournament, and they provided the wooden bats. And everyone said well this is okay you know. After a while people came to realize that it isn't any more expensive to use wood. Because if you are going to pay \$300 for an aluminum bat that is going to last for one year, I could buy three or four wooden bats. So that is the biggest change I guess. I can remember guys, little guys, hitting the ball four hundred feet. Now, it's a different game because there are very few power hitters. Our Rickardsville team might only hit eight or ten in a year. And, I mean, in my prime I hit twenty a year. But I would. I was a big guy. But, it was aluminum bats. But, there are only ten legitimate power hitters around - fifteen. You know, the Tom Andrews, the Roman Hummels, Belleview's got Grabel and Knake. There were guys like the Wedewers from New Vienna. Ronnie Wedewer, I didn't mention him, he was as good a player as anybody. But you know, he could have hit a home run with a toothpick. He was that strong. But, anybody that hits home runs now has to be a strong guy. It's really made it obvious how much better athletes the minor leaguers are. You don't think that baseball players are strong, but. There's only a handful of guys around here strong enough to be power hitters with wood. And, you know, I don't know if I would have been or not. I was a good hitter growing up but not a big power hitter. But, in college and after college, I got bigger and stronger and my home run hitting really took off. But it also took off with the aluminum bats. I think I would have hit my share, but I wouldn't have hit what I did.

But nobody else would have either, so...

Right there are very few guys that would have done it.

Where do teams in the league, or maybe if you only know about Rickardsville you could speak on that, get your financial backing? How do you pay for umps, and players, and fields, etc.

Well, everybody is probably a little different. Rickardsville has an athletic club. They own the ball field. They sponsor all the teams in town -- the kids' teams and stuff. So, that's where our financial backing comes from. But at the same time, we have to help with... I've been president of the athletic club there. I've been on that athletic board since the mid-seventies. I've been president of it since Billy Sam died in about 2000. We host our tournament. Richardsville is a small tournament compared to these others but we have our own tournament. We've had one every year since '79, I guess. And being a small town, I mean, the team basically has to put on the tournament. And the profits from that have to go to the athletic club. Most teams have to do some fund raising of their own. Some have an association, like Cascade Legion in some way or another helps finance the Reds. Monti Cubs I think are strictly independent. They just raise their own funds. Farley Hawks raise their own funds. Dyersville, I think they have an organization that helps them out, backs them. But they expect the team to put a certain amount of work out. In one way or another, everybody has to at least help with their own fund raising.

Do you find that certain cities support their teams better or more, and maybe not even financially, but just through fan support?

Oh, yes. But to some extent I think it's... that the teams that have won over the years tend to have better fan support. Teams that don't win a lot, they don't get as much support. I think it goes a lot with who is winning. And certain teams have won for a long time and mainly because it might be the same guys running it. Paul Scherrman has always ran Farley, and Cascade has had a lot of the same people involved all of the time. And that makes a difference. You know, I've seen where Dyersville one year was like 55 and 5, and Tom Jenk quit and the next year they were terrible. And it took a while for somebody else to build it back up. So the guy running it is huge. He's got to do so many things. He's got to be the general manager, and the manager, and usually a player. He's got to be the fund raiser, and he's got to be the guy who takes care of the diamond. And, by the way, you can't piss your friends off or they won't play.

Makes you wonder why anyone would want to do it.

Yeah, and that's really when teams drop. You know, any town could have a team, if one or two guys wanted them to. Like with Monticello, when Dale quit doing it, Garrett took over. Garrett does a nice job. But if someone like Garrett hadn't stepped up, who knows. Monticello I think the town has enough tradition of baseball, enough old time people, that if they won a little more, I think they would support it pretty well. Because, when they do win a couple of tournament games, all of a sudden you see a lot of people there. A lot of the old time people come. When we used to come up here in the late seventies and eighties and they played down at the fairgrounds, they announced the games and their fund raiser was, they sold a season pass, which really didn't mean anything, because they didn't take a gate. But, it was a season pass, but the bleachers would be full down there. Of course, usually Al Westhoff was announcing and you liked to come out here for a league game because there might be two hundred people at a league game. That was a lot for a league game. Of course, over the years, they haven't won a lot lately. That makes a difference.

Actually you might have touched on this a little bit, but I'll ask the question anyway if you want to add anything. Do teams usually have their own fields, do they share with both the schools, who maintains the fields? I know you mentioned maintaining.

Well, that's again kind of different from town to town. Obviously Monticello shares with the high school. Dyersville shares with the high school. Cascade, the Legion actually owns the field, but the high school uses it as well. Farley shares theirs with Western Dubuque but the Farley

park board owns that. The smaller towns, you know, Worthington, their athletic club has the diamond, there is no school. Rickardsville, there is no school, so the athletic club has it. The small towns, pretty much there is some kind of athletic club or something that keeps the diamond going. And then the bigger towns, they have nicer fields, and then the team is just one of the people who uses it. Like, Peosta built that beautiful field over there, but they share it with Clarke College, and West Dubuque uses it for their sophomore team. They play their varsity at Farley and their sophomore there. And then they rent it out. Key West actually uses it for league games too. So, anybody who has a real nice field is sharing it with someone.

Did Rickardsville used to have a high school?

No.

They were always with...

Well, yeah, Rickardsville kind of sits in an odd area. It's out by itself. They had a grade school, a Catholic grade school, when I was young. And that closed, I guess after I was in 7th grade. When Holy Cross Leo had a Catholic school, a lot of the kids went there. Now a lot of the kids go to Beckman from there. But, if you go to public school, you go to West Dubuque. But also, if you live on one side of Rickardsville, you can go to Hempstead in Dubuque. And then we've had kids from Rickardsville who go in to Wahlert so. At one time when every kid was from Rickardsville we might have still been from five high schools. And they were all Rickardsville kids. So, it was kind of odd.

Have there been any big problems that the league has had to overcome over the years that you can think of? Anything that.

I think that there are sportsmanship issues once in a while. But, our kind of ball, we tend to have that. We don't have a high school association to control that sort of thing. Baseball players in general are pretty aggressive people. And, when you are leaving them to police themselves, maybe they don't do as good a job as they could. So, because of that, the umpires sometimes get picked on a little more than they should.

Has the league ever punished, or fined , or done some sort of repercussions?

You know, there has been instances, but usually the league ends up saying, Well, we're not really sure that the guy was at fault. That kind of thing. And, there is not a strong umpire association either. Most of the umpires are just, you call a guy up and he'll come and ump. Well, that really puts them at a disadvantage. If the umpires would form their own association, they'd have some clout. They could say, Well that's fine, except nobody will go to Cascade now. And then Cascade would have to decide, Well we'd better make them more welcome when they come. And, I'm just saying Cascade.

Right, as an example, I understand.

But, it would be good if we had a strong association of umpires but we really don't. We could use, the whole league could use stronger government but it's kind of ...supposed to be a lot of things by gentleman's agreement but we're not all gentlemen.

Understood. In your opinion, was this league ever in danger of failing over the years?

No, not this league wasn't. We've been strong and continue to be strong. We've really never fallen below... I think we got down to seven teams, is the lowest that we ever got.

Is there a maximum—I don't even remember how many teams—I have it at home but I don't remember how many teams are in the league now. Is there a maximum that you guys don't want to have more than this number?

Nobody has ever said that. We had nine last year. Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin is not coming back. So, I would assume we'll probably have eight this year. I'm saying that not knowing that everybody else will come back. And not knowing if there is a new team. But, if there was a new team, we'd probably know about it. So, eight makes a nice number. I don't know if there is a maximum, but Prairie League is ran with sixteen. Our league I can remember in the past having twelve you know. We would play two divisions of six. And you can make any number work. I've always been, you know, anybody who wants to play, I want them in. Because, I always worry about this, that it's not going to keep going. And, I think the last thing you want to do is have people who want to play and tell them no, you can't. Because who knows. In 1975 they said that Rickardsville was a dumb idea in the Prairie League that it would never last. And, we've been a solid team for thirty-five years.

Are there certain people in your opinion over the course of thirty-five years that are responsible specifically for keeping the league alive? You said it really wasn't ever in danger so maybe it hasn't been an issue.

Obviously some people contribute more, the Paul Scherrman's and... But for the most part there has been a lot of people that have come and gone. Outside of Paul Scherrman and myself I don't know who's really been around the whole time other than us two. Loras Simon from Cascade has always been involved but Loras is not an organizer. He's never been involved with running the league. He's been involved with coaching and playing on his team but he never was a league officer. Nor did he ever want to be I don't think. That's just his nature. But, I mean, there's been a ton of guys who have come and gone and the league is still here. If Paul Scherrman quit this year I'm sure we would go on. And if I quit, I'm sure they would go on. Some people are definitely more important but I don't think the league is in danger of folding. If something happens I think it will be through attrition that one team at a time folds. And then you'll reach a point where, Are there enough teams to make this viable? Once in a while there is talk about merging with the Prairie League. But, that's never gotten serious. I'm sure it's out there. If enough teams folded, you could always merge with those guys. Probably the main reason they don't is that there are always two or three teams that want to play more games. They'll play in both leagues. And, if you start merging, then they lose that chance to do that.

What memories do you have on the leagues? Specific games you played, specific events, anything really stick out?

I've played so many games and coached so many. I suppose winning the Dyersville Tournament. That was great. The three years we won the league, that was great. I think I was MVP four different times in tournaments. I mean that was great. You know, that is from a personal standpoint. I always just bled for Rickardsville, and starting the team with a bunch of kids. When we finally got to the point where we were one of the best teams, that was a highlight for me. I think we won the Worthington tournament in 1981, was the first time that we really... Because if you win a tournament, it's an accomplishment. Especially when you start with a bunch of kids, really young kids, from a really small town, and you kind of build your way. But at the same time, we got second in Dyersville in '79, I think again in '80, which that was "the" tournament back then. I think we got second in Cascade in '80. When we started to really compete with the older established teams, that's what I remember. The guys on our team now are

great friends, some have play 15-20 years, but those original guys I think are some of my really good friends. Because, we were younger, we did it all together and kind of built the team.

Why and how has the league and teams in this area, and you can even throw in the Prairie League, been able to be viable when town baseball in other areas has faded?

I really think the tournament structure has a lot to do with it. It's more fun to play in a tournament, you know a one and done situation, than it is to just play eighteen league games. I mean, you go to high school and a high school basketball team that is 5 - 15, they win that first round of the tournament, there's a real sense of excitement around at school. I think the tournament situation has kept teams, kept the interest up. You can have a poor year, and I don't mean to pick on anybody, but I know of years were Monticello maybe had a poor year and we played them in our championship a few years ago, three or four years ago. Well, they had to knock off three pretty good teams to get there, and there were a lot of people who came down for the championship. And Monticello to Rickardsville is not a short drive. But, even though they weren't a good team, the people got excited because they were doing well in this tournament. I mean, it was a small tournament, and it was a long drive, but they came. I think the tournaments do it and up until this point tournaments have remained a money maker. So, if the town that puts it on can make money and the teams enjoy playing in it, I think the tournaments will stick around and the teams will stick around. You can have a team that has a bad year, if they do well in one or two tournaments, they still have something. They still had some rewarding parts to their season.

Last question is: What is your hope or wish for the future of the league?

Well, I just hope that it continues. I think with changing demographics, that it's going to be tough. You know people ask, why do teams have to get more guys from outside their towns. Well, you get a town like Rickardsville, which is basically two hundred people, and a farming community around it. We used to have all these farmers with five sons. And you only needed a couple of families to field a team. Well now that one farmer has a daughter and a son and he owns four farms so there aren't four farmers. So you have one potential player instead of ten. And then the kid goes to college and after his sophomore year gets an internship and doesn't come home for the summer. It's a numbers thing. I think that kids want to play as much as they did, there's just not as many kids. I mean, I don't know what the Monticello High School is like, but Cascade I think is losing numbers. Monticello, maybe with the highway and close enough to Cedar Rapids, maybe we're not losing numbers here. But it's changing demographics. A town like Rickardsville is doing okay because we are close enough to Dubuque that a lot of people are willing to live in Rickardsville and drive to Dubuque. But, like Holy Cross doesn't have a team anymore. New Vienna doesn't have a team anymore. What happened is they are further out. Not as many young people wanted to stay there and drive to Dubuque to work and stuff. So, so far, Rickardsville is holding on. I just hope it holds on. I hope that the kids coming up have all the fun as I had playing in it. And I like it for the... It's a community thing too. Rickardsville lost their grade school when I was a kid, probably will lose their Catholic church, you know they are down to one mass a week now. At some point they will lose their Catholic church. There is a sense of identity in having a ball field and having a Little League team and having a girls softball program. I just think it's a good identity. In Monticello, if Monticello Cubs quit, out of 3,000 people and most of them here in town, probably wouldn't pay any attention. Oh, there's no more Cubs, well okay. But, there are certain people who still identify that, yeah, we still have a baseball team, we have the Monticello Cubs. I just hope it sticks around because I think it gives a sense of identity to a town.

Personal interview with Dale Digmann
By Todd Hospodarsky
March 10, 2011

What was, or is, I don't know if you are still working with the league at all, but your connection with any of the semi-pro leagues that have been going on in this area for the years?

Oh, I just go to a lot of ball games.

OK. Did you play any at all?

I played, yeah, for quite a long time.

What teams did you play for?

Mainly Worthington and Dyersville.

What years did you play? Maybe go all the way back, when did you start going to games since you said you go to a lot of games? And what years did you play?

I played from '51 to '72.

Wow. Twenty years is a long time. Did you go to games as a kid then before '51?

Yeah.

You were probably pretty young in '51. Right out of high school maybe?

No, I never went to high school. Never went to college. I went to a lot of ball games in my life time.

Did you keep going then when you quit playing in '72?

Oh, yeah, I had a son that played for Dyersville. I still go to ball games.

Do you? I was wondering.

Tournament games, not so much the league games. Mainly the tournament games.

Do you go to everybody's tournament or pretty much just Cascade and Dyersville and Worthington?

Well, mainly Worthington, Dyersville, and some to Farley. But it always seemed like Cascade was a long way out of the way. But, we go to them mainly.

How did you become involved in baseball, and like, who influenced you getting into baseball?

My father.

Did he play also?

Yeah. Long before. All my brothers, well my older brothers, they all went to high school. I didn't go to high school. They played high school ball. But I started Junior Legion ball. That was, I suppose after about sixteen, fifteen, I don't remember. That's where I got started. My dad was, that's one thing he did do, was he let us kids play sports. A lot of people don't.

Right. I assume you guys were farm kids.

Yeah, I was raised right here.

Yeah, I assumed. So, then, did your father play then for the Worthington team or Dyersville or did he just play kind of catch with you guys?

No, he played with us and taught us what he thought we should be doing. This is the... I was the first one to be born here in '36. So he was quite old before we moved here. I played here and a lot of... just play ball.

What can you tell me about the formation and running of the league or the tournaments if you know a little bit more about that. You know, as in your time, how did the league run, what teams were in it, that type of thing?

Oh, God.

If you remember. I'm asking you to go way back in time.

It was always Cascade, Worthington, Monticello, Dyersville, Holy Cross. Epworth was in way back then. New Vienna had a ball team. They mainly all had tournaments too later on. But mainly at first it was only like five tournaments. That's Monticello and Cascade, Worthington and Dyersville. That was. Then the rest of them came along after that.

Then did the teams change as you went? I know New Vienna and Holy Cross those are pretty small towns did they come and go or were they around pretty much the whole time?

They pretty well were around here until just maybe five, six, seven years ago they started not having enough kids. Well, there's so much going on any more for. But way back it was about all they had to do -- play ball, play ball

Who were some of the key people that you remember running the league back when you were playing or maybe even as you were getting out of it? What were like the people that kept the Worthington team going, Dyersville team going?

Well like Worthington I can remember when I started playing town team ball in '51, Johnny Wolf was the manager. It was just local guys. We'd usually hire a pitcher out of Dubuque. The rest of it we'd kind of fill in with ball players around here. My brother Jim managed it in '55 I think. Then in '57, '58 I went to Dyersville and played the rest of my career I played at Dyersville.

Who was managing up there.

Tom Jenk. He managed all the while that I played. Did a lot for baseball. That he did.

I've got a call into him and he hasn't called me back. I think he's busy doing taxes. But I'm hoping to get a hold of him here soon. What players or coaches, we just mentioned a couple of coaches, that stick out in your mind as great players that you played against or with, or coaches that were really terrific?

I played, I caught five guys who went to the major leagues.

Who were those all?

Eddie Watts, Jim McAndrews, Joe Hoerner, there's a kid from Waterloo, a left-hander, that made it to -- can't think of his name right now but he was a good one. There's a guy by the name of Jim Rider that signed with the Mets when we were in the Amateur World Series back in Battle Creek in '62. Had a -- caught a lot of good pitches. Yes, a lot of good pitches.

Those, were they Worthington, Dyersville, which team?

No, there hasn't been anybody that. You mean, what team did they play for? They always played with Dyersville.

And, obviously you said one of them was from Waterloo, were they local boys or were they hired in?

Yeah, they were hired in. I can't think of his name. He was a super, super pitcher. A left hander. A really good ball player.

When you say "hired in", that's one of the things in this paper that I'm learning about. I'm not from Monticello originally so I'm kind of learning as I go with this. Where I'm from we don't have any town team ball, haven't had them for eighty years probably. What would usually be the pay? How did the money work out?

I don't know the pay end of it. They would get so much to play. I would think it would be a fair guess maybe – twenty or twenty-five dollars to play. It varied. See like when Watts played here, and McAndrews played here, I think they both played with the University of Iowa. And then they would go out and play, pitch, in these tournaments around here. Of course, when you went along when they pitched in these tournaments there was probably 10-12 tournaments. Dyersville we pretty well had, all the while I played with Dyersville, we were pretty well the same players.

Are there any teams over the years that you remember being especially good? From some of the other people I interviewed, Dyersville was always mentioned as, not necessarily a dynasty, but they year after year were consistently good. Since you played for Dyersville, were there any specific years you remember you guys being good or other teams that you remember being very good?

Well, once in a while we, for quite a few years, we won most of the tournament games. Cascade was always pretty good. Monticello had a few years back yonder that they had some good ball players.

Do you remember roughly what years those would have been.

I would say it had to be back in the late fifties to the early sixties. See when I started playing ball with Dyersville in '58 I guess -- '58 or '59 there was a lot of good teams. That would be good one year and not so good the next year but Dyersville was pretty well good straight through the line. Mr. Jenks, Terrible Tom I call him, he hired five of the best pitchers around.

Do you think that makes the difference? Pitching?

Pitching is the name of the game. That's definitely the name of the game.

You can talk maybe about Worthington and Dyersville both since you played for both -- How did those teams get their players? Did they do tryouts? Did they advertise? You said it was roughly the same guys but how did that work out?

It was just mostly high school kids and guys that wanted to play ball. And they were pretty well, we pretty well like at Worthington would furnish our own team except for probably pitching. But then once in a while you would get where you would need more of them, and like some of the kids wouldn't come out and I think that one year when we won the Cascade tournament I think we had three guys from Dubuque play with us. They played with us all year. Just didn't come in and play, they played with us all year. They were guys who are all in the Dubuque County Hall

of Fame now. They're all older than I am. It pretty well. Dyersville they had a few, most of us guys that when we had the good teams in Dyersville were from out of town. My brother lived in Dyersville, but he started out here in Worthington. I'm still trying to think of that pitcher's name.

It will come to you sometime.

There's a guy by the name of Simpson that played over there too that was. I don't think he played...other than he didn't play pro ball or anything, but he was very competitive. Hoppy Wright from Monticello was very competitive. Jim Wright, very competitive. The Westhoffs I don't know if you know any of them.

Yep I talked to Rick. You don't remember anybody other than pitchers getting paid ever? Pretty much just pitchers?

Well, we all actually got paid.

Ok. Maybe talk about that -- how did that work?

Dyersville. I never got paid for playing with Worthington. Dyersville, they had a point system they used. Of course, Dyersville probably was the best team around, and drew the most people. There's times there would be 5,000 people at the Dyersville tournament.

That blows my mind.

That was back in the sixties. Pitchers and catchers, now we've had guys that played with us all year. We had probably four pitchers Sal Olberding, Art Huinker Dave Reittinger. We had three of the better pitchers around that played with us all the time. But we played, I think I could get books around here that showed we played probably seventy-five ball games a year. They had a point system. You played... You got so many dollars a point. Pitchers and catchers got paid two points a game. The rest of them got one point a game. Then at the end of the year they'd figure it up and we'd get -- it was nothing big but you know.

Right. And that would probably come out of your winnings from the tournaments, etc.

Right. Because a lot of, back in '56, '57, '58 we probably won most of the tournaments, so. That's where the money came from. They had quite a program at Dyersville really.

Sounds like it. I'll have to get a hold of...

I played with Hopkinton. The only time I ever played at the Monticello fair we'd always go and I'd always play with Hopkinton. Why I don't know. Good friend of Ducky Huber played with Peosta years ago. Played Petersburg. I played with most of the teams around there. In the Delaware County League. But it was all...

Was that fairly typical that players would kind of -- not jump teams -- but play with other teams? Or is that...?

No, that was the way it worked. A lot of times the Delaware County league they just played on Sundays alone. And of course that was before any lights or anything was around. They'd need players and if you wanted to play you'd go up and play with them. And like I said, I played with Hopkinton at the Monticello fair all the time. And of course there's times maybe when like Petersburg was in a tournament in Sumner or something and they'd ask you to go along and play.

It probably helped you were a catcher. Catchers probably were in somewhat short supply weren't they?

Yeah.

What changes do you remember over the years in like the field or rules that you guys you know ran under or did you usually just use pretty much the major league rules?

Yeah. I never got into the rules. If I thought I needed to argue, I'd argue and if I didn't, well I'd just let it go that way. We pretty well just did it according to Hoyle you know. I never got into that end of it.

What do you remember about changes in - you mentioned lights before -- any other changes in the fields that you remember?

No, I think myself the worst thing they did was when they started going to grass infields. Because they didn't take care of them good enough. I think that kind of ruined it. As far as I'm concerned, that's just my opinion. But, no, I mean it changed. I think the umpires had a lot to do with it. As we got older and even like up at Dyersville we had young kids come in and play too. But then when we went on trips and stuff they usually couldn't go but they were always there. It was real easy for a kid not to agree with an umpire that had a lot of bad calls because they'd just, "Why do I want to do this." You know. We'd argue with them a little bit and chew them out but I think the umpires hurt baseball as much as - the quality of it, I mean, I guess you can go and get a license. But we, back when Dyersville had the good teams we were very lucky and it's a good thing they were. They took control of ball games there is no question about it. These guys umpired Big Ten.

Did you have the same guys?

Pretty well, for quite a number of years. There was a guy by the name of -- they were all from Cedar Rapids. And if you interview Jenks he'll know all of them. There is a Burtichek that umpired all Iowa's games. And there was a guy by the name of Ray. There was three to four guys that umpired at Dyersville Tournament but then it cost quite a little money to get them guys. The town of Worthington couldn't afford it. But they are drawing 3,500, to 4,000, 5,000, 6,000 people they could afford to pay them. It's a good thing they did because everybody and his brother wanted to beat Dyersville. There was a lot of things going back and forth. If the umpires didn't take control of the game, things would have gotten out of hand.

I've read a few newspaper articles where it just mentions bickering, it never goes into details. This team argued about this thing and this team complained.

I can remember, the one I remember the mostly in 1957 I was working in New York and we got the Dyersville Commercial. The headlines in the Dyersville Commercial were "Petersburg fans are going to bring their chainsaws and cut the light poles off in Dyersville ball park." I never will forget that.

You'd mentioned trips before and you mentioned Battle Creek. Do you want to talk about that? Obviously, you must have made it to the National.

We made it to the Amateur World Series. Three years in a row.

Three years in a row? Ok. So how did that work? How did you get...? Could everyone go to state? Obviously you had to win State to go to Nationals, I assume. Tell me how it worked.

This is just town team ball. This is not... First you had to win in your league. Then they had a tournament. First it was at Denver, Iowa. You'd have to win that. Then when you had won that, then you'd go to South Dakota. If you won that tournament up there, then you'd go to Battle Creek. And you'd play teams from all over the United States. Us old farmers did pretty good. But you see, after. If you won your league I think you could pick out three guys from the league to add to your team. Then when you went to Denver, Iowa, later on it was at Dysart, but then you could pick out three more out of that tournament.

Out of that tournament there?

Yeah. And then when you went to South Dakota, you could pick three guys out of that tournament. And then you'd head for Battle Creek, Michigan. I've got pictures here that I've taken with Bob Feller. Says in the headlines of the paper "Iowa farm boys talk baseball." And I got to know Bob pretty good.

Cool. That's really good. You said you did well, but do you remember records, like -- how many games would you play when you were out there? Was it a tournament?

It was double elimination. Well... I got books in there, papers from all that. I think the first year in '61 we maybe won four games and then got beat out. In '62 we should have won it. We blew a 7 to 1 lead. Blew it. That was against Culver City, CA. Teams that we played out there were Shaney Studs, they were out in New Jersey. All three years we played out there we beat out Louisville. We stayed in the same hotel. Played pinnacle with all the guys and got to know them pretty good. Played against Mike Epstein. Played behind Boo Baugh, first baseman. For years, what a ball player. God, he could run. He was a big man. Woody Fryman, he went on to pitch major league ball. Played against him out there. First game we played in Battle Creek we got beat 6 to 1 by a 54 year old left hander from Savannah, Georgia.

Like Satchel Paige pitching so old.

Right, right. That's where, Jim McAndrews signed out there with the New York Mets. The year we were out there. We had that. Jim Ryder the next year went with us. We picked him up at one of the tournaments. He signed with the Mets out there while he was playing.

How many teams would usually be out there? Would it be like sixteen or thirty-two team?

No. Probably--you see, they'd have it set up in zones I guess and there would probably be eight or ten teams. Say if there would be eight teams like double elimination it's about like a sixteen team tournament. But, that was quite an experience for a bunch of Iowa farm boys.

What did you guys drive out then, kind of car pool or caravan?

Yeah. See these guys, what I got a kick out of, we paid our own way. Dyersville gave us a little bit of money. They paid the motels and stuff. We had to see how to get there and live and so on but the Shaney Studs. Louisville, Kentucky, would fly players back and forth. They couldn't come. The guy that sponsored Louisville, Kentucky, team, if I remember right is Tom's Builders. He was a big real estate man in Louisville. He owned seven or eight bowling alleys. Money is no object. He always said jokingly "Ain't you ever going to let us win a ball game?" We beat them all three years. Then we'd go back to the motel and sit there and play cards. No, that was quite an experience. I think that the most that we played one year we had like a 74 and 4 record I

think. We were always up, played more games than anybody else around here. Played a lot of good ball players. I think everybody back our age took the game a little more seriously than what they do now. But, we had a lot of fun.

Sounds like it. What kind of support did the cities that host the teams offer and are there some cities that are more supportive than others? You mentioned Dyersville paying for the hotel rooms. And I know that Dyersville has a very nice diamond and Cascade, the Legion, has the diamond. Was there any more that you know of, any more support that the town gave other than helping with the diamond, that type of thing?

Well, I think they... I can remember in 1953 Worthington won the Cascade tournament. And I think that you could have set the town on fire and it would have burned down because everybody was at the ball game. We had one guy. Of course, in '53 I was sixteen years old, and he would come to the ball game and he had a new Chevy car, a wash tub of beer in the back in the trunk and a fifth of whiskey sitting on top of it. Every game we played all year long. Of course, I didn't drink so it didn't -- he had pop there too, but that's the kind of support that... Everybody back in them days more so than now really supported their... I can remember going to Worthington in '51 and '52 and there would be guys come in there at 5:00 in the afternoon to get to where they wanted to sit. Well, that don't happen no more. It was just more fun playing ball back in them days than it was when I quit in '72. Not that it wasn't fun in '72. But everybody was behind their team more than they are now.

A little more town pride don't you think?

Right. There's a lot of good town team ball. Like you know Peosta they've got a... Back when I played with Peosta in '56 I think it was, why that was just Sunday afternoon. Now they got lights and. I don't know how the hell they can afford them but, well I guess A. J. Spiegel put some money into them, but... Sports is a great thing. It's very, very, very good, especially for young people. I think the kids probably lost -- they've got too much to do, other stuff. They don't take any pride in what they are doing compared to our age. I can remember when Monticello had their good team there was a guy by the name of George Hines. He was also a catcher. We had a young kid from Colesburg pitching that could throw BBs. Major league called. Got a curve ball. I said, George. We struck him out the first time. I said, "George, I'll tell you what, I'll bet you a six-pack that you don't get a hit tonight." George said, "I'll take that." So, we strike him out the first time. I said, "You don't want to up the ante do you?" "Yeah. I'm going to get him." We struck him out the second time. We struck him out the third time. And we struck him out the fourth time. So he said, "Well, when do you want to start carrying beer in?" But it's. There again. We had a couple of beers and laughed about it and. Hell of a man. I don't know if you know Bobby Hines? It's his dad. Super, super ball player. Bobby had an uncle, John, that played first base. Good ball player. Real good ball player.

How about problems? Was there any problems that you remember that the league had to overcome? I know you said that you didn't really get into a lot of the management stuff or rules but was there any time that you remember the league being in crisis? Because I know that it's changed names and kind of organization of the years. Was it ever, you know, in crisis?

No, I don't think so. Mainly it started out as, oh what the hell was it, way back it was... the Maquoketa Valley League, I think. And then they changed it, I don't know why they changed it. Well, then they got some other teams got into it. Then it was Eastern Iowa once. But I never went to any meetings or anything. I don't think the. The brand of baseball didn't changed. It

was all the same, it was just that the name was changed. Delaware County League and that was west of Worthington. But I think there are teams that. I don't know if Worthington ever got into the Delaware County League. I guess maybe you had to be from Delaware County to play in that league. But in tournaments, you just went where ever you wanted to. I can remember times years ago when we'd be playing baseball and we'd end up going to New Vienna and playing with New Vienna old pros in the softball tournament. Because they had their players down playing in the Dyersville tournament and they asked a bunch of us other guys to go up so they could keep going in the...

Would that be fast pitch softball?

Yeah.

With the tournaments, like the Dyersville tournament and Worthington, you're probably most familiar with, do they usually have the same teams year after year, or would they invite other teams to try to get a mix?

No. Years ago it was usually the same sixteen teams. Because we used to, I can remember Jenks complaining about Lowden, down south, they would always want to get into the Dyersville tournament, but they wouldn't let Dyersville in their tournament. So they wouldn't let them in their tournament. But there were a lot of players from Lowden, Wyoming, that would play with Monticello, Cascade, and whoever, that would end up playing in the tournaments but they really wouldn't leave Lowden in the Dyersville tournament because they wouldn't let us in their tournament. I don't think that the. It was pretty well. There was about a fifteen year span there, maybe longer, that there were the same sixteen teams. And then it wasn't until probably in the late eighties where it let -- New Vienna couldn't go any more, and Holy Cross is gone now, Sherrill is still going. No, Sherrill is out too I think. No, Sherrill is still going. But there was a few of the smaller towns that dropped out.

Do you remember who the sixteen teams were that used to come? Obviously Monticello, Cascade, Worthington, Dyersville. That gives you four.

Then usually Petersburg. Earlville was in way back. Sherrill, Farley, Epworth, Holy Cross, Rickardsville. They usually, for quite a number of years there, they were the same teams. I think that you are talking fifteen years at least. All the same teams. Monticello was in it. See Farley never had no tournament until later on. It pretty well was the same. And everybody would hire pitchers. It would get to be quite a fiasco.

In your opinion, are there certain people that are responsible for keeping the league alive? The crux of my paper that I am writing is. You know, if you go back a hundred years, pretty much every town had a town ball team of some sort. There really pretty much every town. At some point in time it obviously is faded now. Really this area is about the only place that still has it. And I think the Prairie League as far as I know is kind of in existence. I don't know what teams are in that versus the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League. I guess, who are the people in your opinion around here that are responsible for keeping it going? Well I think that Worthington had different managers years ago but I think like now Bill Burger is, and his sister, which was -- she was supposed to go in to the Baseball Hall of Fame two years ago and turned it down. I thought that she should have. I kind of...

Is that Sue? Because I'm supposed to interview. Is that Sue Burger?

Yeah, She should have took it. I talked to her and I said. In fact. I think it'd be neat because she has done as much for baseball that any man did. And I thought that. She's got two brothers in the Hall of Fame, Joe and Bill, and I just thought that she deserves to be in there just as much as... But she said she didn't want to. I said "Sue, take it." And I went to B. J. and talked to him and he said, well if you can get her to take it next year we'll put her in, but they didn't put her in last year, so maybe she'll get in this year. I hope she does.

She should

Yeah. But I think that Dyersville Jenks, They've all got what they call commercial clubs or something and I think like Farley. Paul Scherrman's probably been connected with that for years and years. I think B. J. has always been in over at Epworth. I don't know who would be at Peosta. I don't know who that would be. And then see we used to have teams come out of Dubuque, we had the Budweisers and the Dubuque Blues. And East Dubuque is in the league now. I mean I wouldn't have no idea whose kind of... But it's usually. They are lucky to keep these old guys. Like say Holy Cross, why Hank Lucas, I don't know if you know Hank. He played pro ball. A good guy. I'm sure, of course now they ain't got no team. But there was, I can't think of his name now, was always in that trying to keep it going. But it's a good thing somebody did. But Laverne Deitmeier always kind of kept Petersburg going. Seen that they were in the leagues and stuff. I don't know if anyone ever mentioned that when I used to play at Petersburg we'd go up to that Waterloo Courier Tournament. That was a tournament just like you could pick up some players and stuff. That's where that -- still can't think of his name.

The kid from Waterloo?

Yeah. A little left hander.

What about Cascade. Who would be responsible for keeping Cascade going do you suppose?

Oh, I suppose like now, I suppose Rich Napper. I don't know who really was in charge of it way back in the late fifties. I wouldn't. There was always a guy by the name of Patty Clark that was there. And Verne Weber was a Cascade manager back in then. They had one of the better teams back in that, in the early fifties. Boy, they were... That was before I come along. My dad would say "We've got to get the weeds pulled in the oats, take and do this and do that, and maybe we'll go to the ball game. Man, we'd clean the hell out of the oats so we could go to the ball game. But Verne Weber was the manager back in them days. Now these years, I don't know.

There is a Pat Weber that pitches for them now, I don't know if.

That was his Grandpa. That would have been Pat's Grandpa. He managed them for quite a number of years when they had them good teams. They use to play like Elkader. They had about. Well, Johnny Sullivan played for Iowa. Buddy Kurt played I think for Iowa. Johnny Moran was a... They always told me he could have signed but he went to be a priest. Signed with the Yankees of all teams. I hate the Yankees.

Maybe that's why he became a priest, he chose the better path.

He had two brothers. But I don't know who would have been managing. A little later on. I'd say from the late forties on up to probably to the mid-fifties Laverne Weber probably managed them then.

Well, you've mentioned a lot of these, so I guess I'll ask the question if there is anything else you want to throw out there. What memories do you have of the league or specific games that you played, happy games, frustrating games, or any specific memories that you haven't already talked about? You've talked about a lot. Favorite game memory?

My favorite games -- we always played Satchel Paige's team up at Dyersville. I always went over, I admired the man. Shook his hand every time. His fingers would come up to here on me. He could hide the baseball in his hand. I mean this man is 6' 6" and he'd always say "You kids going to take it easy on the old man tonight?" And he always warmed up from third base and he pitched two innings. Then he brought a left hander in that was about seven foot tall and when you were swinging at the curve ball it was coming down at this angle. It was just unbelievable. Another time, well I went up to Dyersville when they had their Field of Dreams stuff and Buck O'Neil was a colored gentleman from Kansas City. We played his team. And it was always such a honor to play. I mean these guys were the best negro players around. In them days. I can remember talking to Buck, I've got a ball in there that is autographed by him, but never got Satchel Paige's autograph. I didn't have enough...

Gumption?

Well, I did, I don't know why, I just never thought of it. We played him three years in a row. I'm sure his autographed baseball would be worth a lot of money.

It would, it would. What years would those have been? Fifties probably.

Yeah. I don't think it would have been.

I don't know, I think he pitched into the sixties and he was an old man then.

Yeah. But this Buck O'Neal, I says to him. We were talking about, he says to me "Did you play any Negro teams?" And I said Yeah, we used to play Satchel Paige's team and I said one year we played the Kansas City Monarchs. And he said, "That's my team." He was manager of that team and he wanted me to know that. But it was really fun talking to them. But I could never figure out, they always had a white catcher.

Really?

Satchel Paige's team always had a white catcher. He was kind of cruddy looking but he was white. Isn't that something?

This next question is basically, and we talked about it just a minute ago, but its kind of the crux of everything. In your opinion, why and how has the league and the teams in this area been able to stay viable when town baseball in other towns has faded away? And I know you hinted at some things, you know that kids are busier, that they've got too much, but what's your overall opinion? Why baseball has been able to hang on here when it's died elsewhere?

Well, there's a lot of, a lot of pride in this end of the... like in Delaware county...like in Dubuque county, and there's a lot of guys that played. I was thirty-eight years old when I quit. My brother Jim was ... he played about three years longer than I did ... so he was around forty. Tom Jenk was... And that's kind of what. When you go to Farley they had some like Paul Scherrman, and a Lehman kid, played way into it. You know a lot of them played long enough for their kids to start playing. And I think that's what helped with it a lot. Like Tom Jenk he played forever. I think Art Huinker was up, Babe Reittinger, Sal -- they were all in their late thirtys, which you don't have any more. They don't... Well in my opinion the kids now days don't play as a team,

it's what I can do. That hurt it a lot. Took away from it a lot. That one guy's name, Tom Simpson is the guy from Waterloo--not the one who went to the majors. A real good pitcher. A little left hander. I'll come up with that other name. And I think a lot of why it isn't going over, some of the better ball players when they were kids, the umpires had strike zones that were so ridiculous and then they'd say what the hell, I'm not going to put up with this bullshit. You know, so they just quit. I can't blame them. I think what ruined, my opinion, what ruined baseball as much as it is around here is the umpiring. For that reason, the young people. The old guys, they just wanted to play ball. When you get these young guys come out. First of all, they don't care what happens to the team. Just they can get... They go to college and they all say they're batting .500 and out here they come and they can't buy a hit. I think that's what kind of ruined it. Of course, I think it's just like the town team ball back in the sixties and seventies it was just like the major leagues. When they had Warren Spahn and Don Drysdale. You go to the Yankees there was Whitey Ford. The pitching was just better than it is now. They didn't throw 110 miles per hour but they still got outs and...

They could usually pitch nine innings instead of four.

Yeah. You get a pitcher now if he goes five he needs to get another twenty million. I watched a movie here the other night on Ted Williams. I really got a kick...I never got to see him play but I've been a Red Sox fan all my life. I've been to Fenway Park. I listened to Ted say that he thought probably Willie Mays was the best all-around ball player there ever was.

Pretty big words from Ted. He was a little...

He said on the end of his deal on television. He said I set him up. And I don't remember the name of the pitcher. He threw him a high fast ball. You know back then it was shoulders or armpits. And he said I swung at it and I could almost read his lips saying "Man I've got him now. I'm going to throw him another one right there." Well, that one left the stadium. The last hit of his career. And he said when I went around second base he said, "I thought 20% of me wanted to (tip his hat). He never did that but he said the 80% took over. He didn't do it. But he thought about it he said. 20% of me. But I think it's that way. A lot of people like Dick Dupont he played with Sherrill or Rickardsville, Sherrill I guess. He played long enough that his kid started playing town team ball. Which is great.

Yeah. You kind of pass it on down.

I don't know what my son -- played for Dyersville too, caught, he was a catcher. Been all over the world with the Fields of Dreams Team. It's a great thing that Field of Dreams. At least they spent money out of the government to run them all over. At least we knew where the money was going. It had to be quite an honor to do that. But one of the highlights of baseball around here is when they brought back all those major league ball players back to Dyersville and played. I'm talking Bob Feller was there, Rollie Fingers.

What year was that? Do you remember -- roughly?

I'd say in the eighties.

That was before I came, but I remember hearing something about it.

Yog played and he said two of the nicest guys that were there by far Bob Gibson and Lou Brock. And Lou Brock's son was there. He said that they were perfect gentlemen. And then they had Reggie which was... he got drunk and... But you know there was guys there. Rollie had his big handlebar mustache. God, it was just like going to a major league ball game. My friend Eddie

Watts was there. I don't think Jim McAndrews ever got an invite. Who else? There was a kid Duane Josephson. Did you ever? He was from up around Denver. I think he caught for the White Sox. I think he might have been there. But they had. It was just like a major league roster. They had all the big boys here. It wasn't the little boys, it was the big boys. That had to be the highlight of a lot of people's... I know I got Bob Feller's autographed baseball. And they always told me that he charged kids \$3.50 to sign a ball. And I kind of lost my respect for him. Shouldn't talk about the dead, he did die here about two months ago. I got a ball and had him autograph it and I think I'd probably have told him to kiss my ... if he'd wanted.... But see, Upper Deck brought them here. And they had to pay. He was doing it because they paid him to get him here. But, Eddie Watts said I wouldn't charge a little kid to sign a baseball. He come on his own I guess. He come because he played ball here with us for a couple years. It makes a difference when you're kind of baseball... Your life kind of... Now I'm into softball. I have a granddaughter who pitches for Beckman, Two years ago we went to, I never will forget this, I went over to Vinton/Shellsburg, is it, yeah I think it's Vinton. They played the team that won the state Class 2A tournament that year. She pitched sixteen innings, gave up one hit, got beat 1 - 0. But that is really one of my highlights. I said to her, well in the fifteenth inning, she had one well over the fence by about that far foul, she'd have won her own ball game. I told Margie this is. They just couldn't hit for her, they didn't hit for her. They couldn't hit much all year. I says, this is a lot better. You pitching sixteen innings and giving up one hit and getting beat one to nothing that got beat on an error. If you'd gone down there and played that team and got beat 14-1 they'd say How in the hell did they get here?" I think she went out is style. That's the way I look at it.

I coached softball for ten years down in Monticello and I love it, love the sport. I grew up a baseball man I just became softball out of college because that's where the job was.

I hated softball when I was playing baseball. But I got into this girls'. I've still got two granddaughters pitching up at Beckman. They were on a traveling team, of course this ain't got nothing to do with baseball but. What the hell is his name? He's over at... One of his brothers teaches over at Dubuque. On a traveling softball team. They went all over. And I had more fun. We went from Dallas, Texas, to down to Disney World. Played on Wide World of Sports. We went. There was seventeen and under baseball, seventeen and under basketball, saw Michael Jordon's son. Tampa Bay Buccaneers were practicing football. Atlanta Braves were playing their rookie league down there. And I knew some coaches that Watts played with and got the kids all an autographed baseball. They were all girls, one boy, but they had more fun in one year in Kansas.

I'm thinking that baseball took you to Battle Creek, MI, they get to go all these warm places for softball maybe you played the wrong sport.

Well, I guess the guy is really kind of lucky. I played in the M and J league in 1956, no 1955. I went down in the industrial league in Cedar Rapids. I played with Iowa Manufacturing. They make rock crushers. I don't know if anybody ever brought up the name of Darrell Rockroth? He was from there. He played in that league I played in. I threw my arm out in the spring of '56. I had an opportunity to go to New York to build highways. So I did that for two years. Never picked up a ball for two years. Come back, and my brother, Jim, was playing with Dyersville. He talked me into coming up to Dyersville. Best thing I ever did. We played a lot of ball. But I was self-employed all the time so. When I came back I started my own business. If I had to take off two hours early, well... These kids don't go through nothing to play ball what we went through. I used to work down in Washington, Iowa, and I'd come home and play in the Cascade tournament. You wouldn't catch nobody doing that now.

Nope. I know where Washington is at. That's back home. I grew up in Riverside just you know north of there.

But I can remember one time I told them I wasn't coming back and my dad and the manager came down and got me. We were in the finals of the Cascade tournament.

Well, the last question on my list and we can keep talking about whatever you want to talk about. What is your hope and wish for the future of the league?

Well, it's going to be really hard to keep it going. But I hope that. I would really like to see. They went to the odd team. I just don't understand that. They've got actually seventeen teams in these tournaments now. And then they split them, top section and bottom section. So they put the first eight better teams in the top division. I don't know if that is going to make any difference but they don't. Well, they might hire somebody. But the quality of pitching ain't near as good as it was back. I would just say they've got throwers now. They ain't got pitchers, they've got throwers. Some of them throw pretty hard but... You go to a... I think it's just kind of going to fade worse. Because, unless you've got a kid playing, it's real easy not to go. Or if you've got a kid that I like, yeah, I'll go and watch him. He's a good ball player. But you look, and I go to baseball, high school baseball too. Not like I go to other games. But you go to Beckman, you can't. It's just like it was back when I was playing. Fricking people are all over the place. They'll go to all those high school games. But they won't go to. I always told my son, Dale Jr., I use to tell him we had more drunks at a ballgame than what they get at the Dyersville tournament now any... Until you get Farley playing Epworth, Peosta, Cascade will draw a pretty good. There ain't nobody there. It's just... shameful. We used to walk in beer cans that deep in Dyersville back in the fifties.

They weren't worth a nickel back then.

Hell, no. But there wasn't near as much to do back then but still draw just as good for high school. Now that night when we went over there when Maggie pitched that game she got beat one to nothing, I mean there were people wall to wall. The high school games are that way, but not the. There again, I think the biggest part of it is the umpire. That's why the quality of baseball went down. You've got a guy that. Who knows where the strike zone is. And then the kids says --- I'm done. You know. And the people like me, I just go to be doing something. But don't pay a whole lot of attention if they've got a real good thrower or something. But God, when you are calling strikes up here it just takes the fun out of it. And I think that is what is going to be hard on. They say you've got to go to school and get this, but, license the umpire. And actually a baseball game, if the umpire starts guessing what he is doing, is this right or is that right, you've already lost. And that's why, like when we went to Battle Creek, at all times the umpire was in charge. You didn't mess around with that. But getting back to this other deal, I think the umpiring, it's got a lot to do with it. The caliber of baseball's got a lot to do with it. And there is so much other stuff. I mean a lot of times now when my granddaughters are playing I ain't going to baseball games. You know they've got twenty-five kids, twenty kids on the softball team. So if you take that whole family, twenty families out of it. That takes a lot of people away. And anymore the families go on more vacations. Back when I was growing up there was no such thing. It's so hard to... They'll go to the high school games and they'll go to the girls' softball games but if they've got guys like my age, got grandkids playing, sure you'll go. But your heart really ain't into it. You're just. Like if I went and I had a nephew or something playing baseball. Yeah. I enjoy watching baseball, I like to see kids do good, if they work at it. I don't get too much of a thrill out of watching them throw to the wrong base about

seven times in a row. That's another thing. Cascade is probably on the home talent as good as any team as far as playing kids. They've got a few of them come in you know from different towns. Dyersville, now, it's hard telling where they come from. Years ago when I played there it was pretty well the same team other than pitchers. But when you get playing all those damn games you got to have a lot of pitchers. I keep getting that guy's name on my tongue but I can't say it. He ended up playing down in Florida.

Personal interview with Jude Milbert

By Todd Hospodarsky

Date: May 3, 2011

Tom's (Jenk) history is... well he could tell you more too, but his dad, this is back in the twenties and thirties, he is actually one of the guys who started one of the semi-pro teams in Dyersville.

Great. That's just the information I need.

And so he'll be able to. Actually he's my father-in-law so we have a connect there, besides we share and office obviously and all of that. But then Tom, and I think he's...he was voted captain of the Pan American team which I know in these days isn't – but back in the early sixties it was a big deal. In the off Olympic years that was a big deal, so he played there. And then he was, back in the late seventies early eighties when the Olympics were looking into having baseball as a sport, he was one of the national guys on the committee. So you'll have plenty to talk about.

And what is or was your connection with the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League? It's been different names over the years but that kind of the league there.

Yeah, we've, well probably everybody that starts with a town team, probably starts, and this is how I did it, and this is probably typical of everybody, especially my age. The guys would be in need of a guy so they'd call up a couple of high school kids and I think I was a sophomore – I remember Tom Jenk called me up myself and two other guys. "Hey, we might need some subs for Sunday's games. Would you be interested in coming up." And back then, I'm going to be real honest with you, maybe not this day, but that was like being called up from triple A to the majors. It really was. Just to sit on the bench with those guys. You mentioned Dale Digmann. Those guys were heroes. So that's how I started.

What year would that have been?

Oh, '73. I was a sophomore in high school then. Dale Digmann, and this is introducing kind of a funny story but, I'm sitting back, and this was back, we had probably one of the first high school teams that had white shoes. And these guys were old school guys. They're chewing tobacco and they are probably mid-thirties or later and in those days was fairly far along. So I'm sitting on the bench with two or three other guys everyone wearing their white shoes and Dale's the catcher, you have to know Dale to know how he is. Dale tells it the way it is. Didn't have much to say. He just kind of looked at us and we had our new uniforms, you know the ones back in those days the tight ones and they still had the old look. And so, we're the new kids and Dale's got a wad of chew in there and he just came in from an inning and he sits down and looks at me and says, Nice uniform. And I'm OK, Thanks. I'm just happy he said something to me. I get up in the next inning and I hear this squish in my shoe. Here he had dropped a wad of tobacco on it and he's laughing. I really like Dale, we still get along, actually I ended up playing with his son also, so I know him, but that is just one of those stories. But that's probably pretty typical of how those guys especially my age got started, you got asked and you know, you play your high school ball and you played... back in those days you played as much ball as you could and if they wanted you, you played. Because like I said, that was a thrill. And especially back in those days with, and it was even. I remember as a kid, maybe I'm going off your thing here, we were, when I was a kid, we would. You go up to the Dyersville tournament here, there would be 5,000-6,000 people there on a few nights. They had kids selling peanuts and popcorn walking through the stands. It was just like a big time minor league game. And you saw some really good players. Then as I, we got in the seventies naturally things started changing a little bit as far as people had

other things to do, and the cable started coming around and things were a little bit different, but we still had big crowds. I mean we'd get 2,000-3,000-4,000 at the finals of the Dyersville Tournament. They used to give cars away and all that stuff. It was a big deal. So it was a big honor to play. And you just...back in those days I went to college and I played through my college years, I'd played college baseball. I'd gone to Coe in Cedar Rapids and back in those days, you...like you brought up towns, we had a core of guys that were all within probably 4 years of age that played high school ball and stuff together and all the way up through. And a bunch of them stayed around because guys were able to get good jobs in the area and didn't have to go to college or move away. So a lot of those guys were here. My wife and I had no inclination that we were going to move back to Dyersville, it just worked out that way. She is a teacher also. The reason we, she got a teaching job and that's why we settled here. She got in over at Western Dubuque. We got... And it wasn't as important to have a job back then probably. But we came back to play baseball and if you got a job, that was a bonus. That was a side thing. We came back to play baseball.

What years were you involved in the league? Obviously you started in '73, how long did you play?

Yeah, we played – it was that core group of guys that I was talking about, we all played – and Tom ended up being the manager. I think it was '84 when he retired. We were all getting up to you know thirty years old and it's just the thing, everybody were having kids and stuff and we had a really good year. We thought it was time for everybody to just bow out a little bit. Then Dyersville had a rough stretch there. They didn't have. They had a couple of managers that didn't work out. A guy I knew took over the team and he asked a few of us guys to come back and just help out, at least get started again. And we did that. I think I played about another six years after that.

How did you become involved in baseball? Who influenced you in the early years? Obviously you idolized these guys but who really got you started?

Basically it was pretty typical watching baseball with my dad. I remember my dad bringing me up to ball games, the tournament games up in Dyersville and every once in a while Dyersville was in the finals down in Worthington or Holy Cross or some place. He'd take you along. Invite some friends, like I said that was, like I said, like going to a major league game.

Did he play, your father?

No. My dad. I was kind of the youngster in the family. Well, I was the youngest, I was kind of an oops, so age wise he was up there a little bit more than most dads but he was still very. We farmed so. But he always loved baseball, Sunday afternoons watching it on TV and things like that.

What do you know about the formation and running of the league over the course of the years? The league itself.

As long as I remember playing, I'm pretty sure it was always the Eastern Iowa League. There was the Prairie League and Dyersville, we always, from what I remember, we belonged to the Eastern Iowa League. Sometimes we may have belonged to both. But I know when I was a player it was always the Eastern Iowa League. And I guess that was just our affiliation.

Do you remember what teams were in it when you played?

Oh, sure, yeah, um. There was Dyersville, Worthington, Monticello, Cascade, Farley. Farley I know belonged to both leagues. New Vienna. I believe Rickardsville was in it. Back in those days Petersburg had a team. I believe even Earlville had a team. I'm trying to think who else. I'm not sure, Dubuque may have been in it for a few years.

Who were some of the key people that you remember running the league? You obviously mentioned Tom. Any other people from other towns you remember being real leaders of the league itself?

Again you might get into with the Hall of Fame thing, but I know Rich Napper down in Cascade, I think he was really big in keeping it going. And I think like Tom Jenk.

Any big players or coaches that you remember playing with or against? Guys that maybe went to the majors or just were really good?

Well, I can't right, well, around here, I mean I played against, and obviously that's not around here. A couple guys in college, but, around here, yeah, back then for the big tournaments, we call them the big four, Holy Cross, Dyersville, Cascade, and Worthington, we used to. It was more for bragging rights than anything. A lot of teams, we might have one or two pitchers. So if you were getting into the semi-finals and that, you'd hire a pitcher. A lot of guys, back in those days there was a lot of University of Iowa pitchers that they'd hire for the summer. Moline had... And so a lot of those guys would get hired. Around the Cedar Rapids area they had teams, Walford, Norway and all that. They had kind of like here. Probably they may have been, just because it wasn't, obviously you've got Cedar Rapids there, obviously you've got Norway and the history there. They would have, I would say they probably had six or eight teams versus the thirty to thirty-five around here so the talent was a little more spread out. And I think those guys mostly played just on Sunday so they usually had some pitchers available. And they had Sawville. And there's, I'm trying to think. He was. I can't think of his name off hand. Mike Ungs. Mike was actually I remember, I think when Mike I think got cut from AAA with the Twins and we were playing up at Rickardsville, I think, no maybe it wasn't Rickardsville. We were at Holy Cross in a tournament. I think we were in the finals and Mike walks in. He was a big guy, and he's still got his Twins uniform on and he comes in and mows us down. So there were some guys who had gotten up into AA maybe one or two guys who got into triple A. I remember Ed, he threw hard, really hard, you know, for guys around here. If you needed a pitcher, he was usually the guy to hire. But then again, there were a lot of guys from the Davenport area that would come up. We'd kind of... We usually got by with our staff at Dyersville, but every once in a while you'd bring someone in. Like I'd say it was more for bragging rights than anything.

Do you remember what they usually got paid? I forgot to ask Tom that.

A lot of times it was so much per strike out. Maybe \$5 per strike out. Some guys would get \$100 a game. I mean this is back in the seventies, that was good money. Back in those days, I'm pretty sure, but back in the fifties first place in the Dyersville tournament was four hundred and some dollars. I think it still is. But, sometimes you'd spend five hundred on pitchers. Actually I remember one time, and I can't think of the guy's name, Joe Burger was our catcher, and Joe, we were in the semi-finals at the Dyersville tournament. We were playing Bernard. And Joe wasn't going to make it. Joe played college ball at Morningside, and he said, Hey, I've got a pitcher who pitched for us. I'm going to have. Sam Newby, that was his name. A big left-hander. He said, I'll call him up, he'd probably come up. So he called him up and the guy said, Yeah, he said and he'd bring his catcher along from this town. I don't remember where it was at. The guy walks in

and the catcher is missing two front teeth. Newby's got his warm up sleeve, is a long sleeve underwear. We're sitting there saying, Joe, what did you do you know? Anyway, the guy comes in and I happened to be playing second base, and I've never seen a guy hit. He threw fairly hard, but he had control. The catcher would sit there and put his glove there and he'd throw a breaking ball, and boom. And he threw a no hitter. He did walk a guy, and the catcher, from his haunches threw the guy out at second. We ended up finding out that the catcher made it up to AAA. But that's one, I'll never forget that guy. He was just really impressive. We found out that he threw eighteen innings for Morningside and got beat by Nebraska in eighteen innings one to nothing.

I'm always amazed when I hear stories like that because like today coaches don't even let their guys go eighteen innings. And it just, you know.

It was such a totally different game back then. We were taught, throw, throw, throw. If you ever have a chance, and I'm sure his name has been around, Frank Dardis. And Frank is still playing. Frank is two years older than me. And Frank, he just had. He was a left-hander. You know, Frank in his day, threw fairly hard. He just had great movement, a typical left hander, good control and all that. He'd go on two days' rest, throw seven, throw nine, two days later he's back throwing seven, throwing nine. He never had arm problems.

Pat Weber is kind of the same way. Cascade is.
Exactly.

How about teams. Any big teams that you remember over the years as being especially good. Obviously Dyersville has been good, but.

Yeah. Back in our days, we had a good team. You know, one year I think we won seventy games, another year we won like sixty-five, I think one year we went 70-8. So we had a good team. Back then, you know, Farley was very good all the time. New Vienna had good clubs. Cascade was always a good team. But it usually came down a lot of those games. Rickardsville. But they all...I mean you always had to make sure, they were always there. Bernard. Probably the thing that we had over them, we had four pretty good pitchers, you know. Whereas they were down to one or two, so you sometimes when you get to the finals, that's when they've got to hire and stuff like that. But it was usually Farley and us we're probably the main ones.

I think you just covered my next question. What kind of separated those teams? Pitching kind of helped.

Yeah. Overall, of course. Like I said we had. We were fortunate, you know we had four guys, sometimes maybe five, that were what we call "tournament" quality type pitchers I guess.

How did teams get their players? Did you have tryouts? You talked about getting called up as a high schooler. You know, as you got older and you're on the team, did you just show up?

Yeah. It was pretty much. It was just kind of... Tom managed, Basically it was the group that I got you got up, and you started playing. It was a pretty big...our situation it was pretty much the same group of guys. We all aged together. You had bring in some guys when older guys would quit, move, whatever. The high school was always bringing guys up, or ask them. There were some guys that even. There was a guy or two from Dyersville that either he didn't think he was going to play here when he could go down to wherever and play all the time so he'd go do that.

We already kind of talked about compensation for pitchers and stuff. How about changes in the field?. What do you remember? You probably came after lights were already in. Tom couldn't remember when they put in the grass infield? Do you remember any big changes in the field or regulations?

I remember when we put the grass in, just because that was a big deal. Everything had the skin. I think Monticello had a turf, or a grass infield back in the old fair grounds.

Do you remember what year that would have been, or roughly?

Late seventies. And when we put ours in up here, it was probably '83 or '84 just because I remember it was one of the last years we were playing. They put that in, put the watering system in. That was. The Cascade soon followed and Farley, and everybody started upgrading the fields a little bit.

Any idea where teams in the league get their backing, you know to pay for ump's and stuff. Tom had mentioned the Commercial, Commercial Club but yet he didn't ever remember getting any money from them. He wasn't sure...

Back when Tom was playing, I think they probably gave them so much and then the guys were on their own. And I think a lot of the time they got around and got some sponsors. But then they won enough tournaments probably they probably had enough money to support themselves. I know I can remember when I first...You know you'd have a home game where they'd pass the hat around to pay for the umpires. Then back in the seventies you know the Commercial Club, they basically were paying for pretty much everything. At least the entry fees and everything. Whatever money we got usually went for beer and stuff like that. Which wasn't, again, by the time you're done. Sometimes we'd pay for some guy's gas if he had to travel a little bit, but that's about it. But most of the time back then I remember the Commercial Club was picking up most of the tab. They'd give us so much to get started and all that.

How about support that the cities gave? Fans, or even like helping with the park, although I know the Commercial Club, it's their park and stuff. Are some cities that you remember visiting more supportive than others?

Well, you mean as far as fan wise? Oh, yeah. Farley was always a great group. They'd bring fans and they were always yelling and giving everybody enough. We had a pretty good group of fans, but Farley was probably far the most vocal. Everybody, if they had a decent team, they all had their core group of fans that would come. They don't want to admit it, but certain tournaments were set up to make sure that certain teams got to the semi-finals because they brought more fans whatever.

I wondered about that.

They won't admit it, but I'm sure that's the way it was.

Do you remember any problems in the league or like the league? The crux of the paper is that a lot of towns have lost their teams. Do remember the league ever being real weak or in danger of failing like you'd worry about not. You know, maybe Dyersville is going to have their team, but the league itself might not be there?

I don't really remember that. I think all the teams are pretty strong.

Are there any certain people, in your opinion, that are responsible for keeping the league going? You know, I'm sure...

I've talked about Rich Napper. I know Paul Scherrman from Farley. You know Tom was probably pretty influential. Those guys were probably the backbone of organizing the meetings when they had the team meetings and stuff. Those guys were pretty influential.

What memories do you have of the league, specific games that you played in? We've talked about a couple memories. Any that we haven't mentioned that really stick out in your mind, of a game played or a person faced or whatever?

Well the league games themselves are usually played during the week. I know Prairie League plays on Sundays. The Eastern Iowa games were pretty much during the week. And then if you got involved in tournaments and you happen to win you have to reschedule. There was a lot of shuffling games around. But I guess, right off hand, the league games like I said there were a lot of times the guys were saving their pitchers, you are down to your shortstop throwing or your catcher throwing. But it was good to get a lot of guys to get some playing time. I remember in the Dyersville situation we had a lot of guys and they showed up all the time and that was their time to play. And not everybody could make every game and so. And a lot of times in the tournaments that proved valuable. I remember a guy named Kevin Tegler. He was a tall first baseman. Pitched our league games. Great defensive first baseman. Couldn't hit worth a lick. But, there were tournament games he'd come in in relief, he'd get a couple outs. He had kind of that Ken Tekulve side arm thing going and come in and get a big out or two. Put him in for defense in the last inning, make some great plays. And then during league games try to get a start in, keep him sharp.

So the tournaments tend to be more important than the league record or whatever.

Yeah. Back in those days it was just because everything was geared toward the tournaments. But the league, you had to have it to... because if you weren't; if you got beat in the first round, you had ten days with nothing to do. So you had your league games to fill in there.

Right. I get off my list here a little bit. With the Hall of Fame, since that is kind of how I got a hold of you. Tell me a little bit about the Hall of Fame. I haven't been up to Dubuque to look at it. How did that come about and kind of the...

From my, my history on it is... Basically, we've got Cascade, Dubuque, Farley, I shouldn't say Farley, Worthington, Dyersville, pretty much the basic larger, more popular teams, I guess. There's six of us on the committee. I just asked the guy from Dyersville who took over for his dad. He had just put his years in and he had kids and they were coming up and he asked if I'd be interested, and I said, Sure. We're just kind of there to. But it started back in; I think we are in our 25th year this year. So the group of guys, older gentlemen, the guys that got together and said we should honor some of these guys like Tom and Dale Digmann, and all these guys came up with the idea of doing it and then the *Telegraph Herald* got involved and said Hey, we'll sponsor and All-Star game. Kind of make a weekend out of it. So, we have a banquet on Friday night, on Friday night when they introduce the guys and they have them give their little speeches and stuff. It's pretty good. A lot of fun. A lot of old guys get together and tell everybody how great we were and stuff. Then Saturday night there is an All Star game where we've got a couple of guys. Well, we kind of talk to the managers and maybe take a couple guys off each team to come and play and stuff so we have a game then.

When is that usually?

Around July, the first week or two in July. July 8th and 9th this year. Then it goes from town to town. It goes – I know Dubuque, Dyersville, Worthington, Cascade, Farley, and Peosta, we take turns just hosting it.

The next question is sort of what the crux of what my paper is about. It's kind of an opinion question. In your opinion, why and how has the league and the teams in the league been able to stay viable in this area when town baseball teams really have faded in other areas?

That's a good question. Probably one thing is tradition. Second I think probably is the high school teams are strong. So there is a lot of good players and they want to play. A lot of guys are going on to college to play so they want to keep playing during the summer obviously. I think that's some of it. In the Dyersville situation, I know there's a little bit of a gap there that it was really questionable whether they were going to have a team, just because you need a manager. Randy Olberding, who is my age and I played with, stepped up and organized and kept it going. And then the group of guys now, they're all local kids who grew up kind of like with us. We were actually talking about it the other day it's kind of like the old days, they are ended all back here for one reason or another in the area and they are all good players and they want to keep playing. One of the kids took it and said I'll manage it and you know, do all the grunt work and so they've been going. You've got Cascade, it's kind of the same way. They've had Pat Weber, you know. You need guys like that who are going to do all the BS work, call the guys and do all that and he's been doing that. Paul Scherrman. Every town's probably got a guy who's doing that. And they're the ones who keep it going. I think that and like I said the strong high school teams in the area and they want to keep playing.

Last question is: What is your hope and wish for the future of the league?

Well, again I think. We were talking the other day with a couple of guys and we were just shooting BS and we were talking to a couple of Dyersville guys now and after they left we were kind of talking. Right now, as far as the teams, the quality of players I think is probably as strong as it's been in the last fifteen years. Just from the teams around. And a lot of guys that are sticking around here, kind of like the old days, have jobs in the area so it sounds like they are going to be around for a while. And so I hope, I just hope it can keep going. Love to see it where these guys could experience what we did, playing ahead of 3,000-4,000 people in a Dyersville Tournament. I don't know that it's going to happen because there is so much going on, and cable TV, and all the other excuses. But that would be, I'd like to see it get back to that level at some point but I don't know if it will. But I think as long as these guys still have a place to play and stuff.

I actually have to backtrack. That was supposed to be my last question but I thought of something with that All-Star thing. With the All-Star, not the All-Star, the Hall of Fame, excuse me. How do you select? Is there a nomination selection process?

Yes, a lot of times the guys will. Tom will. This is guys from all. Guys will send a letter and say, I'd like to nominate so-and-so, and the committee itself, we will. Gary Langel who just got on. He's been doing the books, and running the Worthington Tournament, and working, helping with the team. Again, one of those guys you need around. He's got batting averages and stuff from guys from you know. And so we sit down with the criteria. You have to be out, kind of retired for five years, which is kind of hard these days because a guy like Frank Dardis is maybe going to play ten games yet a year. If they need somebody they'll say Frank can you help us out and he'll

say, Sure. But you have to be out for five years. And then, it's just, it's not just totally on your batting average and your records, it's you know, longevity, having good decent stats, but just helping the team out, helping the town out and helping keep the team going. That kind of thing. So we have players, we usually put in four to five players a year. Usually try an umpire, and then someone that is behind the scenes kind of person. Like on the Commercial Club, we've had a couple of guys that have been, they're up there every night, selling beer. They're taking tickets, doing whatever. We try and honor them.

Sounds neat. And it sounds. And I forget. You told me and I wrote it down in a different notebook, but it's up in Dubuque, I don't remember where you said.

Yeah. Right now, actually, another thing we are doing right now, we're going to do it this year we just applied to get a non-profit and we're trying to get a grant from the Dubuque Racing Association. Our initial thing we were going to do this year is put up, it's a, it's not really a... Actually we've got a meeting tomorrow. (gets a sample from folder) Something on wood like this. We've got everybody's names. And Dyersville was selected to have the first one. And again, this is just down at Cascade, but we've got everyone's name and things like that. Up at the diamonds. And then all of a sudden one of the towns said, Hey, we'd like to do it and stuff. So we thought well maybe we could get a grant and get a lot of it paid for. We've got about five towns right now that will...

They just have a different. If somebody comes to watch a game it's because their family member's playing or because they enjoy baseball. It's not because it's a passion for the town like it is.

You know, when I was a kid, that going up to that Dyersville tournament, it was a big, one of the top big deals of the whole summer. You couldn't wait for it to get here. But, Dubuque again, obviously size wise it's different. They had some really good teams and some good players but like you said the fans were mom and dad and girlfriends.

Anything else you want to throw out there that will help me get where I need to go?

I guess a lot of people, you know, like I said, it just really struck me when in the movie in the Fields of Dreams when that guy Frank Grahams jumped in that van, what he said about small towns. Man, they couldn't have picked a better area to do that. Back, like I said, in those days. I just wish people could really understand. I played down in Cedar Rapids at Coe and a lot of those guys I played with, you would try to describe to them what it was like. There like, yeah, right. And I said well they even used to have a TV show on it, on KCRG. Again, it'd be really, really great to get back to something like that. But I guess times have changed and there's too much going on. But the people I've been around appreciate what it was all about. That's for sure.

That's what I. Doing this research is interesting. I moved to Monti in '95 and like I said it was really surprising to me that it was still going on because back where I was at home, before I was born it had died out. I went to a Cubs game last year and there were seven people in the stands and two of there were me and my son. I realize it wasn't a great night I remember, as far as weather. But it was...

We used to, the first round of the... I hate to again compare times, if you like to, I'm turning into the old timers, but when we played the Dyersville tournament, we played the first round game, that'd be the early game, we'd have more people there than they have in the finals now. Which is unfortunate. But, like I said, I think it's gone from where... Whereas it used to be an event, it was one of the highlights of things to do.

Personal interview with Tom Jenk
By Todd Hospodarsky
Date: May 3, 2011

What is or was your connection with the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League or any other names the league has had in the past because I know you've been around the league for a while.

I was manager of the Dyersville White Hawks. I played in various different leagues—Maquoketa Valley, the Eastern Iowa League, and we played in the Waterloo league.

What years were you involved? Actually Jude said maybe your father had managed way back when.

Yeah, my father had managed and I was bat boy in that probably in '35 to '40. Then when I was fourteen years old I played right field for the town team, and I played for about forty years.

You had to be pretty good to play at fourteen.

I played right field then all of a sudden I was at center field. Because I was fast and had a pretty good arm. And the right fielder and left fielder weighed about 250. And they didn't cover much ground. But I thoroughly enjoyed it you know.

So what years would that have been? You started at fourteen. Must have been in the forties.

'44 or '45.

And then you played until roughly...?

Well the last game I played. I was managing the... with the team and we were playing the consolation in the Dyersville Tournament. And it happened to be that we had sponsored also a softball team. And half of our fellows played softball and baseball at that time. And what they were doing was, they were going to go to the state tournament semi-finals. And I said, just go. I'll play. And I hadn't played all year. We played against Cascade in the consolation and I got three doubles in the game so I thought it was time to quit. I was 54.

Three doubles. Wow. I don't know how you quit after three doubles.

You want to quit on top. Not when you get out three times

How did you become involved in baseball in general? Who influenced you to get started in baseball?

Well, basically my father was a manager. Other than that, I was bat boy, and that was it. Around here there wasn't a heck of a lot to do. We didn't have a swimming pool or anything else. And, I played baseball for high school, so I thought well I could move it up. They didn't have high school summer baseball at that time. They had a fall and a spring, and so it was something to do that way. That was it.

What do you know about the formation or running of the league that's in existence? Or has been, I guess I know it changed from the Maquoketa Valley League into the Eastern Iowa League at one point in time. Were you involved with any of the running of the league itself, or just managing Dyersville?

No, I just managed Dyersville. I didn't have anything to do with the League at all. Although when I was eighth grade, ninth grade basically none of the other teams around here wanted to let you play except Dyersville I played on that, and so there's Bobby Elderbrant, Buck Escow and I and we got together and we formed a team over in Delaware. It was a corn field and we had to put a pitching mound in and go there and we played a grass infield with a pitching mound and home plate. And we played in the Delaware County League at that time. I was only about fourteen at that time. We had a great time.

How did you get over there? If you were only fourteen, how did you get over there, did you drive?

Yeah. We always had someone to pick you up and take you over there. My dad managed many many years and we used to pick up Bob Nieman, I don't know if you've heard of him. He did Crooked Court over in Manchester for about fifty years and so he was the catcher. We didn't have a catcher so we'd always pick him up. I was the bat boy for the town team for a long time.

Great. Who would you consider some of the leaders of the League over the years when you were a player or even later when you managed. Other coaches or managers, maybe your dad, who were the leaders to keep the league going year to year?

I think, you know, they had a close knit outfit. Say to Petersburg to Cascade to Monticello and Epworth, Farley. It changed around and one guy would be the manager one year, someone else the next year, and then the fellow that quit back again. It was... I don't know. It was a unit and everybody got along with everybody really. That was before night baseball came in.

Night baseball came for Dyersville in?

We had problems. First of all we have a beautiful park up there. We get 6,000-7,000 people there in the finals. The foul ball lines were the out of bounds lines. How many people were there. If you drank beer, you'd sprain your ankle because I mean there were so many beer cans laying around. And we had thousands of people come in for games. And they gave a car away naturally. They'd have a queen's pageant. We had a lot of rivalry. Teams would fly players in. There used to be a field right behind the beer garden. They'd fly them in from Cedar Rapids. I mean to play you know. There was a lot of competition around. Every little town including Dyersville had a team.

What players or coaches stick out in your mind that you played with or against? Maybe guys who went to the majors or maybe not, just great players or coaches. And you can go back to your dad's time maybe. I know there. Johnny Moran was thrown out, that name, I know by an earlier interview. You know, anybody?

That's a little bit different, basically as far as I was concerned when I was a junior in high school I went to Elkader. To me they had the best semi-pro baseball team in the state of Iowa. They asked me to come up there. They got me a job and I played center field for them and I traveled all over the state of Iowa. We beat Cascade consistently. Father Moran, the Morans were there, the Kurts, I mean the Sullivans. It was always an arch rival. When I came to Dyersville, I told them the Dyersville beats and I'm not going home again. I mean, not me but the Elkader team. Well we had Jack Kipner, we had Glen Ronn we had Soapy Sapp, just really a great great team. We traveled all over the state of Iowa and played.

Did you guys ever go, I know you mentioned Battle Creek, did you ever get to go to Battle Creek with them, or?

No, they didn't belong to a league at that particular time. We belonged to the AAVC and we went to Battle Creek I think four consecutive years. That was when we won the state tournament, then we won the regional and we'd go to Battle Creek. So all of a sudden Waterloo said, the Merchants over there said, you've got too easy a league that's where you should go every year, so I said, Well we'll do this. We'll play in your league also. So we went both leagues and we took all our three extra ball players and went out of their league instead of out of Maquoketa Valley and then they got mad because nobody from that area went to the tournament. A lot of rivalry. We had some good ball players from Waterloo too.

Anybody big that you played in Battle Creek? Or maybe in the regionals in South Dakota?
Yeah. We'd go to South Dakota, Milbank, and we had a great time up there. We had Eddie Watt who pitched for. We had Jim McAndrews. We had Faulkers. We had some really good pitchers I mean basically come in and pitch for us. And, they all played majors. I can remember going up to Minneapolis one time, one of our pitchers pitched for one team and one pitched for the other. We had a good time at those games you know.

Are there any teams over the years, I'll tell you from interviewing some of the other guys from other towns I know Dyersville is always mentioned as being kind of a dynasty through different time periods. Any teams of your own or any other teams you remember as being especially good? You mentioned Elkader actually but any really strong teams that were for a four or five, ten year period of time?

Well, Elkader had a semi-pro team and basically they would get you a job and then they'd also pay you so much a game and you played under the VFW up there. And they played throughout the entire region. But they had a lot of pretty good teams, like semi-pro out of Cedar Rapids, like Monticello had good one. Cascade always had good baseball down there. Farley had good teams. They had the Dubuque Merchants too, some of those boys I mean played quite a few games. And we had a Hoerner that played. Maybe three Horners. One played for St. Louis, another would be Bob he was an outfielder for the pros. I can't remember the dates or anything else like that. I don't if you remember Joe Horner or not, you can see Joe right up here. (Points to a picture.) Over in the corner the second one over, he's leaning over. And after he left the Field of Dreams out here he went home and had a boating accident and got killed. But he was pitching relief for St. Louis. There was a Nora too that was a really good ball player. I remember that he pitched for Bankston in a Worthington tournament. Last game he pitched around here and everybody was saying how great he was going to be... he threw the ball about ninety miles an hour. And we left him with an 8-1 victory over him. And you never know. This hitting is not accidental too, if you hit line drives you're going to get hits eventually. I can hit bloopers over first base just as easily as I can hit line drives.

What separated Dyersville or Elkader some of the really good teams you've been attached to from others. I mean was it pitching, was it hitting, was it fielding, was it coaching?

Oh, I think it was the desire. I mean you get together to play. We had some good ball players you know. We were real fortunate too. The Digmann boys played for Worthington then they decided something, they didn't like the organization, the way it was being run, so they came up here to play. A real good third baseman and a good catcher, an excellent catcher. With Eddie Watt up here who threw the ball at ninety-five miles an hour and Dale Digmann didn't get here before the game, a semi-final game, until the third inning, our catcher had ten past balls already by that time. It's different. You had to get your key ball players in key positions in order to go

ahead and win, I think. And, we all got along, you know. We had twelve guys and they were there every game.

How did you get your twelve guys? Did you have tryouts? Was it the same guys year after year? Did you – how did you get your players?

Well, just put a note in the paper. I think I had the same guys for ten years so. Every once...we tried to get one or two high school ball players to come in and help out, and educate them and go from there.

Right. Because you're going to lose a couple probably.

I can remember I got bawled out for that a few times. Dale Digmann, due to the fact, he was on second base and we needed a run to win the game so they put a high school kid in to pinch-hit, I mean pinch-run and he got picked off. Dale really told me about that.

Did you ever have any compensation for players? We talked about semi-pro as a term. Did your players get paid? I know sometimes pitchers for tournaments like you said would get flown in or brought in. How did that all work out on a general level?

Well a lot of teams, went up to Wisconsin got different ball players. We had ball players on ours who were supposed to pitch and they got paid and wouldn't show up because they'd go to Wisconsin semi-pro deal. We paid. Some of those pitchers would pitch the night before and wouldn't tell you. And basically, as far as I'm concerned I wouldn't pay them. We'd pay mileage and that was basically it. I wouldn't even pay them mileage if I found out after they came that they pitched the night before.

But you didn't really -- just pitching, usually, is that all?

That was all, yeah. We had Jack Dittmer come down here a year after he was cut by the Braves. The Milwaukee was the Braves at that time.

So how did you get him?

He hit pretty well. He's the only guy I know that could hit the ball to the fence and still get to first base. I don't think he washed his uniform the whole year because he never slid. But, he was a great ball player. We had Buzz Beatty who was a shortstop. He said he was better than any major league ball player that Dittmer ever played with. But he had bad knees. In fact, we'd have won the national tournament if Buzz could have got to first base. He hit one off the fence. We had men on second and third and two outs. He makes the turn to run past...His knees went out. He couldn't crawl to first base. If he'd had gotten to first base we'd have won the national tournament. So, you know, there are little different things. Beatty was really good, really a good shortstop.

What year would that have been? I think you said you went four years and I think Dale had said it was in the early '60s but I don't remember.

Yeah, I think about '64. Yeah. I've got a big trophy back there to show you.

That would be great. What changes do you remember in the fields? You mentioned the grass infield when you were playing in the Delaware League. Any other big changes over the years? You mentioned lights – when did Dyersville get their lights?

We were one of the first ones to get their lights you know. Not only that but then we had to put in a grass infield. I think I dragged it in after fifteen years I mean without grass and then all of a

sudden we needed grass in order to get state tournament or high school tournament games and not only that but it was starting around here. I think Cascade probably went a few years ahead of us and then we got grass. That was it. And, you had to keep up with all that baseball stuff.

Do you remember when you got lights or grass? Roughly?

No I don't.

Actually you mentioned tournaments. I'm going to back track a little. When did Dyersville start their tournament? Do you remember?

I don't remember.

But Dyersville is one of the bigger ones, right? Like sixteen teams usually, you mentioned the queen and the car. Dyersville tended to be one of the bigger tournaments.

At times we'd have between 6,000 and 8,000 people there. For a game. Not for the whole series. And if you walked through the crowd, you had to watch yourself that you didn't sprain an ankle over a beer can. I shouldn't say it that way.

What kind of... In Dyersville, where does the team get their financial backing? Who pays for the ump's, the players when you hire a pitcher, the field. Where does all that come from?

It's self-supported. I mean, from the gate. And actually the Commercial Club is the one who sponsors the team. I don't remember asking them for any money what so ever really, truthfully.

Who takes care of the field? Is that the manager or does the Commercial Club take care of that?

Well, I took care of it for fifteen years before the grass, and then after the grass – I took care of it for quite a few years too, but it was tough on me. When you didn't have grass and then all of a sudden it'd rain and you'd have to get a gas truck out there, pour gas all over it and then light it and you were lucky if you still had your eye lashes. But that was different. And everybody seemed to help you know.

I've never heard of them burning off the field before. I coached softball for years. We just used a broom I never thought to use gas.

We'd put gas on there and burn it off and away we'd go.

What kind of support did the city offer? Is the Commercial Club part of the city or is that kind of a separate entity? I'm not sure how that all works.

It's a separate entity. The Commercial Club runs the park, the 4th of July. We used to have up in the park also Thousand Dollar Days. I mean where they'd have high trapeze acts and everything else. And the reason for that is between the Wisconsin State Fair and Iowa, they'd stop here and perform for two nights.

I just got to thinking with the 6,000 to 8,000 fans at the finals whatever, were those mostly Dyersville people or just the two teams that were in it, or did everybody come out?

Worthington come up even if its Holy Cross vs, Rickardsville?

There was a lot of rivalry. They'd come up to see their rivals play each other you know. Cascade was one of our biggest rivals. And so if we had a Cascade game. It's the same thing now with Beckman. Beckman/Cascade, they'll draw 2,000 people up here for a high school game. You

don't see that many other places. But, the crowds were there. People would reserve, not reserve, they'd be up there at 1:00 for a 7:00 game. Putting their blanket someplace on the stands so they'd get a seat. Not only that, we had bleachers all the way down the first and third base line. We don't do that anymore. It's just – TV took over.

I was just going to ask you what kind of crowds they get now.

Not bad now. Maybe 1,500 at the most. We get more in high school than they do in semi-pro.

Why do you think that is?

Well, I think it is because the high school kids I mean they've got their mothers, their dads, their brothers and sisters, all their relation coming. Where you get out there and the town team, I don't think they follow them that close, that's all. Not only that, but you lost some kids because the kids would rather do something else than sit up there and watch dad play, you know.

Right. Do teams, you mentioned the Commercial Club, do teams that you know, do they have their own fields, do they share with local schools? I don't even know, does Dyersville high school use the same field? How does that all work with the fields?

Yeah, Dyersville, the Blazers or Beckman High School, have their own field. And, I would say probably a hundred games are played there, no lights. But I mean, that's Babe Ruth, Legion, various different things like that. And some of the Babe Ruth games are played up at the park, but Beckman and the town teams play up there. And then we've got an over 35 league or something like that, I'm not sure. And then the Legion plays up to the park also. So, there's a lot of games up there.

Yeah. Actually we kind of already covered that so I'll just move past that question. What problems do you remember that the league has had to overcome? Obviously it changed from the Maquoketa Valley League into the Eastern Iowa League which I don't know if that was just a name thing. But do you remember any time the league was kind of in danger of failing, or having problems?

Not really. I know they changed differently, Monticello, Cascade, Dyersville, and some of the smaller towns like New Vienna and Petersburg, they don't have teams now. It's a little different. Although there are a lot of little towns now like Luxemburg, Bankston I heard even got a team now. And Petersburg, Luxemburg, they are starting out again.

Are there certain people, in your opinion, that have been responsible for keeping the league alive? Or do you think the league just, especially lately we obviously see some lack of, less interest, I don't want to say lack of interest.

Really I haven't had anything to do with the town team for quite a few years. But, I'd say like Paul Scherrman. He's instrumental over at Farley keeping the league together. I was instrumental in the Maquoketa Valley League at a certain period of time and it was in existence when I quit, but it kept on good and it had some real good guys at Cascade were into it all around. Concerning the sponsorship of the leagues. But there was an Eastern Iowa League and then there was a Maquoketa Valley League. And then we've got the Delaware County League and whatnot. So.

Do you remember how long the Delaware County League existed? I'm having trouble finding stuff on that. I know it...

I think it started about 1924. And then it just kept going on and on and then all of a sudden boom. Manchester, Ryan, Delhi, all those things. Delhi was a little different. I played for Delhi too, and as far as their concerned, they had field out, and then it dropped down and then there's a fence there. So, what you do is you get out there early, and you put a ball next to one of the poles and when it went over the hill, you ran right to that pole to pick the ball up. Instead of running after the regular ball.

What if the other team's outfielder grabbed it first?

I don't know, it didn't happen.

What memories do you have of the league or specific games you played? We've talked about a couple. But, any big memories, favorite game? Favorite people? Anything.

Well, I just enjoyed the game. That was the basically it, you know. And we had a lot of good ball players like Faulkers, McAndrews, Eddie Watt. They all played for us and those are good memories. Especially when you go to major leagues and you see them playing there.

Did you get free tickets to any of the games?

No.

What's the use of having connections? This next question is kind of the whole point of my paper. What I'm trying to figure out is. In your opinion, why and how has this league and the teams in the area, Dyersville, Monticello, Cascade, Worthington, etc. been able to hang on when other towns have lost it, when it's faded out in places like Holy Cross or Elkader or whatever. How has this town ball semi-pro ball hung on here?

Because of rivalry and because of home town talent, I think. I think some of those smaller towns, if they wouldn't have gone to Dubuque. Like Holy Cross, and got eight ball players on from Dubuque and one from Holy Cross. They lost their existence. You know it's a money game. You've got to go ahead and make money to buy the equipment, the balls, and lights cost you money too, you know. It used to be, like say in the Delaware County League, I mean everything was Sunday afternoon. So you could play Sunday afternoon and then come back to Dyersville and play Sunday night, which we always did.

Be hard on the pitchers.

I never pitched.

And my last question is: What is your hope or wish for the future of the league?

Which league are you talking about?

I was thinking of the Eastern Iowa.

Okay. Oh, I think it will exist. You know there are small towns like Placid, and Pleasant Grove, some of those, I mean, they are in, they are out. There's always somebody to be picked up one way or the other. And I think like in Maquoketa Valley, like Cascade, Monticello. And they can go from the Maquoketa Valley to some other league. Maquoketa Valley usually plays night games and the Prairie League or the Eastern Iowa League are afternoon games. You can play both.

Great. Any last things you want to share? Anything. You know this is Dyersville. This is kind of the mecca, Field of Dreams home and everything. Anything that you can think will help me try to figure out what I want to do in this?

Well, you know the park is beautiful. We're ranked number two in the state for high school. And it's enjoyable to go up there. And when we get teams from Des Moines that come in, high school teams, they just marvel at how good it is, how nice it is. Of course, in addition to that then they get to go to the Field of Dreams, you know. Before the game, after the game. But I think it will stay alive. As long as we keep playing a lot of local talent so we get the local towns, parents, and relation, and friends.

To keep the kids interested.

Yeah. It used to be that I could go up there and I could see the whole top row. I could tell you everybody from the behind, who it was because they were there for every game. It's a little different now. Television has taken away from it. It's pretty hard to fight TV when you sit at home and grab a Coke, pop popcorn and not get up and have to go up there.

We had TV in the sixties and seventies, how come it didn't fade earlier? As far as the interest? Obviously we still have teams, but...

I don't remember. I don't even remember night baseball. What I always tried to do when I was managing was, I always tried to get one or two high school kids every year to come out so. That they played the high school game so that they could play the town team later on. They didn't here. There were quite a few of our high school kids that went out and played for other teams. Right now we probably have four kids playing for Loras, I mean. From Dyersville. Rickardsville, about seven of them are from Dyersville, you know. But they're local kids, you know. And we have quite a few kids now from Dyersville, playing on the town team too. But the two Digmann boys were a big asset for us because we needed a catcher and a good third baseman. And, when they said, hey, we want to come up there and play because we want to play in tournament plays. I welcomed them. Both of them were excellent ball players.

Well, Dale didn't have anything but good things to say about you.

Is that right?

I laughed because he still called you Mr. Jenk.

Is that right?

At his age. For me as a younger person I just chuckled because I'm like, him calling anybody Mr. was quite respectful.

Well, we had good times, I mean after the games too. And not only that but the high school kids here were playing and hoping that they could eventually play for the White Hawks because that was another step up. Like playing pro ball. D, or whatever it is.

I was going to ask you too. Has Dyersville always been the White Hawks? Do you remember if way back when. I was thinking.

They used to have another team called the Flyers. Actually, the Flyers were more. They were in competition with the White Hawks. It started because some of those guys didn't make it to the White Hawks and they wanted to go ahead. I'll get in trouble for saying that.

No. That's OK. The reason I asked is because I was looking at an old *Express* article and they weren't called the White Hawks and I don't remember if they were called the Flyers or the Dutchmen, or something like that. And I was wondering if. But it might have been that group. They might have been the Flying Dutchmen or something.

Oh, they had another team and I don't remember name they called them. I don't even know if they had a nickname. They had a contest, What's the name the Dyersville baseball team should be.

Great. I can't think of anything else, unless you want to throw out more stories. I love hearing stories.

I'll tell you. I played in the service too and basically as far as its concerned, I thoroughly enjoyed coming back here. I always made sure my furlough time was tournament time.

What service and what...

I was in the Air Force. Bangor, Maine. Basically we had a team up there. Mostly college ball players. And we played in a class D ball league, so we traveled all over. It was fun to be in the service and not have to worry about it. So, we'd leave at 10:00 in the morning, for sixty miles away and at 8:00 game at night. So we had a good time.

What years was that?

Probably '50 to '55.

Kept you out of Korea then.

Yeah. It kept me out. I also played basketball. My biggest thrill being in the service was not being in the service and playing basketball in New York. In Madison Square Garden against the Knicks.

That'd be great.

It was. I still remember it like it was yesterday. Walking in there. In the locker room.

How did you guys end up playing the Knicks? Was it a charity game or something?

We had a pretty good base team, and so we were playing up and down the coast in New England, basketball wise and all of a sudden, like a plum game, you know. We had a good time.

**Personal interview with Sue Burger
By Todd Hospodarsky
Date: June 28, 2011**

And, what is or was your connection with the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League or any other names it might have been over the years that you've been involved?

Well I uh, when my daughter was five I started coaching, uh, girls softball and I've been involved on the, with the Athletic Association here ever since. And my daughter's twenty-nine and it's about time for me to be off I think.

What is that about twenty-five years almost? So the Athletic Association is what runs the...not just the semi-pro team but the...

The whole ballpark. The ballpark and all the teams.

Just out of curiosity, what other teams use it? Obviously you mentioned girls softball and the semi-pro team...

Little League

Little League

And Babe Ruth

How, ah...I kind of reorganized my questions to gear it towards a fan, um as opposed to the questions I was asking the former players...but, um you mentioned how many years you've been involved in the Association, but how many years have you been a fan of the Worthington team, um? When did you start that?

I think I've been...ever since my dad was involved in the...at that time they called it um...it wasn't the Athletic Association it was something like a park board. And my dad was on that board. And we only...we lived in a house just right up by the ballpark when I was a kid so anyway we would go to a ballgame every night. And we went since I remember...gosh since I was five years old.

Did he play at all or just...

No.

He was just on the board.

He was just on the board. And, ah, since I was five years old we went to a ball game. And when the ball tournament was, it was always...we were there all the time. We would go to every town that Worthington ever played in... we would always go...to the ball tournaments at least. Sometimes we would just watch them go play ball. And then my brothers played for the Worthington and then we would go to every game.

What years was that? Do you remember? Or rough, roughly?

It was in the seventies...eighties probably. Yeah in the eighties. Yeah.

How did you....well actually you kind of got into that a little if you want to elaborate any. The question is like how did you get involved in watching baseball which you mentioned you father and who influenced you? Was it just your dad? Was your mom involved too?

Oh, mom was too, yeah.

Everybody was into it?

Everybody went to the ballgames. That's , the whole family went to the ballgames.

Grandparents?

Yep. My grandma and grandpa, yep they even went. They even went to the ballgames. That was the only thing to do in Worthington. That was a big thing going to the ballgames. Yeah even when the...we still had the high school down here and they had the high school games up at the park you know. We'd always go and watch the high school team play.

You watched a lot of baseball.

Yeah, yeah I did.

What has attracted you to baseball in general and more specifically to Worthington...and maybe you kind of touched on that last one again. Um, you know how did you become a fan?

Oh, I guess I just...we always went and as kids I know, as kids a lot of times we just played. You know played up there but ah, you know we always, we always cheered for Worthington. You know it was just, I guess that was bred right in us.

What do you know about the formation and the running of the league? You've been in it around twenty-five years I think the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye was probably going then. I think they started in the seventies. Um, anything that you've noticed over the years as far as how it's run, teams that are in it that type of thing? That you remember watching?

About the same teams. I remember about the same teams have been in it. Except Holy Cross dropped. And now it's funny because there's a lot of teams you know, well New Vienna used to have a team. They don't have a team now. And there's a lot of teams that are just taking kids from maybe five kids from each town just to have a team. New Vienna didn't have a... Luxemburg had a team, they don't have a team but it's...it's practically the same...you know the same teams since I...

Since you can remember?

Yeah.

Any players or coaches that stick out in your mind? Obviously I'm sure Worthington people do...you can mention Worthington people or other towns.

Yeah. Well my brother Joel. He was a very good player.

Was he?

Yeah. And ah...

What position did he play?

He caught for Worthington for years and years and years. And then he played for Dyersville too. And then um, well Tom Jenk, um Dale Digmann, he was always a good player. Um from Worthington, Leroy Gassmann, I remember him and oh there was a lot of players from Worthington that were really you know good players.

Any other teams? Any Cascade or ah, Rickerdsville or anybody?

Well Lenny, he had ah...Lenny Tekkipe and ah...Dyersville would be...Freddy Martin. Freddy played for Worthington a lot. And ah, um, the Trum boys. They were always good ball players. Let's see who else...Cascade, who from Cascade... that used to play. Pat Weber I mean...you know. I was trying to think back in the old...I can't remember any...

That's alright. That's alright. Um...are there any teams over the years that you remember being especially good?

Dyersville

Dyersville.

Was always good. Farley. Oh I know another player would be, ah, Paul Scherrman. He was always good. Farley was always good. Um, Cascade's good. Worthington was good. They won a lot of games, a lot of tournaments.

Who's good this year? I haven't seen a game yet this year.

Cascade.

Cascade's good again this year?

Yeah their good.

What do you think separated those good teams...Worthing...Let's take Worthington for example when they were good, from the others? What made them good those years?

They had good players. You know, oh, they had players that could hit and they had good fielding players and you know they had good players...A lot of them had a lot of college kids you know that were from college that came back. Now those kids don't come back here anymore. And ah, they played on the team. That's when they were good was when they had the college...

Where do you think the college kids go now if they're not coming back? Where are they at?

I don't know. I, I honest to God I don't know where they're at. You know if they just quit playing ball? But uh, yeah I don't know if they just quit or...but you know they all get jobs away and they can't you know for them to travel back to Worthington every day. It used to be the kids came home and stayed with their folks. And then, and then played ball. Yeah but now they don't do that.

Right. They get internships or whatever.

They get apartments and live up there. Live where their at and they don't come back.

What kind of changes do you remember over the years? Either in fields or maybe crowd attendance or just how things are run or anything. changes You know how has it changed from when you started or from when you were a little girl to now?

Well first thing, field is some of them have grass infields. We don't because we have little league and girls that play up there so we can't. We can't have a grass infield. Another thing is crowds. We used to...all of those tournament games would just be packed. We would just be packed. We talked about that just the other night how...we were at the ballgame there was hardly nobody there. And said this is sad. You know it used to be they'd have to keep telling the people "please move away. Please move down away from the foul line." Because there'd be chairs, lawn chairs all the way out there because there was no place to sit down.

So how many people do you think were at a game?

Oh, I bet there would be times here, up here there'd be a thousand people on a finals night. Finals night or semi-finals night there'd be at least a thousand people.

What would you get now on a finals night?

Hmph, couple hundred. Yeah. And I can remember up at Dyersville especially Queen's night, Mom would take us up at four o'clock in the afternoon to sit down to reserve a seat. You know at four o'clock we'd sit there all day.

What would you do to keep yourself busy?

Ha! I don't know. And you know to reserve a seat so we'd have a seat at queen's night and I bet up there, there'd five thousand people. Because you know...yeah...maybe I thought there was, but...

Which night was queen's night? I can't...I've looked...

It always was a semi-finals.

Semi-finals.

And they changed it to the last night of the quarter finals. Now they have it on the first Sunday night I think.

Oh really?

Yeah.

I've never been to a Dyersville Tournament, I've read about it in the...in the Commercial...

Yeah it was always on the semi-final night. And then on the final night they always gave a car away. And that was really packed when they'd give a car away.

I don't know how you give a car away, but...

I don't either, heh, heh.

Um, what, where do teams in the league get their financial backing? If you know, if you can talk about Worthington or whatever, um...

We get ours from uh the money that we make off the lunch stand. And our players, our players pay \$20 fee.

Ok, each player pays a \$20 fee? And, and little kids too? Cause that would...

Well not the little bity...the pee wees um they don't pay. only for the reason that we don't have enough nights available for them to practice on the diamond. So they practice up at ah, down at the school. So anyway they don't have to pay the fee. But the other teams do.

So that all goes...the lunch stand goes from little league and Babe Ruth, that all goes together and then...

Yeah every night...every time there's a game whoever's team's got to supply workers for that night. And then on the tournaments, each team has to take a night at the tournament...to work.

Ok. So it works out pretty well? Then um, like let's say that the Worthington team needs uniforms or a new bat do they go to the board then and ask for the money for that?

Yep.

And How many people sit on the board? Or how's that work?

Each...the coaches...the coach of each team and then myself and Gary Langel is on there. Don't know why I'm on there yet. Heh, heh.

Uh, let's see, how much crowd support, well we talked a little bit about crowds but we can talk a bit more about it. How much crowd support do teams receive? And has there been better times historically than others? Um, and maybe, maybe we didn't talk about that, why do you think that it's less?

I don't know. We had a game the other night down here and ah, I...I had something...what was I at? Oh I had a church meeting and I emailed Wayne and said I'll be there...the meeting starts at 6:30 and it last just one hour, one hour. It's over at 7:30. So I said I'll be there as soon as I can to open the lunch stand and uh, Gary Langel said there was no fans and no lunch stand for the first time in the history of base...of Worthington baseball. That he remembers that.

What, now did that continue for the whole game or just the start?

He started emailing...he started texting all guys who are usually at the game. He says I'm up at the ballpark and there is no Worthington fans and no lunch stand. So then they started to come out little-by-little.

But what if he hadn't? I mean...

Probably not. But that's like our league games. That crowd has gone down to zero, but I will tell you why...there's no Worthington kids playing for us. So it used to be even last year when there was a Worthington kids that played um...

So there's not even one Worthington kid? They're all...?

Not one Worthington kid.

Where they all from then?

Oh, Manchester, Dubuque, there's some come from Cedar Rapids.

How'd Wayne get them all?

Well the kid from Manchester knew a lot of, a lot of players and he just gets them. Wayne's son plays and he knows some players and they have hung out.

Yeah that's sad that...

It's sad because then, it used to be when there were Worthington kids playing and the parents would come. But you know there's none that...

Well I've been to a couple of Monti Cubs games the last couple years. I didn't go...I moved to Monticello about sixteen years ago and I really wasn't familiar with the whole semi-pro league so of course I didn't, you know grow up with it or anything. You know it's a half a dozen or so It's all girlfriends and parents.

That night there wasn't even any girlfriends.

That's a bad sign.

Yeah. Yeah. The crowds have just gone down. I don't know...

Now has there been a trend. Since you've been in it for 25 years has that steadily gone down or has it gone down and then come back up or you know...?

Just steadily gone down.

Steadily gone down a little bit?

Yeah just steadily gone down. That actually ah, Thursday night, last Thursday night they did have a pretty good crowd for the Worthington game. But the other crowds have not been good.

Huh, do teams, league games or the tournament, do away teams bring any crowd at all? I mean obviously they didn't the other night but...

Cascade brought a pretty good crowd the other night. Cascade you know, you know about who you want to stay in the tournament. Cascade and Dyersville um, Rickardsville you know they'll bring people um Farley doesn't bring very big crowd anymore. But I think that's the same thing. There isn't any Farley kids playing on the team hardly. Um, yeah. There's not a lot of...

What teams do you think are still kind of the town team where they have mostly town kids? And how, and which teams are more of the outsiders, the college kids or whatever?

Well, Cascade, they're, they're a hometown team and you can tell that by the crowd. They had a, they had a nice crowd. Um, Dyersville they'll have a lot of Dyersville kids on it. And um, Monticello do they have a lot of kids on their team? They had some, but they had...

They have some. And the out of towners are like you said friends of you know somebody in town.

Rickardsville, they still have a lot of...

Rickardsville kids?

Well I don't know if they are so much Rickardsville kids or kids that...people that play from a long time.

Right, Right. Because don't they come out of Dubuque kind of because they're so close?

Yeah. Because Rickardsville...

I don't know does Rickardsville even have seventy people in the town? I don't even know.

I don't know. Probably not. Yeah you know there were kids that played with them a long time. So they draw a pretty good crowd.

What memories do you have of the league or specific games played that you've seen?

Because you've seen a lot of games. You know what are some memories?

Well the one that I have is when we um celebrated uh fifty years of baseball and we had this big, you know celebration. Every night we had something different. Every night we had somebody else sing the star spangled banner different. And then on the semi-final night we had the queens, we had all the old queens from Worthington come down and we had convertibles for them all and paraded them around the diamond and...

How many did you have then because that would have been, I mean you could have a lot...?
 Well we had a lot of them, yeah we had a lot of them. Oh I bet we had twenty of them. Yeah. We paraded them around the diamond like they do up at Dyersville. They all got out at home plate and we introduced them, you know what year they...what year they were...but then the night that sticks out was um, oh I can't even think of that pitcher. You're going to have to ask Lang who that was now. He used to pitch for the Cubs...um

The Monti Cubs?

No, the Chicago Cubs.

Oh the Chicago Cubs. Really.

Oh, what did they...they called him "Wild Thing". What the heck was his name?
 Wild...anyway he was a friend...he was a friend of Paul Scherrman. And he told Lang that he was going to come be around here at that time and Paul was going to try to get him to pitch for Farley. And they were going to play Rickardsville that night in the tournament. And you know we didn't think that was ever going to...that was never going to happen. And here Paul called Lang and said yeah he's going to pitch for us. It was on a Sunday night. He's going to pitch for us at your tournament. So all...we are like...everybody said if it rains...if it's a rainout he can't so he had to...that night we got...we went up to Dyersville because it looked like it was going to pour that night. We went up to Dyers... up to Theisens and we got these like plastic...plastic things and we rolled them out over the diamond because it looked...about five o'clock it looked like it was going to pour down rain. And they announced it on TV...on the...on the radio station that he was going to play. And anyway we...he rolled...we rolled it on the diamond and it rained but it saved the diamond we got enough and we got...

And he pitched?

And he pitched. There was people...we could not believe it...the cars were all the way back...back by there. I bet...that night there were probably 1500 people there to watch him pitch. And he...he hit the first batter...by God...and Lenny was mad because he didn't think it was fair that they allowed, allowed him to pitch in the tournament you know against their team. Ended up Rickardsville beat...beat him. The first batter after he hit...he hadn't pitched for years and years and years.

Well you know the thing is though I mean for the tournaments and you know this I mean people hire pitchers frequently when you get...so it's not like it's a new thing. But I suppose they hadn't hired a Chicago Cubs. I'm trying to think...actually I'm still trying to think who it is. I can almost...

Wild...They called him Wild Thing. What the heck was his name anyway? Lang will know. Gary Langel will know.

And that was the fifty...was that fifty-nine or ninety-nine? Was it...Did it...?

Well we're at sixty-three right now.

Okay. I'm trying to remember. I was thinking...as I recall and I don't remember the dates for sure. I was thinking that Cascade's was around forty-eight and Worthington was like the very next year or something. And then Dyersville was a couple years after that when they started if I remember right.

Yeah.

I think... If I remember it was like Cascade was forty-eight and Worthington was forty-nine and then I think Dyersville was fifty-one was when they started their big one. So...Dick had given me the fifty...the commemorative...the Cascade Pioneer had the commemorative...that was really neat.

Yeah. And then yeah...Another thing I remember about it. We had that old...that dirt diamond and it would pour down rain so we would...well we can't do it anymore but they used to take gas truck out there...

That's what...who told me about that? I've never heard of that before.

You'd think you'd have then as soon as we'd see the gas truck would go by all the kids would go...there'd be all the kids. They'd light that thing on fire to dry that diamond out.

I think it was Tom Jenk Sr. who told me that. I have never heard of that before. That would be...

There...There'd be kids. There...as soon as they'd see the gas truck. "Oh their going to go burn the diamond. Let's go hurry up, let's go." you know. Burn it off with gas. You know gas was ten cents a gallon way back then you know and then they'd light that thing on fire. And then...another thing was we had that old dirt diamond and it would be just mud and everybody would go all... my brothers and all them would go up and you know try to work that diamond up so they could play. I know there was one game against Dyersville had the Babe Ruth... I don't know if it was the Iowa Babe Ruth tournament or some kind of Babe Ruth tournament and they asked if they could use this diamond down here to play some games and it rained. And there were a bunch of people from Virginia...there Virginia that were supposed to play. They came down to see that diamond and it was just mud ...mud and they had these tractors out there and they were getting stuck and just spinning in mud. And this guy from Virginia was just like "we'll never play on this diamond today". And my brother he said "oh, yeah. We'll have it ready by the time it is time for you to play." And they'd just keep going around and around and around. And they were ready by time that game was supposed to... That guy from Virginia said "I can't believe this."

Well if you stubborn enough.

Yeah. They would do that all the time. They'd go...everybody go and They'd dip water out to Get that diamond ready. They won't do that now. Now they don't do that. They bought a tarp.

Oh, that makes a lot more sense. Um, Let's see...this, this next question is kind of the whole reason I'm doing my research on this is in your opinion you know if you go back a hundred years every town had a team. Even if you go back fifty or sixty years almost every town around here had a team. Why do you think that this league, the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League and even the Prairie League um and the teams around here have been able to keep viable when town baseball teams have failed pretty much everywhere else? I mean there really isn't a league like this...

I just think that they're so stubborn and it's like we're not going to let it die. You know if that'd dies, you're going to have all these ballparks sitting there with weeds going on them with nobody taking care of it. And I just think the people are so stubborn that it's not going to die. We'll keep it going. If we have to have players come in from out of town...I know they talked about that the other day. They said you know if it gets down to that they'll be combining maybe combining teams just to keep it going.

I know there's been a little talk about combining the Eastern Iowa and Prairie League but...the Eastern Iowa people don't really want to do that because they think their better you know...the teams are better. I don't know because I haven't seen... I don't think I've seen a Prairie team yet. I know Zwingle was playing Worthington when I stopped by the other night but I didn't watch. Um...

Yeah...but um...yeah I just think that people are so stubborn they're not going to let it die. They're not going to let the ballparks sit there with nothing going on.

It just fascinates me. And that's why I chose this to be my research because really truly you know, I grew up in Southeastern Iowa and there wasn't...as a kid there was no teams. There was slow pitch softball was the really the only thing going on. So it fascinated me when I got here and you know look around and Wisconsin used to have a really strong back in the fifties and sixties. When it was strong here it was strong there but it died pretty quickly and...

We used to get some pitchers out of those towns to come pitch for us.

And Minnesota used to have a pretty strong...they still do but I think it's mostly um...like college. It's more like collegiate league um kind of like the one down by Norway. They have four teams down there I know there was an article in the Gazette the other day. Um, My last question unless we come up with something to chat about...is what is your hope or wish for the future of the league?

Oh, well I hope it keeps going. My wish...I hope it you know I hope it keeps going and I just wish more people would...I mean on a Sunday night when there's a ball game what else is there to do but go up and watch the ball game. I just wish more people would go.

What do you think people do with their time instead of going to ball games?

Sit in the house and watch TV. Play on the computer and that's just like kids you know...we...that's all we ever did was play ball. We played ball. We had up there we had a lot that we just went...the bases were... just you know drawn out from running on it and that was all we ever did was play ball and...I know um...a kid that used to live up there he umpired the little league tournament and he hadn't umpired for years you know and he was a good umpire and a good ball player. Well it's Tom Engler out here...he'd be one to interview...yeah...but anyway he ah, umpired the little league tournament here. He came in my office one day and he says "oh my" and I go what's the matter. And he said I umpired that little league tournament and he said man-o-man-o-man he said kids walk out...walk out to their bases, they stand out there, they put their hat...their glove on their head. There they stand he said. We used to have to run to our bases. We'd have to throw the ball around out there before it was time to play and he said, I said to Hank Lucas, one time what do you think old Louie Rudden and Bobby Rolling would have said if we would have did that? And Hank Lucas said we would have got our asses chewed if we would have done something like that. But that , yeah the kids they don't ...They go out...here's what they do...they pick their glove up they go out and play ball they throw it in the corner and they don't pick up until they...til it's the next game. They do not play ball. We played all the time. That is all we used to do is play ball.

But there wasn't as much opportunity to do anything.

No I know. We didn't have a computer like we had a TV.

Yeah and on the TV you had the three stations. There probably wasn't anything on to watch. You know soap operas. Yeah I was the same way. I was just talking with a ...I coach little league and I was talking with another coach...he was talking about how bad the talent is. And we were talking about you have have four kids and then six kids...

Yeah and you can tell the kids that want to play ball.

And the ones who have.

And the ones that are there because their mom and dad wants them to do it. One day...one day when I was coaching I had a little girl...she just was not paying attention. She was out in right field and she'd just stand there and she was looking around. And I was scared to death she was going to get hit by the ball. That was my biggest fear. She was looking around and she was looking in the crowd and all over. Finally she came in and I said you have to pay attention I said you can't ...you know a ball went over her head and I said you can't just be standing out there looking...and I said when a ball comes to you at least make an attempt to get the ball. And she goes well I don't want to be here anyway, my mom's making me. Ok.

And I...I don't know. I coach T-Ball for my other son about two years and it, it's there and I mean you can see it in T-Ball. Four kids and six kids and you really wonder is it even worse sending those six kids out. You know I suppose a couple of them want to be there but there was no one to play catch or whatever. But um...

Well that's another thing you know we had five kids in our family so we had five kids to play now they have two or two maybe or three.

It must be a nice lunch stand. I didn't look at it that closely...

It needs work. I got my list already for next year. A new walk in cooler.

Well if you're going to retire you can't make a list. They're going to want you around if... Need another freezer. That's on my list. We got one freezer but it's not enough. We got to have two freezers because you keep things you know in the freezer and when you run out then the truck only comes once a week. So I got a whole list of things.

How does that work, I'm just curious, I just was thinking kind of out loud here in my head, um I play slow pitch in Anamosa. We used ... Monticello's league kind of fell apart. They lost their diamond and things. And with the Anamosa thing it is on a city field...

And this is a city field.

And they...they won't let us have alcohol on it. So I was just wondering...

Oh no we got our own license.

You've got your own alcohol license?

Yeah we pay the dram shop. And we pay the...yeah. We got our own license and we pay the dram shop. And ah, we pay the insurance on the buildings and we pay the insurance on the lights. We pay all that.

Let me just run down my questions because that was one that I had when I asked you know for former players and coaches. See if there is any other ones that I might have missed real quick. I tried to take out the ones that were more towards players. Other than that...

We used to have...I used to play softball. We had a softball league.

You had a softball league? Really? Who...was it very similar to ... as far as structure as the semi-pro?

Yeah, yeah. We had teams from all over.

That sounds really interesting. When was that?

Oh, that's been twenty years ago. Yeah.

Really, it was fast pitch kind of similar to...

Yeah fast pitch. It was like Worthington and Dyersville had a team, Cascade had two teams. Um, Key West had a team, Placid had a team, um, Epworth, Farley, yeah we had two ... We played a north and a south.

So what position did you play?

Second Base.

Second Base. What ah...

I usually played second base or center field.

What ah...you said it was fast pitch kind like high school? What age did you get for ...were most of the kids right out of high school?

No, we could drink beer.

That sounds like fun.

Oh we had fun. We had more fun.

Now how did that fall apart?

People got married and moved away. Yeah, yeah we had fun.

It sounds like a lot of fun.

We went down to Key West one night it was really funny. Key West had nuns on their team. And nobody could beat Key West and everybody said it was because they had these nuns on their team. And anyway we went down there one night and we beat them one to nothing. And we all . But ah, we all...But that was fun. We always had fun at those. And the men's team. There was a men's league too.

What's the prize for first place this year?

\$400

\$400. Does that come out of the association fund?

It comes out of the association.

Has the tournament ever not made money?

No.

Personal interview with Art Huinker**By Todd Hospodarsky****Date: June 29, 2011**

What is or has been your connection with semi-pro baseball, the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League, the Prairie League, or whatever it was?

Well I suppose I have got to start by saying I played with my home town of Festina, Iowa for ... while I was in high school. In fact, when I was a sophomore in high school I started playing for them. And that was the same type of set up, it was semi-pro. The team had my two brothers and I had six first cousins on it. But from there then college, well, high school then college. And then one year while I was in college I played for the town of Dyersville. And then came back four years later, five years later, and I took a teaching/coaching job at Dyersville.

Can you give me a time frame, what years would those have been?

OK, I played 1956 was the first summer that I played for Dyersville and my wife and I were living in Dubuque at the time. I was still a student. And then, pro ball, was between '56 and '61 when I went down to Dyersville to teach. And then played with them from '61 to '68 for them.

**Now pro ball was that, I think someone said the Yankees organization?
Cardinals.**

Cardinals, OK.

Cardinals, my favorite team, even before I signed with them.

Well that's great.

I've been kind of hung up on that.

I guess maybe tell a little bit about that. I've only heard little bits that you've been in the pros.

I only played for one year, for a couple of months. I had already signed a teaching contract so I asked permission to be able to fulfill that. Well then the next spring, well January, when I got the contract for the coming year, it was \$400 a month and I was married with a little boy and there was no way I was going to be able to make enough money and I asked if there would be some way in which I could get more and they said no and I just simply didn't go back. I made a decision that family and my wife was more important.

I bet that was a tough decision.

It was. I think about it a lot. I played with the Cardinals and won 6 and lost 1 and I had a 1.2 ERA. In fact, I was just thinking about this yesterday when I was doing some work on my book. That every game I pitched was a complete game, except for one where I was lifted for a pinch hitter in a nothing/nothing ball game in the top of the ninth inning. And we wanted a relief pitcher.

You don't see that much anymore – the complete games.

No. I don't know if it was my arm or just didn't take care of it, but I pitched 15 innings one day in a game in Milwaukee County stadium. I pitched three innings one night in Dubuque, got rained out, and came back and pitched eleven innings the next night.

What years were you involved in, well you actually kind of covered that, actually I can skip that one. How did you become involved in baseball in general, who influenced you, who got you started?

I can answer that very easily after what I have been doing. My first chapter is all why baseball was so important to Huinker family. And, because my brother Kenny played pro ball too. And then he played center field for Festina for twenty-five years I think. But, my dad had played baseball. And I never got to see him play because I was the youngest in the family. But, living where we did, on the farm, no TV. I never saw a football game until my junior year in high school. I never saw a basketball game until my sophomore year in high school, and that was a girls' game, my first cousin was playing. So, there was baseball. And as I look at the different situations, everything was baseball. There was never any question about my dad's sport. First of all, when I was about thirteen we had a local lumber company that had a new manager come in from a different town and they had legion ball where he had come from and he thought they should. Apparently he had heard the Huinker name though talking about legion ball, who should I get and stuff. He came up to the farm and it was the easiest sell he ever had. No problem. My dad said, yeah, he'd love to have him play baseball. So I started playing Legion ball at thirteen. And then in baseball, my two brothers were playing for Festina already and of course I got to go to the games and I loved it and everything like that. Then all of a sudden New Hampton got baseball lights. I don't know what year it was, '50 maybe 1950, something like that. Maybe even '49. We milked religiously at 6:30 in the morning and 6:30 at night, as close as we could, and that's good for cows, and so all of a sudden Kenny and Lanny would have to leave around 5:30 to get to New Hampton for a ball game. Art, you and I were staying home to milk cows. That lasted two games. All of a sudden for some reason he decided it wasn't that significant if you milked them at 4:30 in the afternoon it was OK. That's the way he. If you think about it, he hardly ever interfered when we were playing ball. He supported it. I've heard stories about people sitting with him as a fan and how proud he was of his three sons playing baseball. Everybody.... Key player.

And, so obviously he probably played catch and taught you how to throw and hit, things like that? Or not so much at home?

No he didn't do a lot. Well, maybe he did, I bet he did with my older brothers. But I was the youngest, and by the time that I came along, they were playing ball so they were my coaches. Never, ever had a real formal baseball coaching. In high school, he was the football coach or the basketball coach. In college he was the basketball coach. He knew baseball, but he didn't know baseball as far as helping you -- how to hit better, or pitch better, or something like that. And the first time was in pro baseball I was twenty-two years old.

That's interesting. Was it hard to...? Did you just soak it up when you got that official formal training? Or was it kind of like well I...

No, I definitely was open to taking advantage of anything I could. I can remember when I was about seven or eight years old, just starting to learn how to read, a book by Stan Musial, on how to hit. I'd put that book on the sidewalk in front of me and I'd practice swinging his way until I learned how to do it. That type of thing.

What can you tell me about the formation and the running of the league? That you remember. You said you weren't a manager, so as a player what do you remember? Kind of how it ran?

The only things I can identify with is first of all the scheduling. The scheduling was very flexible. They probably set up a schedule; I don't even know that for sure how they did it. But then that schedule became very flexible from the standpoint that the home team could negotiate with the team that they wanted to play and they would have a night game, they would have it sometime during the week. We wanted to avoid the Worthington tournament, the Monticello tournament, the Dyersville tournament. And so we only played then. And so the schedule was really haphazard in terms of implementation. I'm not saying as far as scheduling because I don't know what all went on. But it was a very flexible situation. And of course the other thing that happened is that I didn't play a lot of the league games because I was coaching high school baseball. And so, if there was a conflict, I had to coach baseball. In fact, the last year, we had a very good baseball team, and I could feel it, sense it, and so all of a sudden I was sitting at 33-34 years old and I just backed up and said forget it. It got to the point where when we got to a tournament game, Cascade tournament, I didn't have much left to coach. There was something else more important.

How far did you make it then?

We won the state tournament.

Oh, good.

That was the last year that they didn't have any divisions, so you played Cedar Rapids Washington and Davenport schools and stuff like that.

Exciting, that awesome.

And we had a mini reunion. We've had two major ones since then, a twenty-five year and a forty year. And every year, whoever can make it, comes to the baseball town, we watch them play a big league baseball game. We went to Kansas City last year.

That's awesome. Maybe talk a little bit about what teams you've ever played against, you know, over the years, big memory games, plays, players.

Everybody. I remember playing Hopkinton, I remember playing Ryan, I remember Monticello that would be one of the first games I pitched for Dyersville back in '56 was at the Monticello tournament. All those teams. At that time, we only had...Monticello, Worthington, Cascade, and Dyersville, I think were the only...and Dubuque. Those were the only teams with lights, so those were the only tournaments. Holy Cross was next. Then, pretty soon everybody had them, so...I don't remember and specific League games, that we played, I can't think of any.

And once the tournaments kind of came, then those became the thing.

Yes, they really did. And at that time, Dyersville, in '56, we had four or five thousand people at some of our games at the Dyersville Tournament we must have had six thousand beer cans -- don't quote me on that.

Well, actually, Tom Jenk was talking about beer cans. He said you could twist an ankle. Beer cans would just be piled up.

Yeah. And the right field foul line was open and people would just keep moving closer and closer to the field. But as far as any Eastern Iowa League games I really can't think of anything specific. Let me think about that for a minute. We knew that we had to win it. Well, that wasn't true in '56. Dyersville and that whole league didn't go to the state tournament after that. About

'61, yeah '61. They worked. That league result became pretty important. '61, '62, '63 and there we won it all of those years because we went to Battle Creek.

Right. And you went with them? To Battle Creek?

Yes. School was let off. It was September and I happened to coach football too. That was a priority in that town.

That's the chance of a lifetime though to go off and do that. From your memory, who are some of key people in the running of the league that have been real leaders, maybe keep it going, or really making it a strong league, either then or as you got out of it? Anytime?

I know Tom Jenk was. He was one of the main leaders of... There was a guy from Balltown, Leon Cummer. That was very significant in it. - I can't think of his last name -- from Holy Cross. I think maybe Rudy. I don't know who was the manager of ...well, I don't know who the manager was at Cascade. Oh, Worthington was Chuck Ingram. He was very significant in that whole league keeping it going. And I don't think they really had much of a problem with keeping it going. I mean, I think the interest was there. And I think the high school baseball teams had a lot to do with keeping it going. They turned out a lot of good ball players. And even though a lot of them don't necessarily stay around here, you can just almost look through the lineups of these teams and see players that played for a few schools. Beckman, West Dubuque, and stuff like that.

Well, you hit on this a little bit. Are there any players or coaches that stick out in your mind? As a pitcher, who were you most afraid to see come up to the plate? Or was there anybody?

Oh, yeah. There was Popeye Hosch was a big ball player at that time for Cascade. In '61 Bud Kurt might have been playing yet. Cascade, he was a good hitter. Petersburg had Willie Mormon. It as a tough out. I'm not saying I didn't get him out, or he hit me well, but I remember he was a tough out. Cascade had Dick Schnier. He was a good ball player. Of course, Dale Digmann from Worthington played with us. I didn't have to pitch against him. Carl Heitz, Buzz Beatty, both from Guttenberg. Beatty is probably my pick for the best player that I played against. And, I played against a few of them in pro ball. Not Lou Brock but Kurt Flood. People like that. And I identify Buzz. He had played pro ball. He had all the tools as far as I'm concerned. He had speed. He would win the running of the bases contest in Dubuque. They had one every year as part of their tournament. He won it like three or four years in a row. He was a nice guy. But he got both his knees tore up. He was a shortstop. But, he could hit, he could run, had a shotgun for an arm. And then to top it off, we were playing an Eastern Iowa league game one night, we were ahead, I don't know what the score was, but it was lopsided, it was eighth inning. I struck out a guy on a 1-2 pitch and I don't know if I threw it outside, whether I want to throw it outside or inside I don't know. But I'm walking off the diamond and Buzz comes running up to me and said, "Boy, you sure fooled me. I played that you were going to do just the opposite of what you did." And, I thought, Holy Cow. If this guy is thinking that way in a lopsided game besides, he's got his head in the ballgame. That really impressed me so much. Buzz ended up coaching at West Delaware then high school baseball. And we would compete back and forth in the coaching battles. One year he had no pitcher but he had a hell of a softball pitcher on their team. And he started him against us, pitching under hand. Of course, once the first guy got on, he was on third. There was nothing he could do to hold him on. I think he pitched three or four innings, but pretty soon it was all over.

That's too funny though.

From sixty feet, try to throw a softball? Only Buzz. Only Buzz. I'm just trying to think of others. You see Paul Scherrman would have been just starting at Farley. Great reputation for being a hitter. He had Ralph Buchman from Epworth. He was just constantly ... They had a guy, I can't come up with his name, a center fielder, he was a very good hitter. He might be mentioned by somebody else, too, but he was a solid ball player. Farley - I can't remember. Ryan - I can't remember. Monticello would have had the Halls and the. There's another name. Westhoffs.

Wrights? Like Hoppy Wright?

Oh, yeah. I remember Hoppy. Hoppy and Jim. Jim went along, not Jim. Hoppy went along with us to the National Championships. Yeah, they were good coaches. Jim especially was a good coach. Hoppy was one of those guys who.

What about teams? What teams do you remember? Obviously Dyersville's been mentioned by everyone as being good consistently.

Cascade the first few years was tough. Rickardsville was tough. Although they, when they came to the Dyersville tournament they never won that. They had seven players hired from Soldier's Grove, Wisconsin, where I had also pitched sometimes in the summer time. So that's almost your whole team. Catcher, pitcher, second base, shortstop, centerfield, and right field were all from Soldier's Grove.

How far did they make it?

We beat them in the finals. Yeah we beat them in the finals.

And, I'm actually going to get to that later, as far as the hiring of players. What do you think those good teams, Dyersville when you guys went to Battle Creek, or Cascade when they were good, what made those teams better than other teams? What makes a good semi-pro team?

Well, obviously you have to have good players. In Dyersville's case, Tom would reach out to other towns. Why did Dale Digmann and Jim Digmann from Worthington play for Dyersville? It made a difference. Why did... Cascade originally had mostly their own players, except for hiring a pitcher now and then. I think they reached to Bernard a lot. They still do. Even though Bernard itself has a team. I think they did some selecting, along with some good high school baseball probably. You know, I look at Dyersville, you know we had Tangman and he was a good pitcher and played pro ball. From Guttenberg came down and pitched for us. Buzz Beatty played for us when he was at West Delaware for one year, two years I think. The first year I was there they had a Wally, he was from... I think he was from Greeley, or it was Kenny Griffin from Greeley. Sampson came down and pitched for us. You know Rollie Sampson who played right field for us all those years. And he was from Colesburg, you know. It was that type of thing. And what I found interesting, not so much with Tom but with the manager from the Soldier's Grove team. He was talking to me one time about how he selected players. He said I would look for coaches from high schools around. Most of the time they were baseball players. He said "There's a lot of good ball players out there."

I never thought about that. Makes total sense.

I don't know if there was anything magical. I think as far as Cascade and Dyersville was concerned, that the rivalry was great enough that they wanted to be good so that they could beat each other.

How do, and since you weren't a manager you might not have much to say on this, but how would teams back then get their players? How did Tom go and find all these guys? And how did they organize practice? Was there tryouts? How do you decide who plays, that type of thing. What do you remember?

I don't remember anything like tryouts. I have no idea. I'm sure there had to be something. Especially with building up the strength of the team bench wise. My high school kids, all but two of them that were on the starting lineup were playing for town teams when we won the state tournament. And I attribute the winning of the tournament to the coaching and to the playing that they did for their home towns. Five of them were from Petersburg. But, in my case, I was pitching for Loras and we had gotten married the summer before. Now this is '56, and that spring the phone rang and it was Tom. He wanted me to pitch for Dyersville. We were going to stay living there, we knew that. We had an apartment; I had a job. So that was the way he got me. He reached out that way. I didn't bother to have to try out, I know that.

Well you were probably good enough. Maybe talk a little bit about the players, you talked about hiring those players from Wisconsin. You know, I guess when did you see that happening? How much, what was the typical compensation? Did you ever get hired out as a pitcher? I know that was a common thing especially in the tournaments.

First of all, the year that I pitched for Dyersville, in '56 when I was living in Dubuque, I got mileage, that's all that I got. Because mileage was adequate enough to cover expenses plus. And so that's what I did. And I played hardly no Eastern Iowa league games that first year. I did some. But as soon as Monticello's tournament started, I played for the whole tournament. I've no clue on how much they paid players. I have no idea. Because once I moved to Dyersville, then I was a Dyersville player. That was my, it wasn't my job, I suppose I could have said, Hey I'm not going to play baseball. But I'm sure that Tom had a lot to do with my getting a job in Dyersville - to coach. And so from then on, I was a Dyersville native that was playing baseball. I didn't get reimbursed for anything.

So how much was the mileage reimbursement usually? Would that be twenty, because I don't know...

I think I got \$3 an inning. Maybe that's the reason I pitched fifteen innings. It wasn't ... Soldier's Grove is, well I played up in the Southern Mini League, but that was a salary. I got so much money and supposedly this was with Rochester, MN, Austin, MN, supposedly you were getting paid to work. But, a lot of times you weren't there at all because you had to leave early to play a ball game. So, that was the way they covered it and that's the way I could do that while, if I'd been still in college. But I was out of college by then.

So was that more of an industrial league, they were all factories or business that ran teams?

No, they represented towns but I think the manager for us was a plumbing magnate from Austin. So I'm sure there was money that he was putting into it. That was a hell of a league. Either all people who were inspiring to be pro players or it was all former players. I played with a Chris Van Dyke. He'd pitched in the World Series in '46. And he was trying to hang on. As long as he could pitch four or five tough innings but the all of a sudden the ball came up and he was all done. But it was that kind of big. Bill Scaleron played with them, I mean all.

What kinds of types of towns did you play there. You said it was the little mini, is that what you said?

Southern Mini.

Southern Mini.

That's what they called it. Rochester, Austin, Albert Lea, Owatonna, Faribault, Wynona, Mankato. I'm probably missing one or two, but those were the key ones.

That's a fair amount of driving for you.

Oh, yeah. Mankato was not close. Fairmount was in it too, they were not. I can still remember the night that we went to Fairmount to play. It was a good three hour drive from Mason City. And they had a shortstop by the name of Don Daukey who graduated from Iowa State Teachers College. The previous year in AAA ball he hit over .400. And never got called up. Now you try to figure that one out. And he just said that's it. I quit. He was playing shortstop for them.

That would be some politics there. What organization was he in?

I don't know. I have no idea. Played on the west coast in AAA. He hit over .400. He didn't have a lot of speed in running, might have been a major factor, because, boy, speed is so crucial.

Especially back then. Now-a-days everybody wants the home run hitter it seems like but...

I can remember that night. That was right after I got out of pro ball. I started at Mason City. Was in the league for the first time in '57. And then that's when I signed the contract and then I came back and played three more years out there. But that was the type of pay that we got. And with Soldiers Grove, they paid me every time I played with them. And I remember the first time they thought they had a tough. They were trying to get into what they called the National Baseball Conference Tournament. N.B.C.

Yes, the one in Wichita.

Go to Wichita. And they thought they were playing a pretty tough team and they said we've got to have you Art. First of all they gave me I think \$50 to come over and play. This is not '61. \$50 to pitch against the, Satchel Paige's team in Soldiers Grove and they wanted to see me pitch. Of course one of their players I had played against in college. And I think that he said, Hey he's alright. So we won that game. And then about two weeks later the call came. Hey we're in the tournament Art, we'd like to have you come up and pitch. Now this is where the conflict sometimes occurred between Dyersville and them. That summer wasn't because we were living up home yet. My dad was killed that Spring in a farm tractor accident. But, he said we'll give you \$100 to come over. And at that time you got four pounds of ground beef for a dollar. That type of thing. Gas was about twenty cents a gallon. And I can remember, we won the game easy. They got one run in the first inning and then that was it. I think we got nine or something like that. Major's dad said Art... I walked down the path; it was out in the country. Town. Pulled out a \$100 bill and gave it to me. I remember the next day I was helping my brothers put in some tile for farming and our neighbor, Andrew was his name, but he was a great baseball fan and the man loved my dad. And he said Hey, you pitched last night. How did you do? And he said, how much did they give you? I said \$100. He said, God, Art you should do that every night. He couldn't believe that they had paid that much.

I think that's why Satchel did it every night.

But most of the time it was \$75 when I went and played over there. We had such...

That's still good money.

Oh, yeah. We played two straight years in Milwaukee County Stadium and got beat once in the finals.

Did they ever make it to Wichita?

No.

Never made it?

But that's the team that got a pro-gun, he was from a neighboring town. He played for Luther. That's the guy that we knew. He played for my town too. But the shortstop was a coach. Centerfielder wasn't, he worked in Madison but he was from the town right next door. First baseman was the FFA teacher. Right fielder was a teacher someplace but I don't know what, but I mean that was his idea that he could get them.

I read a book. I did some research out at Cooperstown. I got a grant to go out there and do some research. Yeah. It was terrific. But I read a book about the Merrill Rangers in Wisconsin. I don't know where Merrill is to be honest with you, I think it is further north, but they had won the state tournament, their semi-pro tournament like five years in a row. Really.

And literally three or four years later didn't have a team. I mean in just three or four years it just collapsed that quickly and so that is why I was interested in that and I also read a book about Minnesota — their organization got so big they ended up going to classes based on whether you paid the players. You know, they had the true town ball, all amateur, small town, and then they you know, basically the semi pro and then the big cities where the guys were really were pretty much pros.

That was the Southern Mini. They had a Southern Mini, a Western Mini out of Sleepy Eye, places like that. I remember we got beat in playoffs at the end of the year to go to the state tournament up in St. Cloud. Albert Lea got to go. And one afternoon, one morning I got a call from Albert Lea at school, I was teaching at ... And they wanted me to pitch that night. Well, Minneapolis was about a seven hour drive, another hour and a half next to that, so I left at noon. We played at 9:00. Drove all night coming home and walked into class. Never went to bed.

Your administration must have been pretty flexible.

We had a nun that was principal. She was just a great, a great women. She knew baseball and stuff. I'll never forget that. That was colder than heck. We got done about 12:30-1:00. It had to be forty degrees. It was cold.

Did you win?

Yeah. The catcher for the other team had played some in the Southern Mini, just as filler, but he was playing with this other town, but he was already out for college football. He had a hard time swinging the bat. I mean, as far as having any rhythm. He never touched the ball all night. Four times at bat, strike out, strike out, strike out, strike out. It was all because his muscles were so goofed up.

Yeah. That muscle memory is key. What kind of changes do you remember over the years in maybe regulations or rules or in the field? You know, how fields have changed. You mentioned lights earlier. Anything else that you remember?

The big change is grass infields. Holy man, I can't believe. When I was in high school we went to the state tournament. And we didn't play on grass infields until we got to the state tournament in Mason City.

Changes the play a little bit.

And our shortstop could not handle a ground ball. I ended up playing short, trying it. I missed it. Another left hander, our centerfielder tried it, he couldn't missed one. We won the first game, but then the second game we got beat by the team that won it eventually. But it was.

OK so I've never played on a grass infield. We had dirt when I was a kid, so what's the grass do? Does it flatten it or.

I don't know. To me you still have to watch the ball in your glove. You'll get some different kind of bounces. You know the ball is bouncing a certain way and then if you are playing deep enough that it's going to hit once on the ground, it's a different bounce than what it is on the grass. Unless it's hit really hard. So it's probably something you don't get quite the bounce that you thought you were getting and boom it's underneath your glove.

You probably don't remember the years when people started going to the grass infields. Do you remember maybe when Dyersville put in theirs?

Well. It was long after I had quit playing semi-pro ball. Long after. In fact, I think Cascade was the first one that went to it. And then Farley's building a new diamond, they went to it. And then I think Dyersville went to it after that too. Now I watch grandchildren play high school ball, they're playing on grass infields all the time. Festina did not have an outfield fence where we played. Other good teams like Balltown, they had a very short fence in left field. I never played there, but I knew the diamond. The diamonds have so totally improved. It's unreal from what it was. Some fields the backstop was ten feet from the catcher's position. Then a screen up over the top so they wouldn't lose so many balls. That was Holy Cross, the team by the high school there, the old high school. That diamond had practically no space behind the catcher at all. Worthington, Monticello, Cascade, Dyersville, they all did, but now, my gosh, take Peosta, they've got the same underground system that the big leagues do. And improved lighting.

Where, well you might not be able to talk much about this one since you didn't manage. What do you know about the teams and the league getting their financial backing? Where do they get their money to pay for ump's?

I have no idea.

No idea. You mentioned like the manager. No, you said it was the father of the manager who gave you the \$100 bill.

Yeah.

When you got paid, was that typical that it wasn't the team necessarily, or was it some, was it almost a backer.

Most of the time. After that it was the team all the time that did it up there so I can't tell you what was typical. Tom did it in Dyersville for me. So, I don't know what was typical. And we at that time. See I was...then about '62 or '63 we got Jim McAndrew to pitch for us when he was

done pitching big league ball. A little bit anyway. But, I have no idea what the arrangements were for him to come in.

What about support from the cities. Are some cities more supportive than others? You know, fan base. Did you get...we talked about the Dyersville tournament, but as far as, you know...

I think in general, this whole area is very supportive of baseball. There is no doubt about that. And that's the reason it is still going. At the same time, I think the major reason that it is still going is because they can make some money off of tournaments. And that's why they have all gone to tournaments. Gosh, you must have 10-12 tournaments now. Belleview, Bernard, Placid even has one, you know. It's just unbelievable. I think that's the reason, the one thing that maybe keeps them in support. Even though they don't draw anything like they used to.

What, back in the fifties and sixties, what were the crowds comparable for let's say a game at Dyersville compared to Wisconsin or one of the Minnesota games.

Dyersville was much, much bigger. Now, the Southern Mini, that was a little different. When I started pitching there...from the time that I started pitching for the first time in '57 when we were drawing 4,000 to 5,000 people to the time of '61 when I was finishing up, well in fact I didn't pitch up there in '61 because I was playing for Dyersville. I was still living up home. But I would say we were lucky if we were averaging 500. What was the big change? I don't know other than TV and a lot of other things. I don't know what it would have been. And the same thing happened with the tournaments. They don't draw near like they used to. I remember playing...even Monticello, they had a good crowd down there, and now I don't think they get very much anymore. Do you still have a tournament?

No. I think they gave up the tournament since. I know they had them in the seventies. I found a newspaper article about the seventies but, talking to Rick Westhoff and he said they just. They never could get it quite to stick. The fair games, you know the games during the fair, were always still a big deal, but they just couldn't get, couldn't get it established like Dyersville did and like Worthington, you know.

That was always the first one. And, you'd play the first game down at Monticello, it is a son of a gun, because that sun is right in your eyes. Right in your eyes. Man.

I went to a Worthington tournament last night Monticello played and the left fielder and the third baseman. I don't know how the third baseman could see anything. It was right in their eyes and I just thought, of all the positions where you want to be able to see third base it was so ... Pitching I suppose too.

That reminds me of a night in Cascade. They didn't have the big screen up in center field yet. And why, that year, it had to be '61 or '62, and we're playing our first game in Cascade. And we had the first of two games. It wasn't '61, had to be '62. Maybe it was '63 but. We were playing Rickardsville and Billy Sammons is playing center field. Man, what a character. What a guy. But, Dale was catching me and he came out and said I'm struggling a little bit with seeing the ball but I think we'll be OK by the time we start. I threw the first pitch. The batter ran. Dale ran. The umpire fell flat because he had nobody in front of him to protect him. Nobody could see the ball. We went off the diamond and waited for an hour and then played.

I can't see Dale running.

He didn't see the ball. And he said I just hoped it was across the plate because I wasn't going to be behind it. In fact, I think they did have the screen. But the sun was just to the side of it yet. It wasn't behind it.

That would be scary though. Not seeing it. Do you remember helping with Dyersville, or any of the other teams. I suppose with the other teams you were more kind of coming in but you know helping running the fields. Maintaining the fields, chalking or anything like that? Or were you - just show up and play?

In Dyersville we didn't have to. They had a groundskeeper who was paid by the Commercial Club. He took care of cutting the grass, getting the field ready. He's still living, he is 88 years old.

Who is that?

Myron Hittenbaum. He's a coin dealer. And I deal in coins too and I get to see him almost every month. He was a mail carrier but he did that on the side. So, there we never had to do anything like that. So I don't know what the situation. I have a feeling that managers in some of these smaller towns did all that stuff.

I think you mentioned this earlier so you can kind of just review but I don't remember. You don't. What problems has the league had to overcome over the years? Do you remember any problems with -- really anything. From sportsmanship to financial problems, or any problems that you can think of. Has there been any?

I'm not aware of anything. I don't think that we ever had problems relative to sportsmanship and stuff like that.

To your knowledge, was the league and back then actually the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League didn't start until the seventies but before that was the Maquoketa Valley League and I know the Prairie League has been around. And there's the Delaware County. There's so many leagues. To your knowledge, were the leagues ever in danger of failing, like they did in Wisconsin?

Don't know. Don't know the answer to it.

That's fine. What...well we've talked about some. My question is, What memories do you have of the league or specific games played? Is there any one that we haven't mentioned? Anything that's popped in while we've been talking there. Like, Oh yeah I remember...

I can't think. I know I pitched at Ryan at one time. I never remember playing at Cascade, at Monticello, at Worthington unless it was a tournament game. I remember playing at Holy Cross a couple of times. I never played at Balltown. I remember... this is a bit unusual but, the summer of '61, that was the year my dad was killed and we moved out to the farm to be with my mother, and but that fall we were moving to Dyersville. So we were going to play some baseball with Dyersville that summer. They had the first game and the town wanted me to come down and play. They were playing Sherrill. Sherrill, the first time they had a town team for years and years and years so where in the heck is Sherrill. My brother had just gotten a new car. And he said, let's go, we'll take a journey down. And, in fact, at that time we were still living in Ossian because this was the spring of the year before school was out. Had to give a talk at the Athletic Banquet that night. Anyway, we drove down there and we just got there in time for the game to start. When I left, I had to leave in order to get back to give the athletic banquet talk at Cresco,

IA. The score when I left was 30 to 3. I batted twice, didn't get a hit. Everybody else was getting hits all over the place. I think it ended up 38 to 3, something like that.

Oh, wow. Poor Sherrill.

Yeah, but I mean, they for quite a while had some pretty good baseball after that. They just needed to get started and get going. Theirs was a right field fence that was probably about 210, 220.

I might even be able to hit one there. The next question is kind of the crux of my whole thesis. And, everybody has got a different opinion so just give me what you've got. In your opinion, why and how has the league, these leagues, and the teams, Prairie League and Eastern Iowa Hawkeye, been able to hang on and stay viable when town team baseball and semi-pro baseball teams really everywhere else, you know when you go back 50, 60, even 100 years. You know, everybody. I bet, I know Riverside had a team 100 years ago because there's been some news articles, but you know they died long ago. What's.

Festina was the same way. They had a team up until World War II. Then they dropped it. But as soon as the war was over they had a team again. But now they haven't had one for...Oh man. I don't think they've had one since most of my first cousins quit playing ball. Got so old they had to quit.

So why do you think it's been able to hang on in this area?

Well, first I'm going to say you need to have certain people. And I think there are enough Tom Jenks around and Webers from Cascade and stuff like that. Paul Scherrman, Frank Dardis he played that, Willie Palmer from Petersburg without a doubt. Who kept that thing going. And had that spark to do it and want to do it. Lenny Tekippe, a classic example of that from Rickardsville. I don't know if they'd have a team if it wasn't for Lenny. For years he has been catching and managing. It's unreal. So, I think you need people like that and enough towns around here have had that. And I think that the tournaments that they've been able to have are still the financial mainstay that keeps them going. Enables them not to have to dig into their own pockets that much to do it. And, because of the tournaments and the history of those, there's enough build up by papers and stuff that this tournament going on. The TH (*Telegraph Herald*) loves to support that information all the time. Not like they used to. But they used to have their own, too. I think that that interest is just deep enough that because they keeping them going that there's enough fan support that they let us survive. My interpretation.

My last question is: What is your hope and wish for the future of the league and of semi pro baseball?

Well I just hope they keep going. And I think they will. I think there is enough baseball being played in the high schools that they will keep it going. I don't know if we are going to keep finding the people to do it. Are their younger people on the teams? I think of Tim Felderman now who played for Rickardsville for years. Lenny Tekippe's knees are so bad, but he still keeps going. What if he says, "Hey, I'm hanging it up." Is there someone there who is going to step in like he did to keep it going. To me that's still going to be the major question. If they can keep going. They've still got to have that person or persons who have that love and want to see it going.

Is there anything else you want to add before I shut the camera off? Anything you want to throw out as an opinion or a story or anything?

I guess I'd just like to share an attitude maybe or a feeling. I hope to gosh they keep going. I just went to a wake on Sunday of Bob Hoerner. Bob quit pro baseball for the same reason I did. But the relationship that a player builds up with not only his team mates but all the people he plays against in this league is a camaraderie that...I don't know how many players that I talked to at that wake. But they had played. Sure that was 30-40 years ago. But hopefully it's going to be a lot the same. And I see a lot of, like I said earlier, I see a lot of high school players from this area who are still playing for town teams. And I think that's going to be a camaraderie thing. The Legion team doesn't hurt anything that they've got in Dubuque County to help to keep it going. But, in my experience, all the years that I played baseball, the friends...I don't care if they were on the team that I played or on the other team, it's unbelievable. I never played with Bob Hoerner but I just thought the world of that guy.

Good. Well, terrific. I sure appreciate everything.

I'm thinking of what is going to be my final thoughts when I get done. And I think they are built a little bit around what I just tried to share. I hope I never walked off a ball diamond angry at another player. I don't think I did. I don't think I ever walked off a ball diamond mad at another player. I don't think I ever did. Because to me it would destroy the beauty of all the experiences that I had.

I bet many baseball players couldn't say the same thing.

I think there are a lot of them that can.

I think you are right.

I really do. The only thing I feel bad about. If I could do things over I would spend more time after the game talking with the other team. I wish I would have.

You were so busy though. It was hard.

I know. Just a little things. In fact, I've forgotten one already. But, the year we beat Rickardsville in the Dyersville tournament in '65. All the Soldier's Grove players. One of those Soldier's Grove players became a dear friend of mine was Ronnie Halverson, centerfielder. His wife and my wife hit it off. We've gone back and forth all the years since we quit playing ball and stuff. He's the batter. They've got a couple runners on. One run lead. And Ronnie's up. I don't know if the count was 0 and 2, 1 and 2, 2 and 2. It wasn't 3 and 2, I know that. But I'm sure the pitch had to be that far inside for sure. And the umpire called him out. And Ronnie just stood there. And he said, "Art, come here." And I walked over and talked to him. He said, "Was that pitch a strike?" I said "No, it wasn't. It was inside." He said, I knew you'd be honest with me. But that's just the things that I think are so important. Tom Breitbach whose Bob Horner's dear friend. If you don't know him. What a guy. He's - Bob was 86, Tom is 87. They still were playing golf a few years ago. They usually took about three clubs with them. Didn't keep score. They just played golf. But Tom was sitting there and he said, "Art, do you remember the first year that you played in the Dubuque tournament when you were sixteen years old?" I said "I sure as heck do." I said, "I still cannot figure out even though as a sixteen year old I knew I wasn't going to challenge anybody about strategy. But, it was nothing-nothing at the bottom of the ninth. They had a runner on second, John Decker, a pretty good hitter had a hit already that night off our pitcher. Up to bat, first base open, no thought of walking him, and I'm sitting at left field, I couldn't understand why we would be walking - if he hits a base hit, we have

him. But that night. I was a little be cocky at that time, I really do. I feel that I had experienced so much baseball. I was bat boy and score keeper for the Festina team. I went to games all the time with them. From ten years old on. And, I'm playing left field and a ground ball hit to my brother at first, there was a runner at first, he's going to throw to second. As soon as the ball was hit to him, I knew I was backing up that throw, so I started rushing in. My energy was maybe too great because I got too close. And Kenny really threw it wild and it went past me to the left field corner. Tom Breitbach asked me, do you remember when you picked up that ball and threw it all the way to home plate on the fly? And it wasn't very high off the ground? I said, Tom, yeah I do. I remember it well. We got him by about five feet. He said, we just shook our heads. No sixteen year old should be able to throw a ball that far. Just did it you know. But I remember that so well. Then of course the last out, a base hit, ground ball, hit hard. I know enough baseball, it's the winning run, I've got to charge that thing, and I went charging, went to pick it up to throw. Went right on by me. And the next day in the paper Fans were all excited about a possible play at the plate but centerfielder Linus Huinker let the ball go right through his legs. It was me.

Now, would that be the Dubuque tournament? Would that be the big huge one they have? That was a big tournament. I remember reading about that in the paper articles too.

Yeah. They drew thousands. And they had pitchers. It was in September. And if you were a pro baseball player you were pitching in that tournament. They had Thorton Kipper, I can't remember the big guy from...Kipper was from Madison. Oh, what was the guy's name, from Potosi? He was playing football at the time. All those guys pitched in that tournament.

So, who did you play for then?

Festina. F E S T I N A. It's a small town about a hundred people. We're all farmers. First baseman, first cousin. Second baseman, was our neighbor. Shortstop, first cousin. Third baseman married my first cousin so he could play with us is what our story always was. Left field, myself. Well, let's go before I was. Left field was my brother, Kenny. Centerfield, my brother Lanny. Right field was my first cousin. Pitcher was my first cousin. Catcher was my first cousin. And every one of those first cousins had a dad that played with my dad.

Family affair. I think Rick Westhoff said something similar with Holy Cross. He had, because his family is from up there. He said in some point in time Monticello played Holy Cross and there was, I don't even remember how many first cousins he said on the field.

We were the darlings of the Dubuque tournament once we got in. The first year we... no we won the first game but then we got beat in the second. Next year we got beat in the finals. The third year we got beat in the semifinals by the team that won.

Kind of an underdog. Small town. Bigger town.

Hoosiers. Yeah. But, one year we had won the first game. The second game Cascade was playing Dyersville. Cascade had a guy by the name of Orrie Arnson who was formerly from Cascade. Where they found him, he was still playing baseball, but they brought him in to play outfield that night. And they also brought another guy in and they brought a pitcher in. Dyersville hired a pitcher from the Waterloo Whitehawks, a pro team to pitch, and two other players. That game went thirteen innings. We had to drive back to Festina yet. It was 1:30 when we left Dubuque - a two hour trip back home.

Wow. While I've got you, I was going to call Tom back up. Looking through the old articles in the Dyersville Commercial, what was the mascot name of the Dyersville team? Was it the Dutchman back then? Do you remember? Do you know when they became the - because now they are the Whitehawks I think.

I don't know.

And then they also. I found articles about the Flyers which might actually have been the fast pitch team.

No, that was the second team.

The second team, OK. That's where I was confused.

They had two teams for a couple of years. And, what had happened is that the team that was playing was so solid. You know, as far as there weren't any opportunity for other people to come in. And some of those were people that Tom had brought in and were playing with them all the time. That they decided, Hey we're going to start our own team. Because they won't let us play. And that lasted a couple of years. And by then some of those players that were working with Tom, in fact, between '56 when I played and '61 there was a big transformation in players. But Tom was manager of them all the time. And, I don't know when Tom took over as manager. I have no idea.

I don't remember either. He may have said in his interview. That's one haven't got typed up yet. That was one I wasn't sure in the paper because the Monticello Cubs have been the Monticello Cubs since the twenties or thirties, I can't remember when I found them, and you know most of the teams kept pretty much the same name. That was one, I kept finding Flyers articles and then I'd find Dutchman articles and I knew they were Whitehawks now. Must have been the one before, that's the only way I can figure it out. I've never. I remember. Well, coming to the Dubuque tournament, that's the only tournament Festina came to, why we did I don't know. We were invited because we were winning up there.

What league did they play in?

First we played in what was called the Upper Iowa League. And that was a lot of small towns, local towns. Not really tough but then Festina kind of won that a couple years in a row. And the Northeast Iowa League was the big one. Because I can remember one year we were playing up at the Winneshiek County Fair. And we hired a pitcher by the name of Tom Weston. We were playing Spillville, and Spillville said, You guys are getting Baldy? And we said, No we don't have Baldy, but we've got his brother, Tom. They were relieved because Baldy was a good pitcher. And so that was the difference between the two. And then, I'd say it had to be about '50 when Festina switched to the Northeast Iowa League. Then it was New Hampton, West Union, Decorah, yeah Decorah was in it for a few years, St. Lucas was a great baseball town for years and that was old Hans Cooper, tougher than nails. Sumner, it was a tough league there ain't no doubt about it. But that's where we played the rest of the way then. And I don't think there's anything going up there right now. Not a thing.

Personal interview with Jim Hoerner**By Todd Hospodarsky****Date: July 12, 2011**

I played for forty-eight years I guess. I started in the Prairie League playing when I was probably fourteen. I played my last game down in Bellevue in the Bellevue Tournament. Me and my three boys were in the same line-up in the tournament. So I was about fifty-two then. I've been around for a long time.

I am excited to talk to you because most of my study is more around the Eastern Iowa League. Because I didn't realize the Prairie existed until just a couple years ago because you know I'm in Monticello and stuff. What is and you just talked about it a little bit, but what is your connection with semi-pro baseball and the leagues around here? What teams have you played with and that type of thing?
Right now? What is my connection...?

All throughout your whole life. You mentioned Bellevue but what other, what teams have you all played in or for and what leagues?
Do you want me to tell you how I got started?

Sure, sure.

Well, really how I got started in baseball... when I was a junior in high school at Senior High School my brother Joe was a senior we won the state championship for Senior. It was the only time in history of the school.

What school?

Senior. Dubuque Senior High School. And then I have a brother Bob that was playing minor league ball in the Cubs organization. So, we... there is a lot of baseball in the family. And then Joe and I we played with Key West. He pitched and I caught. And then when Joe was 21 he signed a contract with the White Sox in the Northern League. He went on. Well he threw in the minor leagues and he then had fourteen and a half years in the major leagues. And ah, so he left and I played with Key West another year then the next year I signed a contract with the White Sox. And I went to spring training down in Florida. I got injured down there and they sent me home for three months and I decided not to go back. Then I continued to play semi-pro ball with Key West and then I also at that time would... there were hardly any lights so we played on Sundays. We probably only had about a fifteen game schedule. But I also played with Cascade... Cascade, and Worthington, Holy Cross and Petersburg in tournaments.

Would they usually like call you to see...?

They'd call me, right. But the Prairie League then, it was, well there was... I think they had eight teams when I was started. It was Key West, La Motte, Bellevue wasn't in it then, and Zwingle, Otter Creek, and New Mary and Peosta. And then as time went on it got up to sixteen teams so we split it in two divisions. Eight teams in the north, eight teams in south. Then the winners of them two would play in a championship at the end of the year.

What year...like what year, years did you sign with the White Sox and then come back and start playing semi pro, roughly?

That was ah...in ah... let's see I got married and '78. Joe signed in '70 I signed in '79. Not '79... '59... '59. And we went down...I got... there were a couple guys playing catch behind me. There were a row of us here playing with a row of players here, and there is a row in back of us back there. Which should never have been and the guy missed the ball and hit me in the head and I got a concussion. I thought I was...one of the ...I thought I was a hell of a good catcher you know. I had a good arm, I hit for power, and I thought there wasn't anybody better. You get down there in spring training and you get these guys coming from high school. Baseball high schools you know. Arizona and at that place you play year round. You see those guys could throw better and hit better but I...I was down there three weeks. And I had a contract with Clinton. At that time there was D ball. They had A, B, C, D which they don't have any more. I would've been playing just for a team thirty miles down the road and Dubuque had a team in the same league at that time. But I decided we were married my wife was expecting our first child. So I just decided not to go back.

What years were you involved in the league? So you basically kind of started playing about '59 or '60 or actually, did you play a little before you sign that contract? You did...

I started playing in the Prairie League in '53.

And then you said you played until 52 what year would that have been? Eighty something probably?

Eighty ah... that Bellevue tournament was ah... be eighty... 1985.

And does your son coach the Key West team now I saw there was a Hoerner coaching somewhere?

Yes.

Okay I wondered if that was.

My...they coached and there's... they coached and played. I managed off and on all them years. But when the kids were old enough, when Mark our oldest one when he was six I started Little League out here. Get that underway and then we had three boys and I put them through that and then I quit the Little League. Someone else took it over... but it was just all with Joe playing major league ball it was all... and now we got, well my oldest boy Mark and his three sons play with Dubuque in the Eastern Iowa League. Jeff he managed... and Jeff, managed the all-star game out at Dyersville.

How did you become involved in baseball in general and who influenced you, got you going? Your brothers obviously too were very influential?

Well one person was a big really help me out was Jim Nora he was our coach at Senior. And he really...but we had my brother Bob and our dad. We were born and raised on a farm. And there was a little spare time around the hay field you hit the fly balls to each other or play catch during that. It's just that's how we were brought up all it was... was...

What position did Bob play?

He pitched and played the outfield.

What can you tell me about the formation of the prairie league or any of the leagues that you played with or the running of the league? How are they put together? I guess you talked a little bit about Prairie League when they had two divisions is that the same way it always was or was it usually...?

Generally to begin with it was just one division and you just played your...an then... when I first started they played the top four teams had a little tournament and decide the two losers play for third and fourth and the two winners play. But it wasn't very long that they had the two divisions.

Who are some key people that were running the league back then, when you were in it... the other managers you work with? people that kept the teams going or the league going? There was Ricky Hoerner from Zwingle, and Larry Hayes from Key West and ah... Boy its tough to... I don't know it's tough to answer that question. There's other ah...

Who managed Key West before and after you? When you were, you know ready to get out. Jack Grace managed Key West, and Donnie Welch and Larry Hayes, maybe I said that. There really wasn't... Then they, when I quit in '82 or whenever it was at the Bellevue tournament. All my players thought they all knew more than what I did. So we had a meeting and I said I've got no more to prove. I got to play with my three boys in another tournament. So I said I got the equipment at my home the next spring who ever decides to take it over I'll be glad to give it to you. And Key West never had a team. Key West went I think eighteen years.

Eighteen years without a team.

Without a team. And then John Knabel took it over and he's managing it now. But we had we got to where... What happened in these small towns is when the older guys okay, like me, when I started as a bunch of young guys... we got we played I guess it was...I guess we had some understanding wives I guess. They would take the kids, they would sit in the hot car ride to watch us play ball, whereas the young ones don't do that anymore. It got to where you had to go out of town to get ball players. so the last few years I managed it right here in Key West I only have about four guys from Key West the rest I had to go to town. A lot of them from town wanting to play. And I had some good ...Kevin Rhomberg played with me a couple years he went on to the major leagues for I think he had about three years with Cleveland in the major leagues.

What are some players that stick out in your mind that you played against? You had a long career so you can go all the way back if you want. Anybody that sticks out as major leaguers or even if they didn't go on to the major leagues but they were just tough, tough players. Being a catcher you probably had a lot of tough hitters you had to try to get out. Well the Prairie League was probably the ... We never had a whole lot of real outstanding... you know. That league Carl Heitz and the Green brothers. There was... there was really you never had a whole lot of dominating pitchers you know. You had called a quality pitcher you know. But none that was... had a chance of playing minor league ball.

What about at the tournaments if you play for Cascade or somebody, was that quality better then?

Oh yeah, way better. But Cascade, you got... they use to bring in... When I played at Cascade in the tournaments they would almost hire...they'd hire pitchers. Rocky Rothrap of Cedar Rapids. Roger Fredrick is from Janesville, Wisconsin. He was probably the best he had just got done with AAA ball. And he pitched five years for us in the tournaments and I think he was 15 and 1. He was... he was in... and around here there was. The Eastern Iowa League, that was a stronger

league. You had Art Huinker and Bud Ross, Sal Olberding from down around Dyersville, Petersburg. Dave Writinger, a guy that pitched for Bellevue. I just love to hit off of him. But he was one of the toughest pitchers Bill Best. He pitched for Monticello.

What was the secret to hitting him if he got everybody else but you? What was the secret to hitting him if other people couldn't hit him but you did?

Well I don't know you see that sometimes you know for you can... We played them in the I think it was '61 in the championship of the Worthington tournament game. I had a good 3 games going and I went four-for-four off of him and we beat them 3-2 in the final night. I won the most valuable player of the tournament that year. But he was good. Monticello they had a lot of... they had a lot... Glenn Drawn use to pitch for Monticello. But you would get... you would get down in the... the semifinals and finals, I don't care who you played you always had somebody... somebody hired to play you.

How much would you usually pay somebody, a pitcher?

Well we paid the guy from Janesville, Wisconsin fifty bucks to come down. Fifty bucks plus gas mileage.

Not bad.

That was, back then that was pretty good.

Did you ever get paid as a catcher or was it just...?

I played for Cascade, I use to get five dollars a game which covered the gas.

And would Cascade just out of curiosity, did they hire lots of players or basically just the pitcher and catcher because they're so key?

Yeah me and Carl Heitz, which we're both in Dubuque County Baseball Hall of Fame. He and I played the same amount of years with them and then we played with ah...(phone interruption)We were supposed to play Key West tonight. They play Bellevue tomorrow night in the Rickardsville tournament.

Oh, the Rickardsville Tournament is this weekend? Cascade starts what next week?

I go to a lot of ball games. But anyway Fredrick yeah we use to pay him fifty dollars. He was just in town...understand not everybody guesses greyhounds. But he was just in town about three years ago. He was down at the greyhound park which is right across from the... and he could see when he came in that there was a ball game going on over there so he went over. And he thought geez I wonder if Jim would be around. This has been a long time since...So anyway, he asked a guy. Just happened to be the guy he asked knows me real well. He said do you know Jim Hoerner and he said yeah I know Jim Hoerner. He said, yeah I know him real well. And he said, You tell him that Roger Frederick asked about him. And the guy said he gave you a hell of a compliment. He said you know... He said Jim caught me out in Cascade he said years ago in tournaments. He said I played AAA ball for two years and he said he was the best receiver I ever threw to in baseball. So that was a...

I know Art Huinker, I interviewed Art Huinker last week or... or the week before and he had nice things to say about you so... You have friends.

Art is a super guy.

Yeah, yeah he was one of the nicest guys I've ever met I think.

I hit... I hit him pretty good too.

You must have been one of the few ones. It sounds like he pitched all over the place.

Oh, he did. He was. I hit three home runs off of him one night out at the Dyersville tournament.

What about teams? What teams do you remember being really good over the years and what made them better than other teams? Maybe that you played against or for actually?

Well, years ago pretty much Zwingle, La Motte, Bernard and Key West were about the four stronger... stronger teams for the simple reason that they had the best pitching. Not you know major league pitching or anything. And they had more guys that could hit the ball. I would say them... in the Prairie League for a long time were the four most dominating teams that would wind up winning it, you know.

When you played for Cascade or somebody else in the one of the other tournaments in the Eastern Iowa who were the strong teams in the tournament? Maybe it was hard to tell if everybody was hiring, hiring pitchers?

Well, the five years I played in the tournament the ones that would mostly wind up in the final four. The strongest ones were Cascade and Dyersville, Monticello, and Petersburg had a good team. And Holy Cross they had a...later on, Balltown but I would say Cascade and Dyersville. I would pick them as the top two over the years. And that said Cascade still ... they've got a lot of... a lot of good young country boys that can swing the bat.

What types of changes do you remember in maybe the field or regulations over the years? You know how have fields changed? You mentioned not having lights earlier, when did teams start getting lights?

Well we really had some... some fields. We played down at Springbrook. Down at Springbrook the second baseman would have to let the right fielder know if a fly ball was coming that way. If you were batting, pitcher, catcher, if you're batting all you could see is the center fielder and the left fielder. After second base it went down and you couldn't see the... He'd have to play about twenty feet from the center fielder in order to... And then start moving over to his position you lose sight of him. So the first baseman in second baseman if a fly ball would come out there they'd yell the balls coming or something. So that was one. Out at Pleasant Grove, Placid whichever you want to call it. That was another one. You'd go out there, you'd have to clean the cow piles off the field first. A lot of times you wouldn't get it all. And then out in left field it was a very deep, if you ran back for a fly ball, a lot of times you end up in a creek. The creek was very... Oh we had some... There was...And there was some other ones Zwingle. La Motte they had a real small baseball field. Between the fields and the umpires, the umpires are so much better today than it was back then. I mean to tell you.

Who usually umped? I mean if they were bad where did they get them from? Are they high school umps or are they just guys who are around?

Dubuque the Stakis brothers I don't know if you've ever heard of them. They use to umpire a lot of the time. Playing down in La Motte one time and the guy for us hit a ball down the line most of them had just a snow fence and a foul pole about as high is this ceiling you know. The guy hit one off of the foul pole and it went out in foul territory. So the Stakis brothers, the one running the bases yells "foul ball." So anyway we had a big argument and he wasn't going to change it. He says come on fellows he says. You know I made a mistake but were going to leave it that way.

But I will tell you one thing, next time he's up if you hit it again and it goes that way I will give him a home run. They couldn't... they couldn't...you'd have to swing at anything. But they came kept the game under control and somebody had to do it you know. They... that's why they back then they pay these guys twenty-five dollars apiece.

So when did teams usually get lights? When did Key West get lights? Or do they have lights yet?

We don't have lights we still don't have lights. They play their home games up at Peosta. When we used to play we lost our diamond it used to be out by ...by the airport. The guy, the farmer took the field away. So we played up at the Taylor Mound School.

What about other towns? When did they like Zwingle have theirs? When did they get like to do they have lights any other towns?

Zwingle got lights and Rickardsville got lights. Back when we first were playing it was just always the big four. Holy Cross, Dyersville, Monticello, Cascade... or ...or Holy Cross, Worthington, Dyersville, and Cascade. Those were the big four tournaments. And I do remember when nobody else had a tournament. I know when I first got lights. If you run these tournaments...like Dubuque they're in both leagues, they'll play seventy-two ball games.

That's crazy.

But I would say maybe in the eighty's when we started getting lights.

When you were managing Key West and playing how did you get your financial backing? Where did you get your money? to pay for ump's, to pay for uniforms, to pay for equipment?

We sold advertising booklets. The whole league...the whole league did. You would have a meeting before the season and everybody would bring their advertising and we would pay somebody to put them on. It would be pretty thick the Prairie League Advertiser. And the Key West ads would all be together and the Zwingle ads were together.

How much would you make off of that? How much would the advertising cost?

A full page was a hundred dollars, a half-page was fifty dollars, and a quarter-page is twenty-five, and you can get five dollars or ten dollars. But every page was a hundred dollars whether it was one ad or... and then we always threw a little money in... the players before... it got tougher all the time... once we had guys like me, the older guys started quitting. And you don't got many young guys around and then you get guys from Dubuque you know that wanted to play but they didn't want to pay.

How much would you pay? Would it be pretty cheap? Like \$10 or \$20 or would it be more like \$50 or \$100? Like how much would it cost to pay?

That we would throw in? At the beginning of the year we would throw in anywhere between twenty and fifty dollars apiece. And then the umpires it got to where you had to have an umpire out of the umpire association. Which... but then the umpire association that sort of faded. Now what most teams do, they pay for a ball and strike... a ball and strike umpire and they just get somebody to do the bases.

So you never know who you're going to get.

You never know. You never know. I've seen... Those umpires we had. .. we had some good empires. John Cagman. There were a lot of good ones but there were some bad ones too. They were just, they'd get out there and they wanted their money and they wanted to be gone. Call strike three to get the game over with.

How about with the fields when you're playing or managing. Who, well you mention the farmer taking the field back. I guess my question is who owns the fields? Who kept the field up? Who chopped it up, who drug it, got it ready?

Me and about two guys from my team, my kids. Every morning, on Sunday mornings go over and drag the field. If it was wet, work it up you know. Try to get it ready the night before. Drag it and lime it, and put the bases is down.

And you said it was a farmer's field that they just gave you the field or how that work?

Just let us use it. No we didn't have to buy it or rent it but then they'd use it as a pasture. But that one in Springbrook that took the cake. That had to be... never seen that were you couldn't see the...

I can't believe that. How much crowd support did teams get over the years? And were there times historically that was better than others?

Yes years ago. Years ago... Back... back, well, when I first started playing... when I started playing in tournament when I was fourteen I think... and maybe a couple years before that. You would get playoff games... we had at Key West we had in... I'd have to go back and say in '52-3, five-hundred people at a playoff. That's all there was to do back then. There was no games on TV there was no that was the Sunday ... You use to pass the... somebody would collect at the gate a quarter apiece and sometimes you get enough to pay for the umpires.

Yeah at a quarter apiece with five hundred people I mean you'd still get over \$100. That's a good, that's a good payday.

But then as this time went on, now nobody... nothing. Nobody charges nothing but if you got... if Dubuque played tonight if it was their home game. They play up at Petrakis in Dubuque. They would maybe have fifteen people.

Why do you think that is? What caused the big drop off? In fifty years to go from five hundred to fifteen that's a big drop off.

Too much, there was no... there was no little league going on then. You go over here down the hole they have little league every night and that place is full you know. People go and watch their grandkids. Too much going on. I don't know, it's a shame. It's absolutely a shame. I think the thing that really hurt... really hurt baseball when it first started coming out was slow-pitch softball. It's a game for somebody that can't play. .. You can't print that.

That's okay. That's come up before.

You know these... I criticize these guys. They've got these great big guys that would have been good baseball players And they went to slow pitch. They could walk in, they didn't have to run or nothing. Play the game in an hour you're gone so they play the game. Some of these big guys out there they hit the ball up there and they hit it 200 feet over the fence four times in the night. You know and they think they're a big hero. And they say well you try to hit it. I said I probably couldn't. What I said there's really no challenge there you know. And the Kiwanis tournament

there in Dubuque, fast-pitch. They use to have sixty-four teams and they would have to turn it teams down. Now there isn't a fast-pitch team in Dubuque. And slow-pitch, I was to a...to a baseball game the Blues the other night down there and they've got three softball fields and a baseball field. And there are only two fields playing because they're having trouble filling them leagues now.

If they're not playing slow-pitch anymore now what are they doing?

I don't know. I don't know. It's ah...and a lot of them kids got to work. Some of them can't play because they got to work. It ain't back like it ah...like it used to be but it's really a shame. But that's really, really hurt baseball.

When did you see that start to I don't know when slow pitch started. Was that roughly the seventy's? Or was that the late sixties?

I would say right in there. I know when I coached, Key West didn't have a team it was harder to get guys to play you know. And then it was a lot easier for these area teams to get guys from Dubuque to play. But then Dubuque started up and they had two teams. They have one now but they had two teams. I had about five guys from Dubuque that played. Well they went and played in there.

So Key West obviously failed for eighteen years but then came back. Has there ever been a ... I guess a chance of the league failing? Like are there enough teams that the league would just collapse? You know a long time ago probably when you started there was lots of leagues. There was the Eastern Iowa well back then it was called the Maquoketa Valley League that Monticello and those team was in but there was so many leagues and now there's just the two.

Well there's the New Mary had a team in the Prairie League. Otter Creek had a team in the Prairie League. LaMotte had a team in the Prairie League. Springbrook had a team in the Prairie League. They don't ...they don't have no team anymore. So it just got to where it worked out that Zwingle and Otter Creek had a team. They're just wasn't enough players there to go around. So that was four or five teams right there that used to be in it.

Why do you think the teams that are still around in the Prairie League and the Eastern Iowa have been able to hang on when other teams died? What keeps them viable you know how is it... I look back historically for a hundred years you know or so almost every town had a team. I'm from Riverside, Iowa; they use to have a team but they were long dead before I was ever born. I don't even know what the name of them were or anything. But you know now a hundred years later Zwingle still has a team, Key West has a team now. what keep it going in this area? It seems like in northeast Iowa and a few others, I know it is a couple teams in the Norway area. But this northeast Iowa seems to really be kind of a... Well, Zwingle they...what's keep them going is...they've got a nice ball field. They've got a family down there and three or four kids play on there you know. If they would ever decide to quit but then they also have ...they're right in the middle of that La Motte, Otter Creek one on each side so they got help from there you know. But they're getting to where they have three or four from Dubuque playing with them. But they've got...they've got good backing down there. They've got a nice... a real nice ball field and ah... Have you ever been down there? To see it? It's really nice...and ah...they put on functions down there to raise money.

What's your hope and wish for the future of semi-pro baseball and the Prairie League?

Well I...I hope it keeps... keeps going. They're going to have to have dedicated people to keep it going because it ain't that easy. Every year you talk to people like Lenny Tekippe. He's in Rickardsville for years it's just I talked to him down at the hall-of-fame dinner last Friday night and he said boy it gets tougher every time. He keeps saying, "it's going to be my last year," but he said, "I'm afraid it's going to fold."

I think he might be right. It would.

Same thing up in Balltown came close to folding. And I think the biggest thing that Lenny and I were talking about is it's really hurting... you don't get no people you know. You're going out, and you're playing, and you look around and there's nobody there. You don't even, you don't even get... which I think is a shame, you don't even get the players come...they don't hardly get the wives or the kids... when you're playing and you've got a lot of people in the stands that's what it's all about, you know. I mean that's...And if anybody says that it isn't... why when we used to play with Cascade out at Dyersville... I've got clippings in there...fifty, 5200 people

That would have been back when they gave away a car and stuff.

A car, '52... or four or five thousand people there, you know and that brings something out in you, you know. When you got maybe eight guys from here and say you're going down to Zwingle and play and you go down there. They've got eight guys and you're playing and you turn around and you're looking at them eight players and this is what is really hurting the lack of any people...and that's when they say what we doing this for? We aren't doing it for the people. And I think this is... Cascade is going to survive and Dyersville is going to survive. I don't know what kind of shape Monticello is in.

About the same, like ten people in the crowd if that and their mostly moms and dads maybe a couple wives, but you know you've got ten or twelve guys on the team so there ought to be ten or twelve girlfriends, wives. I know I was at the Worthington Tournament since they made the finals...I was there for the finals I miss the semifinals I was there for the quarterfinals and they had oh, Monticello had maybe twenty people there and then for the finals they probably had...they might have had fifty. You know it's not four thousand.

We use to, and back then the other teams places didn't draw like that but the car was a big thing. But they would, like at Cascade they would have two or three thousand. Two or three thousand people. It's just I'm afraid that... I was down in Dubuque this year and Dubuque had six people there and the team that came to play had one. You know, you figure you've really got to want to play the game. I mean I played it because I had to play it. But geez it's got to be...It would be hard on me today. If I was playing today it'll be hard on me to go you know you make a good play, you hit a couple homeruns, you know. You'd like for somebody to see it anyway. And if somebody says that don't make no difference, they are lying.

Right, I mean, well it's obvious. You always play a little different when there's a crowd.

I don't know how these tournaments are... I couldn't believe there's no entry fee. The teams don't pay an entry fee. Dubuque won \$400 for first place. I think there is about \$800 prize money they gave out.

At Worthington or where?

At Worthington.

And I know Dubuque got some because that pitcher was still in college so he couldn't take the money. I think he won the MVP.

Were you out there at Worthington?

I was there for the finals, yeah.

The championship game ? I was out there too.

The last question I've got and you talked a lot about the so if you know any new ones that's fine but...what memories do you have of the league or specific games played or specific events. You know any big memories that we are haven't already talked about. Tournaments played in or...

Well, probably one thing that I always look forward to every year... for years we'd go down and play at the Monticello fair. That was always a... me and a few of the guys would go down. Roy Messer and ah... I always enjoyed that. And probably the year I won most valuable player at Worthington was probably one of the highlights.

Did you say that was '61?

'61 I think. ("It was '59"- from his wife)

You were in the ballpark.

Just ask the baseball widow. She was a baseball...she put up with it more than anything.

(Wife: I think you look forward to the Scott Oltcoff thing every year, too.)

I like to play at the Scott Oltcoff down in Zwingle. I hit all the time. Last year I played first base every year I play a couple innings at first base. But I get a hit every year.

Anything else that you want to throw out there while I have the camera on?

No, you know there's a few a few games that stand out that probably the night in Dyersville. Certain games that night in Dyersville that I hit a couple of home runs off Huinker that was a big night. Independence and Holy Cross we weren't supposed to win the tournament was ??? pitching the championship night and we beat him. I had... the field out at Winthrop we played. The field out there from the right field line in towards center about thirty feet if they had a pole up and anything hit between that pole and the foul pole was a double if it went over the fence and anything on the other... because it was so damn short. It was only about 190 feet down the line. I know that night I had three of them over there and two on the other side. I went 5 for 5 with two home runs and three doubles. And I think the three I hit there were way high out over... You know you could have hit it 400 feet and only got two bases. But that's the way it was. And as far as baseball... signing the contract with the White Sox was something big. And having three generations... me, and my son, and my grandson go to the state tournament which I don't think happened to anybody else in the city of Dubuque that they had three generations that went to the state tournament.

Maybe the *Herald* should do an article on that.

Telegraph Herald did a big article on that.

Did they? I missed that.

Yeah it was in the *Telegraph Herald*. This was...this was when Jeff he coaches and teaches and coaches up at Hempstead now. He manages the Dubuque team but when he was a senior he was

the third generation. There's just so much baseball with Joe playing in the major leagues he entertained us so much.

Now how did you end up a Cardinals fan if you played in the White Sox and he was in the Cubs organization?

Well he got...he was with the White Sox and then they didn't protect him in the minor leagues so Houston drafted him. And then the Cardinals drafted him from Houston. And that is when he went up and played in the major leagues. And he went on and pitched for fourteen years. He went up in '66 with the Cardinals. Then in '67 and '68 they were in the World Series. And I got to see all the World Series home games in St. Louis. Joe was the first relief pitcher in the history of the major leagues to get picked on the all-star team. In I don't know what year that was. Dale Hodges picked him and he was the first relief pitcher. They used to pick all starters. He was the first...he never got the game he was warming up but Jim Hickman of the cubs got a hit and drove in the winning run. But I've been a Cardinal fan and the Cubs fan, I just love baseball.

Personal interview with Pete Temple
By Todd Hospodarsky
Date: July 12, 2011

What is, or has been, your connection with the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League? And any other names that maybe the league has had over the years you've been involved.
 I, as the sports editor for the Express here, I cover Monticello Cubs games and print their results in the newspaper.

And you have been doing that for how long?
 Twelve years. I guess this will be my thirteenth season.

How did you become involved...well this is obviously geared more towards a player, but the question is how did you become involved in baseball and who influenced you? Obviously as a sports writer you are involved and interested in all sports, but do you want to just talk about how you became in baseball and other sports? And who influenced you?
 Well it probably goes back to when I was a kid. And my dad took me to Minnesota Twins baseball games in the old Metropolitan Stadium. I saw Harman Killebrew when I probably five years old. I saw Mickey Mantle play. Hank Aaron late in his career became a Milwaukee Brewer right at the tail end of his career. And I think I saw him one time. So stuff like that... so yeah I think that kind of...I mean with me it's more...it's not just baseball it's all the sports in general. And baseball is probably not even tops on the list. But it probably started there.

What can you tell me about what you know about the formation and running of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League of actually any of the semi-pro leagues maybe you've run into as a sports writer over the years?
 You know I don't really know anything about the formation of them just that they've been around for a long time. Um, you know there's a lot of tradition. A lot of teams have been around forever-and-ever. I can't give you much more than that.

Um, for you as a sportswriter who are some of the key people you've talked to as far as running the league? Obviously you probably talk to Garrett the current coach of the Cubs, but do you talk to other coaches or anybody else from the league about league stuff or...?
 Dale Sperflage. Because he was the guy running it for several years, you know. He has kind of faded back and Garrett took over a few years ago. One year it was um, can't think of the guy's name now. He is over at North Linn now...Trav...ah... Griffith?...

Oh that's not who I was thinking of. I was thinking of Goedken. Oh. KG Goedken, Kevin Goedken, but that's probably not who it is.
 This one guy did it for part of one year, but didn't aah...

So was Dale doing it when you came?
 Yeah, I think so. Yeah I think I was always getting my results from Dale.

Are there any players or coaches or games that stick out in your mind from over the years that you covered? From Monti or other teams?
 Well, the problem with Cubs is...you know in the time I've been here they haven't been one of the top teams in the league obviously so aahh... Yeah I guess not really. You know I know

they've had some big games like, like... Was it last year they beat Cascade which is a huge deal. But I didn't see that game so ... But as far as players, you know Dale is obviously one of them just for years was the ace pitcher of the team you know. Um, there was a guy named Chuck Kavenah who was the center fielder who for years was their lead off guy and if he got to first he was going to get to second. That was... You know he would always steal. You know, That was great for taking pictures too because you know you could count on that he was going to try to steal second I was maybe going to get a decent picture. Um...Not really ... like Brian Benechek because he's been there so long. I don't think he's playing with them this year. Um yeah not really...

Was there much semi-pro baseball where ever ... I don't remember where came from, you know where you were a reporter before. But was there much was there any semi pro games there?

Yeah there's tons of it up there. Do you want me to show you? I looked that up yesterday. It's changed a little bit since I've been there. (Looking at computer)

Now I forget...you...I know you're from Minnesota but where...where were you a reporter?

Twin Cities area. Yeah suburbs. I worked in Burnsville most of time. Up there

Now do they still have the two ... That's the southern Minni right...Do they still have like classes, because they broke it down into classes a long time ago but then they were struggling with...

Here's all the teams

It's like a ton. Because you were in the suburbs...Was it, was it similar to these town teams or was it different?

Yeah, I'd say so. They were probably, um yeah I'd say it was pretty similar because it was a mix of guys who'd been there forever and guys who were fresh out of high school or...or you know didn't quite make college teams. Yeah I'd say it's real similar. Something like this...this league here, I've covered some of these teams... the Cannon Valley League and then there was another league called the Cannon Valley Classic that has some really smaller towns that are more southern Minnesota

I saw you had up there the Southern Mini. Does the Southern Mini still exist?

Yeah it does and the reason I had to say that one because for a year I worked in Owatonna so I covered the town ball team that was in Owatonna, Minnesota. Called the Owatonna Aces. Yeah they were in that league. That was really the only team I covered in that league.

Now are those leagues there like the league you have there, the Owatonna League were they real similar to Eastern Iowa that they've been around for a long time? Or are they come-and-go? How does, I mean how does it compare?

Um, they are similar but they change... I think they change more frequently. I mean they have kind of more teams that drop out and new teams come up. Like some of these teams here weren't even there when I was. But the Burnsville Bobcats were. I remember covering them, but...yeah they kind of fade in and out, I guess part of it I think was just...whoever is running it...whoever wants to put it together and actually manage the team, you know and if there isn't someone to do that the team kind of disintegrates.

Would you say those towns are relatively the same size as like the Dyersvilles and Cascades and Monticellos? Or are they...

These are way bigger. They're the suburbs. This league in particular their the suburbs of the ...

So that would be...I am just thinking of differences so, you know. One the things, I mean, they're drawing from towns of like what do you think ten, twenty thousand? Thirty thousand?

Probably those suburbs are right in that range. Yeah, Some of them might be as high as forty or fifty thousand. But this league here is a much more traditional one and this has changed very little.

Which one is that?

It's aahh, the Classic Cannon Valley League (CCVL). And this team, this Dundas Dukes team. Dundas is a little town real close to Northfield and they have been around forever and they have been great forever.

How big of a town would that be then?

Just probably similar to this probably. Little bitty towns. Miesville is a town I don't know if you know where Hastings and Redwing are? Mieseville is kind of in that area.

So in your experience Minnesota is very similar as far as the structure of the leagues and things to around here? But obviously they have a much larger state wide organization. I mean, because we don't have an Iowa website with the leagues listed and all that stuff.

Right, right. And actually I just learned that yesterday looking that up that there was a state-wide organization. I didn't realize that but...

Well you mentioned that team are there any teams other than that ... that last team you just mentioned that...that you remember over the years just being an outstanding...obviously Dyersville around here has always been and Cascade recently you know...Is there any teams Minnesota or Iowa that have just been dominant?

Kind of stand outs...

And like you...I know you don't just follow baseball so...if you can't think...

And I wasn't as connected with what was going on with the rest of the state so I can't really...you know with a lot of these other teams their kind of up and down. Although they don't change a lot from year-to-year but...like in that suburban league I think there is a pretty big turnover in players in that one so teams kind of fluctuated.

How do teams...maybe if you remember from when you were up in Minnesota, how did they recruit their players since you said they had a lot of turnover did they advertise in the paper or was it a word of mouth type of thing?

I think probably more word of mouth, you know. Guys who had played together in high school and say hey we're on this team come and you know if you still want to play ... come and give it a try.

What do you think separates the good semi-pro teams from the bad? You can even look at Monticello you know we.. I mean we all know that Monticello hasn't been a real strong team in your time period. You know what makes teams better than other teams?

You know I think...I think it's probably similar to high school programs in that it kind of feeds on itself. That if a program is traditionally strong, players are going to gravitate to it, you know. You know like if I'm a guy who has a choice between playing for the Cascade Reds who are always you know are going to win 90% of their games or play for somebody else who is not as good, you know. I mean and if I can be a regular player for this team you know it's an automatic choice. You know it's no different than college basketball recruiting or that kind of thing. I think there's some...some I think that's a fairly good analogy. That you know a team that...Teams that are traditionally strong are going to probably going to stay that way because they are going to attract people more easily.

Do you know of any compensation that players ever receive? I mean its called semi-pro but also it's called town ball.

Yeah I don't think they do here. And I don't think they did in those leagues either

What changes do you remember

Am I right about that by the way? Nobody gets paid around here do they? For...or what are you finding out?

Well, Basically this is...this is...this is what I've got...is, um, is...the most common type of payment, if anybody gets paid is pitchers in tournaments. You know when you get later...longer...further into the tournament you run out of pitching. You know not everybody's got three or four pitchers and so you go hire somebody. Or maybe you just want to win the tournament. After you've won the first two rounds you want to make sure you win the money and so you go out and hire. And some teams are a lot more comfortable hiring. Other teams just do it if they have to. It really depends on the philosophy of the town and things and what their traditions are that type of thing. The other thing we get into...or that what I'm getting into in my paper is what is your definition of semi-pro? Obviously their not doing this for a living, but even in the tournaments...you know I went up to the Worthington Tournament and you know Evan Felton got paid for having the highest... he got ten bucks for having the highest batting average as a catcher in that tournament. Garrett got fifty bucks for manager of the tournament. So there's ways to make money even though you're not necessarily playing to make money. So it really enters a gray area.

That's more like prize money really than...salary money.

Yeah, Um...Let's see...So what kind of changes do you remember over the course of...and honestly...this...you're going to think probably more of the professionals but do you remember any big changes in um, regulations, ah or in the field make up anything or, or not make up but the field...well like something...a lot of guys around here before you came ... a lot of the fields were going to grass infields. Rick had installed grass here in Monticello they went away from the skinned infields. Things like that just to give you an example. Yeah, I can't really think of anything I mean...the biggest change obviously was the Cubs moving from the fairgrounds out to the ...

What do you remember about that?

About the move?

Yeah. Do remember much about that.

I think there were mixed feeling about it. I can remember Dale telling me he was real disappointed because he loved the old field...um...and I think well, I think part of it too had to do with ...ah...you know because that's basically school property now so the guys couldn't hang out and have a beer after the game. I think that's probably a big factor. Um, but it's like anything in a small town a big change is...is...a struggle for people sometimes.

Do you know of anything about how teams get their financial backing? How do they pay for their ump's and their uniforms and things like that?

Well I think they do fund raisers. You know the Cubs have a golf tournament and raises some money for them. And we were talking about those tournaments and the prize money and stuff and that is part of what that is. You know those tournaments have a ...you know they pay the winners and stuff. Which is another reason why the good teams get to stay good as they keep winning more money.

Was it similar in Minnesota? Did they have...do similar fundraising?

I think so. Yeah. I know it was always kind of a struggle to get enough money.

Yeah actually I just found...I don't remember where I got it...One of my interviews, I was going back over it and I found a thing...the guy said it takes about three thousand dollars to run the team for the year. Which is a lot of money. You don't think about it you know. But with ump's I mean I know they are cheap. And uniforms and they have to pay for lights and things like that.

Yeah if you got ten guys their each paying three hundred bucks to ...that's hard to justify these days.

Exactly Um, What kind of support do aahh...the cities aahh...offer the teams? Either through fan support or maybe even helping run the diamond or anything like that. And again if you can remember what was going on when you were in Minnesota. Was it similar, different? Was there bigger crowds?

You know I think here it's not real great. I don't think they get... They get lucky if they have ten or fifteen people watching the game. Um, and I don't know...What is Cascade like? Somebody told me Cascade doesn't draw either.

I don't know. I haven't been to a game yet.

Which amazes me because if you want to see a team that wins a lot. Um in Minnesota it's kind of the opposite of maybe what you'd think has been my experience. The suburban teams and stuff and maybe it's just because there's so much to do in those areas. Those teams don't draw well at all, but the littler town teams, the, the games I saw sometimes had pretty good crowds.

Right. That would make sense, you know they don't have a movie theater to go to.

There isn't as much to do so...and they I think they connected more with their...their small town teams up there.

What kinds of problems...In the twelve years you've reported on Cubs or maybe if you remember up there other than teams coming in and out...Do you remember any big problems that the league has had to overcome? Anything that you'd heard about like...and it doesn't have to be something like maybe would make the league fold, but controversies or anything like that? Any big...

I don't remember anything.

Yeah, um let's see where did that go. In your experience do you know was the league ever in danger of failing?

The league itself? I doubt. I don't think so. I think maybe certain teams probably were.

Are there any certain people to your knowledge that are responsible for keeping teams alive? Or the league alive?

I think every team has you know one or two organize...organizing people who are mainly responsible for keeping...you know setting up fund raisers and doing whatever. Dale would have been a big one I'm sure for the Cubs.

What memories do you have of this league or that...the leagues up in Minnesota or specific games? I guess I kind of hit this a little bit earlier. Do you have any specific memories of games, or...you mentioned the guy stealing all the time you know as a kind of a memory, but has there been any big games or tournaments or anything that you covered over the course of your career that stick out?

Aaah...Yeah not really. I guess.

Why do you think that this league, you know Monti... the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League, the Monticello Cubs, even the Prairie League up a little further North...and the teams in the league have been able to stay viable when town baseball teams have faded in other areas? You know you go back a hundred years, almost every team, town had some sort of baseball team. But they all went away. We've got these little pockets, you know and Minnesota has a little stronger statewide organization, but even there it's kind of you know...not every

Spotty

Yeah...It's spotty. Why do you...why do you think that is?

I would guess tradition is probably the biggest thing. You know, one thing that's really neat here is those tournaments. You know the Worthington, Dyersville...Everybody has those big tournaments and it's such a big tradition...um I think people would be really sad if that kind of thing went away. You know Dyersville names a queen.

Do the teams...do the leagues up there have tournaments? Do the teams...does anybody host tournaments like that?

No...well there may be, there may be some. Not to this degree. Not like where there's one every weekend throughout, you know July and August. You know there may be one occasionally. I don't remember that exactly.

It wasn't as big of deal for sure...

But I know there were end of the season tournaments if you're good enough to try to advance and stuff...And it's...you know when you mentioned before about the hiring pitchers and stuff it

brought back something that I hadn't thought about for a long time, but they used to do that up there. That you know if your team was out then they'd start picking guys off of these teams...

I got you...to fill in for the end of the season

Yeah... for these tournaments trying to get to the state tournament.

Was there regulations as far as how many you could pick off for...?

I don't know. I don't know what those were.

Do you know what...I just thought of this when you mentioned like the state tournament and stuff...Was there...Do they go to nationals? Is there...Do they...there's actually...What I've learned is there's two kind of national organizations that are really big and they've both been around for eighty years. One they play their nationals in Wichita and that's been a really big one. And there's one that they used to play in Battle Creek. That's where Dyersville went three years in a row to nationals up in Dyers Creek back in the...or Battle Creek down in the sixties and I don't know if that one still plays in Battle Creek but the organization is still around. I can't remember where they play. Do you know what the Minnesota teams do? If you win state is there something further or don't you remember? I don't remember.

Maybe none of the local teams made it.

No. I don't think I ever covered a team that got that far. So I don't know where they go. I bet if you look at that web site though...

Could probably find out...um...so you think mostly tradition as far as...and the tournaments.

That's probably the biggest reason and you know I think each of these teams wants to keep it going. You know so as guys get older and other...they start recruiting the college kids and stuff to keep it...keep the team strong and...yeah I think as long as those tournaments are there, I think that's kind of a real binding force...that's maybe not the best word but I think that's the thing that ...one of the biggest things that kind of keeps it going.

Okay...last question is...What is you hope or wish for the future of the league? Kind of a loaded question.

I...you know I'd like to see it keep going and stay strong, get stronger. Um, it'd be nice if some other teams kind of came into existence you know Anamosa used to have one and they don't anymore. I'd like to see our Cubs get stronger, get better. Every once in a while...you know this Worthington Tournament...every once in a while they rise up and do something kind of cool. But mostly they're...you know they win about a third of their games and....Yeah I'd just like to see it keep going and get stronger maybe add a couple teams here and there.

Is there anything else you want to add as far...Anything that you think might help me...Something you might remember from Minnesota or something about the Cubs or...that you ...

The one thing I thought of when you were asking me about Minnesota was there was this manager up there for a team called the Eagen Bulls. I don't know if you've heard of the suburb of Eagen? It's south of...It's connected to Burnsville...It's more south of Minneapolis I guess than...His name was Jack Robinson and he was just a character. He was just funny. He would

bring in his results. He would hand write them out for me. You know the whole thing would be every detail about this game. He was so into it and so involved. One time he almost got into a fight with one of his own players and he was writing about that in there and stuff. Um, and he would say things like when the bases were loaded and he'd say the bases were drunk, you know. Just ah, the people I worked with up there you know we used to imitate him and stuff, because he'd always come into the office and "oh it was a barn burner." You know some meaningless game that ended up seven to six or something.

Personal interview with Gary Langel**By Todd Hospodarsky****Date: July 18, 2011****What is or was your connection with the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League?**

I guess I've been involved with it for twenty-five years now. This is ... I'm not really involved with the team on a game-to-game basis anymore. I do announce and keep scoreboard and all of that stuff for all our home games. I still do diamond work...things like that but for the most part I just run our baseball tournament. And I've been doing that for twenty-five years also.

Did you play or anything?

Very limited. I was not a good baseball player as Little League and Babe Ruth. But I always loved the game so much. I did play a lot of softball but my...I guess my inner love was baseball and that's why I came back to be you know more of the administrative part of things as... you know I still played softball but baseball always came first for me once I joined the team back in '87.

And that actually kind of hit on the next question is what years were you involved in the League? You mentioned '87...

Until current. I mean I am still in touch with all the managers and I've never really gotten away from the league. I still go to the league meetings if I can make it and ... I guess...

Are you from Worthington originally?

Yeah I'm originally from a farm near Worthington then I moved to town I think back in '94. So that made it even more convenient because I'm close to the park. And get taken advantage of checking the diamond when it's wet and everything. But you know I've never really been away from the game at all so I say I'm still maybe general manager of the team to oversee the whole operation but Wayne Schnier is the actual field manager.

Um, and how did you become involved in baseball in general and who influenced you?

Well, it's kind of a strange story. When I was a kid, Corn Flakes used to have baseball cards. And that was awesome for me and my little brother to open up a box of Corn Flakes and they were 3-D. I don't know if you know if you've ever seen them. Not the cardboard type but they were actual three dimensional deal. They were only the good players; they called them the 3-D superstar set. So we fought over who got what and then that led to my interest as a baseball fan. And my dad was always a baseball fan but I didn't really start following until I was nine years old. And my neighbor kid, the same age as me was a Cub fan. And he said Cubs are good got to like the Cubs and I came home from his place one day and said "Dad, Ron Santo is good and Glenn Beckert's good." And he said "They're Cubs and you're not going to like the Cubs. You like the Cardinals." I said, "Ok, Who do they got? Bob Gibson, Lou Brock. They got good guys too." So I said "ok I'm a Cardinal fan." So that's how I started and then the semi-pro scene we lived on a farm about two miles from town and even when I was a kid it would be a big treat if our, my dad would bring us...whole carload of kids, eight kids. Not to the games. But park out on the road. We could watch the games from right field in Worthington. So that was always kind of my attraction to...

Why'd he park out there?

So it was free. So we didn't have to watch you know paying ten...ten people to get in. Getting them pop and candy all night. So it wasn't for a whole game but it was for a few innings you know and that's when tournament were big and crowds were big. And then as I got older and got my license just started going to the games. And little-by-little you know I got involved in the administrative end of it.

What can you tell me about, what do you know about the formation and running of the league in general as it is?

How it is now? Or how it started?

Yeah, or either one. You can talk about how it started and ah...how it is now.

Well I can't really remember well how it started. It started like in 1979 or '80 I think somewhere in there because I know my uncle Edward Hermesen from Dyersville was on the original board that started that Eastern Iowa League. And the whole point of it I know he was telling me that it was going to be a night-time league. You had to have lights and it was going to be the local teams. And it was going to be a better league than the Prairie League at that point because it was going to have night games and hopefully it'd draw more fans. And I think their goal has pretty much been accomplished. Those teams are the power teams. Now the Cascades, the Farleys, the Dyersvilles, the Rickardsvilles are pretty much the better teams. And Dubuque now obviously but Bellevue's tough and you know I think the All-Star game is probably a little misleading because it is always close each year so maybe the two leagues are pretty well balanced now. And then as for the current set up you know I guess you know I've been through it for so long I don't really see a lot of changes because they're always gradual. Paul Scherrman has always been the president and Yipe made up the schedules for years and years and he never got them done on time and he screwed up and you had to reschedule everything and they got this guy from Dubuque now Jim Winner did it in like one day's time. Everything was computer done and it was accurate. It was ...that was the way to go. And Yipe is just a procrastinator and the rebel that he is, he'd just want to get them done.

He is as I can attest to that we still haven't gotten that interview done so...Ah let's see, um...What...Maybe talk about the league ...the teams you remember being in the league in the beginning or when you first got um, into it. And the teams that are in it now.

Boy, I don't have old records...I mean I could go through my old books. Because I keep all my old scorebooks from then. I know Lowden used to be in it, Anamosa was for a couple years I think. And it was always a road trip to Lowden. You know obviously the current teams. Dubuque had a couple, I think at one time Dubuque had three teams. They had the Angels, the Pilots, and the Budweisers. And two of them folded and the Pilots were the last of the three and they were run by Tommy Welter. He was an old guy and never could get good players he just, he'd play and he was old and he'd play his kids and they were no good but he kept the team going. And then he just kind of got disgusted because they were not very good really. And ah then, then I think the current Dubuque team started back up like in '92 or '93. And then they started getting studs. Just like when Key West started back up too they got the studs you know they've got the population base to pick from. Um, I know Fayette was in a couple years ago or a couple years, but it was...I don't know it was probably ten maybe fifteen years ago and they were also the Fayette Cardinals and they had grey uniforms exactly like the Worthington Cardinals and they came to Worthington I think one year and I think we went up there one year and we went on a Saturday. And the game was at one I think so we left early in the morning and road tripped up.

We stopped and we had fun and we lost the game ten to nothing but we had beer in the truck that we couldn't wait for it to be over. We stopped at every bar and got more beer. It was probably the best game I ever...our whole group ever had. We still talk about our one road trip to Fayette we had that one Saturday. A lot of wives and girlfriends were upset when we got back. That was before cell phones so there was no contact ...

No contact and you are unavailable.

It was bad. There was some near divorces. Then the next night we had to play in the Cascade tournament. And I know we were all hung over and tired and just really didn't want to be there. We had guys sitting there their heads in their hands and just not even warming up or anything and we won the game four to three. It was fun. That was one for the memory books.

Who were some of the key people in the formation and running of the league? Who have been leaders in the league that just kept things going?

Well, Paul Scherrman's been the president as far as I know, always. I think and I'm not sure about that. Before I came around. Ah...obviously Lenny, because he's been coach and player for all these years so he's been on top of everything and he's a little more low key. Doesn't get too excited about league. And you know all-and-all the league is a nice thing but they...the teams play for the tournaments and league games always get bypassed if there's a conflict for tournaments which is only right. And um you know it's at the end of the year it's a battle to get the league games made up because of rain outs and tournament conflicts and stuff. And then little-by-little August rolls around and the kids lose interest in baseball because their going back to college or football is in the news. The August league games are always tough to make up...make up. And those are the games when I'd have to go in and play. I'd play a little second base or a little third base. I did alright but I could never hit good enough even as a Little Leaguer to compete at that level. So it has been a pretty solid core of the older coaches I call them. You know Steve Olberding from Worthington, he's in the Hall of Fame, he was kind of our field manager a lot of years. He was good. And Randy Olberding ran Dyersville for a lot of years. Marv Meyers ran Dyersville for a lot of years. Um, New Vienna had a really solid program before they folded. They had an older guy named Bob Backensted. He was kind of...they called him "Bulldog." He was just a coarse, cussin' kind of guy. He ran a tight ship and they really good players because he coached them kids all the way through Little League and Babe Ruth and they were good. They had guys that could hit and pitch and they were almost all home grown New Vienna boys. But that whole group of guys all kind of got old at the same time and you know the rumblings were that they were going to fold within two or three years and it pretty much happened the way it did. That was a big loss. The young kids. Well that kind of catch 22. They were so good with so many good players the young kids never got a chance to get in and play and improve and they'd quit and lose interest in baseball and all of a sudden New Vienna had four guys and nobody wanted to manage anymore. And New Vienna was good. They were as competitive as Cascade were in their day. That was kind of sad to see them fall out. Epworth used to be in a few years. We used to have to play league games in the daylight there. They kind of changed the rules for that. And then Cascade the last few years they've been playing a lot of Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon games and that's not the spirit of the rule. And Yipe says it's so we don't have to pay for lights. And I agree I guess you have to change with the times. But we had a double header at home yesterday against Dubuque and started at four and the games got over at eight and it was so damn hot you know and you think what are you doing here? The players are upset and the umpires hate it and ah...I mean you've got to play the games you can't cancel. But we played two at Worthington because they couldn't get their field and um I

think with them winning the Worthington Tournament they won all four that they played plus they won the double header. So they went 6-0 at Worthington in a three week span.

That's, that's pretty good.

You know, it's kind of rare you play six games in three weeks at somebody else's park and won them all. So the league is pretty much on auto-pilot really as long as the schedule gets made, the coaches are responsible enough they'll get the games in one way or another. There's no statistics. The standings are a battle to get out because Lenny keeps track of the standings and he just watches the newspaper. Picks up Worthington lost to Dyersville. Ok that's... At the end of the year if he's missing some results he'll start calling. And ah it's a pretty loosely run operation but it's successful probably just because of that.

Are there any players and coaches, you mentioned some actually already but are there are any other players or coaches that stick out in your mind over the years?

Oh, there are a lot of good players. And I'm kind of caught up in that now being on this Hall of Fame Committee. And actually I've got a sheet I can show it to you here and maybe can make you a copy of that if you want it as well. That is kind of my homework now away from the game is to keep track of these current players that are maybe potential candidates and the players that played back in the day when I was in there. This is a little spreadsheet I made up... It's not a hundred percent accurate or official but ... What it is... I put an X by every player under the year that they played. Because we have guidelines that you had to have played for ten years, you have to be retired for five. So I've gone through all of Richie Napper's scorebooks, all of Lenny Tekippe's scorebooks, and all of my scorebooks for all the years to compile this list. And it was basically it was name recognition for me. If I thought a guy was good that doesn't mean they're Hall of Fame candidate. But every year in the spring when we meet this is where we at least start. We say he played twelve years or fifteen years. And he was average, he was good, but it's at least a starting point because before I got on the board they didn't have access to this kind of information. That took me a lot of time in the winter before that to you know to go through all those books but it was awesome. It was like going down memory lane. Looking at some of them old, old guys like Richie Napper's book started in '69. And some of them I didn't even remember. So you know I might not have been fair, I can only tell if a guy went two for four and three for five in a tournament he probably was pretty good but there's no way I could monitor his regular seasons or his career by going through a few individual scorebooks.

I am just blown away how long some of these guys played.

When you look at guys like Scott Harris, I mean he's like XXXX. And he's still hitting and everybody says well he's a hall of famer. Well yeah, yeah but they got to quit five years.

He's got to retire.

Yeah, So that's one thing I kind of keep handy from time-to-time because it answers a lot of questions even from the observant fan saying "Oh, he's got to be in." I say "No, he hasn't quit for five years." Because we've got a rule... If they play any kind of semi-pro, even this over forty league, over thirty league that Dyersville and Cedar Rapids and all those teams have, it counts against them. That's still considered being an active player.

Um. So are there any teams over the years you remember being especially good? And what, what made them...what separated them from the other teams?

Well, Cascade always was dominant because they just had the talent. They had Jerry Rolling was a lot of those kids's high school coach and he's... his record speaks for itself. And when he went to Wahlert then Yipe took over the high school coaching job there and he also had good players and kept bringing them into the Cascade Reds. So their fundamentally sound, they love the game, they, they weren't dirty players, but they played the game hard. And they're intense. And that's all based on Yipe's personality I think. They were always good because they just had good talent, they had good hitting, good defense but they also had good pitching. Farley's been pretty steady for years and years and years because Paul Scherrman just kind of does...he recruits basically. And he always has a pitching staff. He makes sure he has three or four pitchers so when they get into these tournaments he's not scrambling. And he'll use them like a major league rotation will, where it's his turn regardless if he's rested four days or whatever. They've got it in a rotation.

Where does he recruit them from? Dubuque?

Colleges and you know some of them guys that he's gotten are actually getting older and he recruits them just as pitchers not as players and that helps too when they only have to show up once a week or once every two weeks if they can get enough innings and keep their arms good, he'll... you know he uses them in their rotation. And that's a good thing to have. And I'm not sure, some of these other teams, Lenny, he's always been one to dig up a pitcher anywhere he could get it. He apparently has phone books...and black books and everything and there again before cell phones I bet cell phones have changed the game so much because how easy it is to contact somebody and not only to contact players your bringing in but to contact your team. I mean you send out one text message when you've got a rainout and you're covered instead of calling and leaving messages. And hopefully somebody's not out in the barn and everything else because it's ... I mean, like some of these guys bitch about being there on time and all this-and-that and I said you should have managed when there was no cell phones. There was no access to anybody.

I used to coach softball and you know and rainout was a pain. You know to get ahold of the girls because they'd be out at the pool or someplace. Now with my Little League team you know you send one text like you said...

You can do the opposing manager, you can do the umpire. You get it all in one shot. And most people read them you know constantly so it's not like I hope they get home and check that. Because they've got it on them. But that's ah, some of the others...Rickardsville's always been good. We've had ah, some good tournaments, Rickardsville's been in. It was one year it was Worthington's fiftieth anniversary of their baseball tournament we had set rosters, we just thought we'd try and mix it up so we had set rosters. Fifteen man rosters. And I had all the teams either mail it to me or call them in. So Farley was the last one to call it in and Paul Scherrman was gone so his son Mike called me one night and he started reading them off. You know. Randy Steffen, Dean Steffen, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, the last one he says is Mitch Williams. And I kind of laughed and I said yeah Mitch Williams from the Cubs I suppose? And he didn't say nothing so I wrote down Mitch Williams. So about two days later Scott Harris called me and he said "I assume you got my roster right?" I said, "yeah." He said that Mitch Williams is Mitch Williams of the Cubs. He said but you've got to guarantee me something because our tournament starts on Thursday. It goes Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Farley was going to play the fourth night. So there was the risk of rain. I said we're going to put you on Sunday because we're going to

advertise and promote the shit out of this to get some people there. So we got all three of our first nights in because Lenny was all over me. They were going to play Rickardsville. He said you know if you get rained out, your poster says rained out games will be played the next night. So he said if they get rained out Saturday that means you're playing Sunday. I said Lenny it's my tournament, I'll do whatever I want. Because he didn't want to play Mitch Williams and he knew it was a one night shot. So we got our first three nights in and everything was great. There's no issues here we just got to hope it don't rain Sunday. Sunday at noon it just poured. But we knew it was coming so we went up to Dyersville to Farmtek and bought a bunch of cheap plastic visqueen, laid it all over the whole dirt infield, covered it up and it rained and rained and rained and all of a sudden the sun started popping out at four o'clock and we called the radio station and said the Worthington Tournament is still on. It's on, Mitch Williams is going to pitch for Farley. We put her on there and I thought God I hope it's not too late. I hope people didn't give up on this thing because the rumor was out. I mean it was...people knew about this. So we got...it was a muddy mess to get everything done and all the tarps rolled up and I got done with the diamond about six and the game started at seven. I was just mud and wet and I had to go home and shower and I come back about fifteen minutes later and the cars were parked like out by the highway where and this is going to happen. And I got there and the crowd just kept coming and coming and coming. They said we had three thousand fans there that night. That was in '99 so that was...and we went through...it was a Sunday night and we went through thirty-five kegs of beer and food you wouldn't believe and it was, it was an awesome night. So, he got shelled he only lasted two innings, yeah. He was wild and ah, he couldn't field two bunts and Rickardsville kept bunting and stealing off him and the end of that night you know I was so glad it was over. And then he stood around and signed autographs for the kids and it was really a good...

How the heck did they hook up with him though?

Scott Harris is the golf cart guy so he's got connections with a lot of celebrities like Brett Favre and just different guys so at the end of that night you know...the next night was an off night so I was glad we didn't have to do anything, no more pressure. I went and cleaned up or raked up the mound after...Monday night I went down there and the hole that Mitch Williams was landing in it was that deep and I said this is... We've got a real shitty mound or that guy's got some immense drive out of his legs for his landing foot to be digging a hole that deep.

Maybe both.

Could be. You know he was...he was throwing hard. Yeah, he was throwing hard. So that was pretty special deal you know with our tournament that night.

How do...If you remember from Worthington. How do teams get their players? You know you've talked about you know like Paul recruiting and things like that but just the general townies?

Well the most I guess first option for Worthington has always been the local kids and through the years when I was still involved heavily we got mostly local kids. A few Dyersville kids with friends that played for Worthington that weren't quite good enough for Dyersville. We had some Petersburg kids after Petersburg team folded. They were a good nucleus. We had three or four Petersburg guys. And then little-by-little then quit. Newer Worthington kids came up out of Babe Ruth and high school. They weren't as good and they weren't as dedicated. And within the last three of four years we couldn't compete. They just simply weren't good enough. They were not college players and some of them were border line high school players. So then Wayne Schnier our current manager had to start reaching out...going to Manchester who has had good

programs over the years. So some Dubuque college guys and stuff like that...so...and it's been a battle. Last night we had a double header against Dubuque, we had three MV high school kids playing just to keep enough guys so it sad to say Worthington has no Worthington born kids on that team anymore. I'm there, I'm a home grown boy. Wayne Schnier is the manager, he was born and raised in Worthington but moved to Dubuque and his son plays so that's really the only connection there is for Worthington. So I think that is part of the problem. Attendance is down because fans just say "I don't know any of them guys. Why would I come and watch a bunch of strangers?" So the fans that do come to the Worthington Tournament when Worthington plays its more of a social event now. You stand around, drink beer, eat popcorn and talk to your people you might only see a couple times a year. Dyersville has...should have the best new players of anybody, they've got Beckman pumping out seniors that graduate and they can't ever get enough guys. They, They had ah, Freddy Martin made the hall of fame here two weeks ago. His banquet induction banquet was on Friday night when Dyersville played at Rickardsville and they were the second game that night Tommy Martin, his son called me and said can you switch Fred to be the first speaker of the night? And ah, because I've got to go play ball at Rickardsville, we've only got eight guys. I said you've got to be kidding how can you only have eight guys for a tournament? And he said..."I called and called and called. I can't find anybody." Well I kind of thought, I'm not going to bend over too much because you should be able to have at least ten guys there on a Friday night. And he shouldn't miss his dad's induction ceremony. I said the agenda is already set up. It's going to be contributors, the umpire and then the players. I said the most I can do is switch him to be the first of the three players. And that's what we did. And as soon as Fred was done with his speech Tommy ducked under the lights and walked out of there and drove twenty minutes to get to Rickardsville to play ball and he was their ninth guy. And then that scares me. These teams aren't getting enough guys. Whether they are looking for too much quality? You know the little teams like Placid and Worthington and some of those teams that aren't as good. They've still got the guys, they can't compete but they're keeping it going. To me that's more important than winning tournaments and everything. You know if our tournament was over three weeks ago we grossed \$9,100 for an eight night tournament. And if you take that income away from...because there's no town team, that ruins the Little League, it ruins the girls softball, it ruins any kind of improvements for that park. Once you lose a tournament you probably never get those dates back. So it's very important to me to keep that thing going and going strong and respectable.

Do you guys just...while we're on it, because I've talked to Sue obviously about Worthington so I kind of know how it's run with the Little League teams and stuff...Do you guys run and I don't remember I may have asked you this but I don't remember. Do you guys have like little kids tournaments too?

Yeah, we have a Little League tournament every year right before ours. And that's amazing the crowds that they bring in. And they've never had good luck with weather. It always, always rains in that week. Last year we have some really good Little League parents involved now, they said let's get a tarp. We're tired of screwing around with this. So we went and bought some heavy duty tarp with some tape that tapes sections together instead of buying one solid major league tarp. We took the cheap route and spent like nine hundred bucks and bought this heavy duty tape to tape the four big sections together and we got a piece of farm tile from somebody and we can roll it up and fold it up, park it along the left field fence and we've saved I bet ten games in the last two years by using our tarp. It takes a lot of work, it's dirty, it's wet, but it saves the games and it keeps you on schedule.

How do you guys do the mound with Little League?

It's just in play. We don't cover it. We don't do anything. Second base is like right behind it. So there's some base hits that kind of ricochet up off the mound but that's the way it's always been. We've talked about building, you see the farmer next it on third base, in that cornfield...he's talked about donating the field and turning it into a softball field but that's low. It's really a low mud hole. We'd have to put a lot of dirt in it plus we'd have to configure the bleachers, the concession, and put lights up. You know it'd be a costly, costly project considering the stability of all the programs. You know I hate to be a naysayer but it would be a risky thing to do. Right now we don't currently have an "A" team because there just aren't enough kids in town. You know our grade school; our catholic grade school is open down there. It's got like sixty kids in it and the numbers just simply aren't there to form an "A" team right now. And Babe Ruth has been real shaky the last few years just because kids either like baseball enough to go out for high school or they just quit completely. So Babe Ruth is kind of the breaking point anyway. And we don't have a Babe Ruth team either this year. And I can see that probably won't be back because they either like it, they're going to move on to another level or play in a different town or they'll go out for Beckman or West Dubuque.

I guess you kind of hinted at this when you talked about the Cubs pitcher but are there players that ever jump from team to team or hire out, that type of thing?

Oh yeah, there was ah...back years ago, tournaments were big things. You would hire pitchers for the first round game and it was a pretty select group. There was guys named Mike Ungs, and there was a Randy Johnson that was good and John Ackerman, he really never hired out much but he was Farley's ace ringer. That guy got released from AAA ball. I don't know if you've talked to any of Farley guys about this...

Just Paul is the only guy from Farley.

He never mentioned him?

He may have, I don't remember. He was one of my early ones...

That was the best pitcher I've ever seen in person. That guy could throw hard, he was intimidating. And he got released from the Giants AAA team back in '86 or '85 somewhere in there because he supposedly took a bat to a teammates knee. He got blackballed out of baseball. And he came into the semi-pro area, he's from Cassville, Wisconsin, so he was pretty local. And he was dominating. I think he won twenty games one year. You know in a short semi-pro season. That guy was tough. I...one time I said I want to bat off him not being a hitter at all. I couldn't even see it basically. He threw hard and he was intimidating, big, like 6'4". The guy was tough. I wish you would have had the opportunity to see him or I wish more people would talk about him because that guy was as good as I've ever seen. There are other pitchers that were good in their day and they basically jumped to where the money was.

So it was usually pitchers though?

Yeah mostly pitchers. Sometimes they'd bring a catcher. Sometimes they'd say they want their own catcher because you don't want to go to a Placid or Worthington team and they don't have someone who can handle you. So sometimes they would bring a catcher.

What would be typical payment?

Seventy-five was pretty common. Dave Schenk, I'm sure you've heard of him, he still charges. He charges a hundred and Balltown gets him most of the time so I don't think they can afford to

pay him a hundred for every game but he charged us last year a hundred and twenty-five in the semi's. No it was second round because we wanted to win to get into the semi's. And he hits so that gives you a little more bang for your buck. He can hit. He can play short on the nights he's not pitching. But as he's gotten older he's been less effective and probably less in demand too. But he was always a guy who got hired. Because he was where's Schenk going to show up? A lot of times he'd hold out in the first rounds to see what teams would be wanting him most too.

What kind of changes do you remember in the field or maybe regulations over the years?

Boy not much. Fields have all been pretty much the same. Some new dugouts maybe and you know we've improved our park. New backstops and new outfield fences. Rickardsville did make theirs bigger. Rickardsville used to be a real, real short left field porch and then they added a whole bunch dirt out there in left I think and extended their left field fence pretty much back to regulation. Dyersville's got you know the odd configured park the way it is. They used to have the football field in there where it'd have the square corner in left-center. When the football field moved to Beckman they kind of rounded that but it's still got the deep, deep area out there in left center. Farley is a perfect symmetrical park. Cascades always been the same, you know there pretty much. New Vienna when they were a semi-pro team, they had a real, real short right field because there was a creek right behind it. They raised the fence like up to thirty feet high so that made it interesting.

Sort of like the Green Monster.

Yep. That is what is was in right field. I can't think of any. Monticello you know when we played down here at the fairgrounds, that was bad. That field was always, the infield was so bad. I still liked playing there because you park your car right behind the dugout and you sit on this wooden stage when you're getting ready and we played a lot of games here for the fair game. Because Worthington was always a good draw and you got sixty bucks if you lost and ninety if you won. So it was a no lose situation. Right up to the beer tent every time. One time we had to play in the semi-finals in Cascade the same afternoon as we had to play in the Monti fair. We won so we won ninety bucks so we said well we ain't going right home but we're going to have a few beers. Not too much so we're going to drink half of it. Well half turned into a little more than half and we come driving into Cascade laughing and oh boy it wasn't good. We didn't embarrass ourselves but we weren't sharp. We got beat in the semi-finals and there were some players that weren't at the Monti fair that showed up sober and on time and the rest of the team came stumbling in. That wasn't a real good deal but...

Yeah I heard the fair games were a good time but that was before my time.

Oh, a lot of pick up players you know guys...it was a work day and a lot of guys would say well my cousin used to play let's get him. We had fun. I got play in those a lot too just to play

Did they get a good crowd usually?

Not much at all. It was just like an exhibition. And I think that's why they quit having it. Nobody really watched it. But we had a lot of fun times down there on that field. Then they moved out here and it's just really generic. You know it's really a new park with no personality yet. And I love the Monti guys, I know them and just their park. It also hurts the night of tournaments. You can establish a reputation or a personality to a park compared to showing up once a year in a league game. Because everyone says they love our park. They love the picnic table, they love the food and it's all close.

Free peanuts is awesome.

Free peanuts. That got mentioned last night even by the Dubuque guys. So they got a kick out of that.

Ah, let see....Um, actually while we're talking about fields, do you in your knowledge, do the teams have their own fields? I know in Monticello they share with the schools, but um and I know you guys from talking with Sue share it with the city with Little League. What about the other towns?

I'm not really sure who's...who does what. I know Farley has what they call a park board and that's just a board of people that run the park and tournaments and stuff and it's not always baseball people. And to me sometimes that shows up when you have tournaments when you have non-baseball people running it. Dyersville is the Dyersville Commercial Club. And you know they put on a tournament as far as I'm concerned it is the worst run tournament. They have nobody that knows what's going on, they have people running the beer stand just because their on a board, and um, you know their big thing is their fireworks and they have the third of July fireworks. That's when they make their money. The baseball thing that used to be Dyersville's whatever they called it the granddaddy of them all or something I don't know. But it's so poorly run it's just... and I've announced up there and helped out quite a bit over the years because it's just they can't find anybody to help or keep book, calling the games, just for example, last week the all-star game, everything is a rush there because the players are arriving late and the managers don't know who plays where so getting the books is a major obstacle. Getting the order, get the uniform numbers down, know what teams they play for. And five minutes before the game I hollered out to the Dyersville Commercial Club President and said where's your National Anthem music? Because it was time, the color guard was out there and he goes I never thought of that. I think God Damnit.

It's one of those important things.

And I've got a Blackberry that died on me that had four different versions of the National Anthem but I had a replacement phone that night so I didn't have my National anthem with me or I would have played it. So they talked two of the color guard guys to sing it just with a cordless mike Which ...and they did good, they were fine but to be just that unprepared. So that's that, um, and the tournaments kind of determine to me how well programs are run. When you go to a Rickardsville Tournament it's run pretty well, pretty organized. I like to think ours is. Farley's is for the most part. And um Cascade's is always pretty good too because they've got Richie Napper involved and he's kind of like me for Worthington you know he was not a player he was just an administrative guy and he coached throughout the years and stuff like that and they do it right. Plus they've got such a good tradition down at cascade too and that makes a big difference if you got that tradition so you know it's ah, I'm probably the veering off the question.

No that was fine I was just talking about the ... ah, what was I talking about? Fields.

Yeah, Yeah, and um the commercial club is owned by the field itself is owned by the Dyersville Commercial Club and I think they rent that out for Beckman I think that's their agreement and um the White Hawks play there but I don't believe there's any other Babe Ruth games there or anything down there. Um, Farley we covered. Cascade is owned by the American Legion post I think and they do their thing. and I don't know how they do maintenance and grounds keeping at any of these parks. Well, I know Dyersville hires. They pay somebody to do theirs after their games which is something we could never afford and we've never had to do because we just had a lot of volunteers and coaches and players who'd do it. So, you know I think the smaller the

town the more local help, volunteer players, parents, and type of stuff you're going to get compared to the big towns. I'm sure Dubuque's coaches and players aren't out raking the mud and stuff before games. I'm sure they've got someone hired from the city that does theirs. But I've never really asked a lot them about it because I guess I don't care as long as the fields ready when we get there I don't know who is in does it down here... at the track.

That's a good question I don't know if it's ...

Does Ben Eastburn? Does he ...

I don't know. That's a good question.

I think Ben Eastburn told me once that he did that for high school games at least I'm not sure if you does it for the semi-pro.

I don't know if you does it for the semi pro or if garrett has to go out there and do it. that's a good question. I didn't think... I don't think I even asked Dale that when I interviewed Dale.

Yeah, you know it's something that have to be done but it's really taken for granted how much time and how much work it is especially if there's weather issues.

Right, I know Rick Westhoff talked about when his dad was managing back in the fifty's you know riding around on the tractor when is dad was dragging and stuff. Let's see where...where and you can maybe focus on Worthington if you don't know about the other groups but where do teams and the league get the financial backing who pays for the umps, players, field?

Well, we're all pretty much self-supporting in Worthington because what we take in in the tournaments and the little league tournament and then just a regular league games. That has to pay for the lights, got to pay for the umpires, and you know the food and beer that you buy, but it also pays for the uniforms, and the bats, and the balls for all the organizations. So even if our tournament brings in nine thousand bucks...we're not going to spend nine thousand just on our end. It gets passed along to whoever needs it. And it's a fair agreement it's always been that way, I don't see any reason they'll ever change it. I don't know how the other teams really do that, but you know the Commercial Club that's they get the money if they charge gate for a tournament they get the money. There's even been some issues there with their president and team manager this year because they wanted new uniforms that was at the beginning of the year when the Whitehawks were losing. And they told him you ain't getting no new uniforms until you start winning some games. He said better yet you aren't getting no money. you win the tournaments, you keep the tournament money and they haven't placed in a tournament since then either.

That's going to be a quick way to kill a team.

So there's friction. You know money is... it shouldn't be that big of a deal. You know when you have a tournament everybody should come home with enough to get into them to the next year I think. Because umpires aren't cheap but my God you don't have to buy new uniforms every year like a lot of these teams seem to do.

It seems that way in high school too, I've noticed. Um, what kind of support do cities that hosts the teams offer? Are there some cities that are more supportive fan wise?

The city of Worthington, well actually. I have an advantage there because I was on the city council for thirteen years along with being on the athletic board. So I could steer the ship kind of

whichever way I wanted to. If ah, and we could sit down and write an ordinance as to who takes care of what at the park and I don't believe I've got that ordinance but it's something I refer to a lot. That the athletic association they...they do replacements on the, the bases, and the bats, and the balls, and the equipment, and the stands, and you know the PA system. They'll do any work regarding the infield like grading the infield or reseeding the edges or whatever. The city does the outfield grass because that's always been the city's responsibility to mow and roll the grass. They will replace fencing they will do electrical work. If the breaker box goes to hell they'll do that but we buy the light bulbs. So it's kind of a similar arrangement as a tenant and a landlord have. Only we have it...and when I was on city council we had meeting after meeting after meeting writing down these responsibilities. Who is paying for what?

I'm sure that's important to get that laid out so there's no confusion...

It is. I mean it's got to be in black and white. Because you're going to have different leaders in city government as well as athletic councils and you have to have something in black and white. And like I said I refer to it a lot. But I pretty much know from having dealt with it all these years you know if they say the left field pole isn't going on, we've got to do something. I say, I'll call the city because that's their deal, when it's electrically related then it's obviously going to cost way more than a little athletic association can do. And there are many projects in Worthington at least that we've just gone 50-50 just to get along and work together. New bleachers, new announcing booth, we've put up a lot of new stuff lately. And they try for grants from the dog track. If they get it then there we'll split the difference 50-50 so it helps everybody out. And it keeps our park current anyway.

How about fans? Do ...like the draw you mentioned a little bit that like Worthington now it doesn't have a lot of Worthington guys so they don't draw very well. Are there towns you know like Cascade who has maybe more hometown kids do they draw better.

They drew pretty well in our tournament but they got knocked out in the second round and that was disappointing because I thought they'd bring a lot the final weekend if they were in the semis and championship or consolation so we set up our pairings according to the local teams winning and moving on. Farley, Cascade, Dyersville we always take care of them. And if they lose it's reflected in the crowds. But luckily for us Dubuque brought a lot of people the last two nights. Even last night's game they had twenty-five people on a 95 degree Sunday afternoon. Yeah, I'm impressed with Dubuque how well their fans travel. A lot of girlfriends and boyfriends or girlfriends and kids and parents and stuff come. Which is...we'll take anybody. As long as they buy some beer and popcorn and a couple sandwiches.

Do you guys charge admission for a league game?

No. Nobody does. No one charges and I don't think you ever will see that because people will say screw it I'm not going in then.

And there so few people anyway it wouldn't...

Right it wouldn't be worth having a gate keeper waste their time for two hours you know until things unfolded.

Um, what...maybe you don't know of any but do you know of any problems that the league has had to overcome over the years? Any...any obstacles, hurdles?

Oh the scheduling thing is a sore spot with a lot of coaches at the beginning but that always gets remedied real fast. You just get it straightened out. You know you have the typical umpire issues.

There was one probably twenty years ago where Terry McDermott was the umpire's name and he was not a good umpire, he wasn't well liked but he got hired a lot because he was available. And one night Yipe was pitching up and New Vienna and he had taken his final warm-up pitch of an inning or something. And he either through it right over his head against the backstop or something to that effect. And Terry McDermott you know he wrote this big letter and I think I have that in my book too.. that I'm resigning unless the league takes action against Mr. Weber. Oh there were also some drinking concerns that night too if some in a Cascade players were drinking. That's what... Because New Vienna played Cascade and I know Pete Welling was New Vienna's catcher and he said he could smell it on the first couple guys that came up. And there again it was a late August league game where they're tough to get in and the interest isn't there and there was a huge rivalry between them two. It was huge. New Vienna had a guy that was probably one of the best ball players all around I've ever seen it was Ronnie Wentwer. The guy could hit, he could pitch, he could play infield, he could do anything. And he made it look easy but he was dumb as a post and he didn't care he just... he was a natural. And he just the guy was good but he didn't he could've done better he shouldn't have been playing around here and him and Yipe didn't get along at all. And they were both managers of their teams for a while. And there were bean ball wars. Insinuations about everything and there was, it was great for baseball because those drew good fans. Those kind of games. So one night I was announcing at the Dyersville Tournament when those two were going to play in the championship. And they were,,, they hated each other and I went down to flip coins you know in the first game so they be ready to go in the second game. And Ronnie didn't say nothing and Yipe said let's just keep it clean Ronnie. So the first guy up for ah... I forget... Cascade was batting I think. Yeah, Cascade was batting. The first guy up, New Vienna pitcher hit him right in the back first pitch. And oh boy both benches were just electric by that point. This is the championship of the Dyersville Tournament. I remember that one pretty well.

What year would that have been?

Oh boy, I'd have to go through my books again. I would say early ninety's maybe somewhere in there. Yeah that's when baseball New Vienna had good, good players. I mean they were very competitive and... and they were both evenly matched it's just that any given night anybody could win.

Um, let's see... in your opinion has a league ever been in danger of failing? We've talked about teams that have died.

That's a good question. No, I think about that a lot. It's...it's always steady or one gains or one drops and you got your backbone teams that are always there. And there's been a few teams that came and went. Who was the last one up north...Marquette on McGregor one of them. They, Marquette, they only lasted two years. Too much of a drive, too far. I think it was like Fayette and Lowden too far out of the area. Cedar Rapids was actually in it for several years. That was run by Jim Eckert who used to be a sports writer for the Gazette. He had it probably, I don't know ten years maybe and he was dedicated he brought the guys they got there early, they did it alright. But little by little it started going away. And then he got let go by the Gazette a couple years ago when they downsized all the sports staff and then I think of that point he said I can't be chasing around to Worthington, Iowa for Sunday league games either anymore. But he was, he was a good coach. I mean he did it the right way.

Do you think having the prairie league so nearby even if maybe the teams aren't as good gives you like a backup if you lose a team, you've got somebody...

Oh it helps immensely because a lot of teams play in both leagues. So you know I'd say some day is going to merge and the whole works will just be whatever. And that will be fine as long as they can get all their number of games in. But you know the way it is now, it doesn't matter if Worthington would go play on a Sunday afternoon at Placid because there is no lights. And I'm sure Placid would love coming to Worthington to play a Thursday night league game under the lights. So I could see it happening sooner probably rather than later. They'll merge. And it's a lot of tiny teens so it's just a matter of...are you going to have divisions or if you're going to play each other once or twice or whatever. But you've still got to keep the integrity of the league somewhat intact too. You don't want to have every game be like an exhibition. But it would... it might make some of them better. If they play tougher competition all the time too.

Um, We're getting close to the end here. Are there certain people to your knowledge responsible for keeping the league alive? People that made sure that it was going to....

I don't think it was never in danger of folding but with the guys that I mentioned, Paul Scherrman, Lenny, myself probably a little bit just to keep the programs strong in itself is the main thing. Its... it's like I said it's on autopilot it just amazes me every year February, March rolls around you don't hear much. All of a sudden the schedules come out it's cold, it's windy and you've got your first game somewhere and teams show up with twelve guys in uniform ready to play ball. I think that's just kind of a rite of spring that it's ...there's still enough love for the game that the players are going to be there and be responsible to show up. Granted it's not the same as it used to be where there was a lot of fan following... um. The players don't stick around afterward like they use to. I have had more friendships formed after the games from opposing players and umpires then in any other environment that I've ever been in. And I talk to a lot of them even to this day at games yet. And you know once you leave the game that's when you realize how good the people were that you played against. Not necessarily players but just good people. And I run into that a lot. And people always...everyone calls me "Lang" because that's short for Langel. "Hey Lang how you doing? Hey five" you know everybody remembers my number and to me you know that's pretty special. The people remember you for even me being a non-player and a nothing really. So it's, it's been a pretty good run.

Um, You've mentioned a couple of these already. If you got any more that pop up, but what kind of memories do you have of the league or specific games played? You've kind of already mention that with Mitch...

Well Worthington was never really a league contender or anything. I think one year we made the playoffs. In all my years we've won two tournaments and they were both pretty cool experiences. But league games themselves were always kind of secondary. Kind of a nuisance in a way because you had to get the diamond ready, you had to call umps. And it's they were always fun once a game gets over and you drank beer. Because our league games were always on Thursdays and Sundays and most teams were years ago. But then they kind of change their dates and stuff and um I liked you know our league games because they were always a good way to start the weekend and end the weekend with our home games and um there's ah. I had a million friends or teammates I guess I should say that we got along like brothers. We played as hard as we could and our goal was always to get the young kids, the local kids in on those league games because we might not always get them in in all the tournament games. And they got in you know and they got to feeling comfortable with the guys. And I'd hate to see guys quit because they didn't get to play nine inning league games. So we didn't throw the games by any means but you also wanted

to make sure that everybody got in and got some at bats. And then after the games we sit down and drink beer and eat popcorn and the stories would get longer as the night went on. And the memories of... not necessarily league games but just after the game themselves are amazing. And that's what concerns me most is these kids nowadays and maybe it's because the drinking age is too high. Because it's twenty-one and it used to be eighteen where everybody, if you played you drank beer. Now they probably drink beer but they've got to get out of town and go to some house or something. That probably contributed to that but that's when the friendships were formed was sitting around those picnic tables and stuff like that and meeting the other teams and all that. You know like from Monticello for example I know Hanken really well, I know Dale really well and Spensley used to play. Other than that you know these young kids seem like nice kids but I see their face and that's really all I know of them because they don't stick around and introduced themselves a little bit and get to know them... you know show their personality a little. So it's maybe it's as good as it always was and I'm just getting old too I don't know. I'm fifty years old now and their twenty so maybe that's the difference. That's not quite my age bracket anymore.

Um, why and how has this league, the Eastern Iowa and the prairie league too or the teams in this area been able to stay viable when town baseball teams have faded in other areas? You know so many teams have failed

That's a good question. I think it's because baseball is so strong in eastern Iowa. You know it's like a tradition in the summer and it gives people something to do in the summer. And if the kids are playing baseball from Little League on up that's what you do in the summer. It's probably not as strong as it used to be. And I know the kids aren't playing as many years as they used to. I mean you've got guys quitting when they are 28-29 years old to be in golf leagues. And I hate to see that because sometimes they haven't even reached their peak yet. And also you know the good college players they maybe had their fill. They've played competitive ball for four years and spring baseball is tough. It's cold, it's intense every game every day. Then maybe all of a sudden the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League rolls around it doesn't seem quite so important to play those two nights a week. And you know they've got to get a job that's the main thing they've got to work and be in the area because you nobody really sticks around the area as much as they use to I think that's part of the problem with the players you know getting enough players too. You know I hope everything continues I hate to see teams fold. I definitely don't want to see tournaments fold. And I think the leagues are both pretty intact. That doesn't say that they're great leagues or anything but just watching that all-star game the other night there was pretty good baseball being played there. And whether just because of the moment you know the atmosphere in the crowd. Or they're just really good ball players all playing in an all-star game is that's what I hope it was.

Who ended up winning anyway?

The Eastern Iowa league won 3 to 2 or 4 to 3. It was one of the last innings I've got that book here. 4 to 3.

What is your ...this is the last question unless you come up with lots of other things you want to say. What is your hope and wish for the future of the league? You kind of touched on it earlier.

Hopefully it continues I...I hope there's more participation by players that you get these guys that want to play. Not one or two years and then don't like it. I want them to make it ten year gig when they start playing. Where you can build a team once. You know Worthington goes through these young guys. They come and go. There's no identity you can't remember uniform numbers you

got to track down uniforms. I just want the players not just Worthington but for all the towns to become more solid than they use to. You know I've talked to some of these hall of fame guys. And I've got a program and all that for that. And they say man we always had twelve guys there every night they were there. There was no questions asked. You were at the games. There was no question whether they were going to be late. There again it was before cell phones you got no way of contacting them and I think it's just a different world we live in that everything so flexible now anymore. To miss a game is not a big deal. I mean it just used to just kill me to miss a game for whatever reason. Because that's... that's my team you know. I've got to be there then that's the other thing that disappoints me is the lack of help that the players give during our tournament. If they win the first game sure they'll be back for the second but boy if they lose the second you're done with them. The next six nights they won't be back. I find that very frustrating because I said over and over its not my tournament is the Worthington town team's tournament. And I don't have time to run down and rake the mound and announce all these awards and all this stuff. And you guys are sitting at home. That's the only...you only have to work like three or four nights that you're not playing. Just be there and follow your tournament. Because I bet half the guys on that team I could ask who won the tournament. They wouldn't know. And that's a shame. It's...It's.. I'm sure that's another thing the other night at that all-star game the players did good it was a good game. It was hot night they all go up and the old-timers came down to get the formal introduction on the field. And I was down on the field handing out the plaques. And I look up and there's maybe ten players left. I thought that's the least they could do was show some respect to these guys that are getting inducted into the hall of fame. And give them a little round of applause. And they were like oh it's hot, I got to get out of here. Yeah, not all of them but a lot of them. And I think that's disrespectful but that's also the sign of our society. You know something else better is always going on. It's such a fast paced world anymore.

Personal interview with Pat Weber
By Todd Hospodarsky
Date: July 25, 2011

Pat is or was or has been your connection with the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League?

Well my connection started in 1984, that's when I started as a player and then two years later I basically became the manager of the Cascade Reds at the age of twenty. And I probably managed for fifteen years...for...I managed for four years before Vernon Simon took over for a couple years. And then after he left I took back over again until the current manager Loras Simon. So that's a span of twenty-eight years. Probably in those twenty eight years I managed eighteen of them. And then the connection with the league I've been the league secretary in both leagues as far as the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League goes and the Prairie League for probably a dozen years here now. Ah, just relinquishing the Prairie League Secretaryship here this fall or this spring so I'm just the current secretary of the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League.

How'd you become involved in baseball in general and who influenced you in baseball?

You know I'd say it's more of growing up a Cascade type of thing as far as influence. I mean I never had a brother... older brother who played baseball and my dad really never you know took me to baseball games or anything like that. It was kind of just an inherited thing from the neighborhood and little league and ah, basically coming and watching semi-pro baseball. Because the biggest memory I have ...because... the one thing I looked forward to as a kid was coming to the semi-pro tournament that Cascade holds with this being the 65th year...you know I've been coming to it since you know I was ten years old you know and I'm forty five now so I've seen a lot of it, and a lot of it you know I've chased foul balls...I've sat inside the fence on a box and you know there were three or four of us hired to chase foul ball all night so that was exciting you think you're actually watching you know professional baseball players play. You know little did you know that they're basically you know people who had the passion that I do today back in then. You know to continue. It's kind of funny as kid watching some guys would bring up and use steel bats and then some guys would come up and they'd use wood bats in the same game and that's one thing that always confused me. And I always admired the guys... I always like watching the guys who used wood bats. You know two guys who stick out in my mind...one was Paul Kurt, uh Merlin Simon, Irwin Simon those two guys. I mean because Merlin Simon always had the nicest bat you know and I was always hoping that he would break it so I could get it. You know when I was a kid. Basically what'd happened, you take it home put a couple nails in it and tape it up you know so that was you know my memory there...and you always wanted to emulate those guys. Not that you were trying to emulate professional baseball players sometimes, but for me it was the semi-pro players. I could remember them and I could definitely remember some of the pitchers when I sat on the box and hear them pitch and their balls sizzled in there. You know, guys like Ed Sawville and Mike Ungs. You know guys that people still talk about today you know if you talk to you know people...that...connected with the semi-pro leagues for thirty years. Those two guys stand out still today as far as throwing in this tournament. So...

You mentioned some people there, but who are some of the key people in the running of the league? Um, you mentioned you are the secretary, but who have been leaders of the league keeping things going?

Oh, well with me being the secretary you know the two key people have been the presidents of both leagues, Frank Dardis you know in the Prairie League and Paul Scherrman in the Eastern

Iowa Hawkeye League. You know... Those... those two guys you know... you... you know we might have had our battles on the field and stuff but you still have to respect them for what they've done for the game off the field because they don't do it for any pay or any glory really. They just do it because they have the same passion as a lot of, ah, handful of people in each of these communities do. You know to keep it going, it's a thankless job at times but... it... it can be very rewarding you know by the same token because you know when people from outside these communities recognize and see this sport you know that it's hard ball. You know they think wow, you know it's... it's not softball, and it's organized and you play in beautiful parks. You know but those two guys I would... you know commend the most, but there's one person in each community you know whether it'd be Lenny Tekippe in Rickardsville, Gary Langel you know in Worthington, ah, you know in Cascade it's always been a group of people you know, not myself but Richie Napper, Mike Gale, I mean it's been a lot of people involved in each community that's kept it going. You know yeah maybe you could single out one guy but it's still... it's a... it's a group effort you know. It's really tough to single out... but those two guys have been the only presidents in both leagues. So... not... not in the Prairie League because the Prairie League is much older but in the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League, Paul Sherman's been the only president.

Um, You mentioned a couple good players, are there any teams over the years that you remember being especially good? I know Cascade itself was good there... I don't know whatever year that McDermott wrote that article for the Times.

Ah, You know as a kid yeah definitely you know I can remember watching the Dyersville White... I guess to go from what I have witnessed, you know the years I've watched semi-pro baseball, um... The Dyersville Whitehaws in the early eighties were a very dominant team. I mean they were a team that would loose you know, less than ten games each summer. And they would win five, six tournaments a summer it would seem like. I knew the Cascade Reds would play them tough but you... you... if Cascade would beat them it would be a 5-4, 4-3, but you know the times I've seen, the Whitehaws at that era you know they pretty much were very dominant. But then all of a sudden you know once one guy quit, Tom Jenk Sr. quit managing that team just collapsed. You know... so... that was a team where... yeah it was built. They went out and replaced people with people from out of town quite a bit. You know they were the only team that sticks out. You know the Farley Hawks one summer when... you know when they I don't know they lost four or five games at most and won almost... you know 57 wins and they won every tournament around except a couple. So that, that was a very dominant team. And they were dominant for a long time. They were always... you know they had... they had a couple of pitchers, regular pitchers on that team that were very difficult to beat on any given night. So... and then you know, not to be biased by any means but you know I felt that the Cascade Red team that I played on... was a part of for the last... for the last decade for me witnessing semi-pro baseball I mean... not... you can't say it was the greatest team because you don't play each other. But it was the most successful team that was ever in this era... in this area at its time. You know because of what they accomplished you know. You go 64-1 in a season you know, I don't care what it is, it's pretty impressive. And ah, it wasn't... I mean it wasn't like we went out and won by ten runs, eight runs, nine runs, I mean we won probably eight games by one run that year. So, and as the season went on you know it gets bigger... I mean it became more difficult and more difficult ah, to go out and be at the top of your game. But it was all... it was a very talented team you know and I was very fortunate to be able to play and be a part of it and pitch on it, but as far as success goes that... that team will always stand out. Arguably... the most successful team there is. You know you're never going to... you can say what you want as far as talking to somebody else... well this team in the sixties was better than this team in the nineties you know. You can

argue until the sun comes up on things like that. But you know as far as success, if you're going to measure black and white and stats and so forth they went 64-1. They lost once and won every tournament and every championship except one that season. And to follow it up though was the thing about it. They were successful before that and as I've said going into this year the team that...it's a team that averaged you know six tournament championships in the last ten years. And it's...so...with that those three teams would stand out the most.

Who...Who'd you lose to that year?

Balltown. Worthington Tournament. One to nothing. You know we won twenty-eight games before we lost. You know we lost that game and then proceeded to win the rest of our games after we lost that game. You know, you would never have thought that. That's what ended up happening.

So what separates the good teams, those dominant teams...Dyersville in the eighties, Cascade in the nineties and up to today?

I, I think it's pretty easy. I think it's the same thing that separates any team in any sport...is the fact you have great team chemistry.

So you think team chemistry more than...?

Yeah, team...I mean I...I mean you've got to have your core of good players. And ah, chemistry and consistency. You, you have to make a commitment to be there. You know, you can't decide I'm going to show up to the Cascade Tournament with my nine best players because it's the Cascade Tournament and expect to go out and win. You know it's important that those nine guys were there the day before at a Prairie League game in Placid at one o'clock because that game is just as important as the next game. You know so and that was one thing that I know the Cascade Reds of that...we were committed to and I know when...looking back that Farley and Dyersville would say the same thing. They were committed to every game. I mean it didn't matter what game it was...I, I can speak for them, knowing Paul Scherrman and Tom Jenk Sr. they wanted to go out and win. And they wanted to go out and beat the piss out of you and that's our philosophy and our approach was too. And...

Was that something that you guys actually would say...like if somebody didn't show up would you get on them and say if we're going to win...

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. It was definitely...

It was spoken. Not just unspoken?

Oh yeah. You know like one line now I remember from Loras. And you know if you've talked Loras...Loras said about the only time...the only excuse for missing a game is a funeral. And it helps if it's your own. So...with that said, you know we...there are things that come up you know. We weren't ever like you know what's more important you know...guys just knew that hey it's important to be there you know. If I'm supposed to pitch I've got to be there. I mean and that's the way I approached it. You know, I, I...you know skipped a lot of family things and so forth and that just...well one I love to play baseball. I can't play baseball in February. I have to do it in June, July and August you know. And it's pretty busy. So commitment and chemistry are two key things going. Obviously you've got to have a load of talent. You don't have to have all the talent in the world. But you get the same guys there all the time and all of a sudden, they, they know what their capable of doing. They know who...who's capable of doing what on the

field and in the batter's box and on the mound. So...you just kind of put the pieces all together and that's how you end up have a great season.

How does Cascade get their players? How do...You know Do you do try outs? How do you replace players? How do you...advertise? Whatever...

You know its, it's always an open invitation to the people from Cascade or Cascade resident, High School um, In the past you know when I first started playing you know there'd always be a little ad in the paper ...welcome you know Reds you know Reds players return and such interested in playing come to such-and-such a practice. You know you get a few people to show up it seems like it was always kind of funny people who used to work for the Cascade Pioneer you know John Sullivan being a baseball guy would ask if you always play baseball and all of sudden you get these sports writers or news reporters coming over and showing up and you know some of them were ok but some of them like OK. You know, Basically a fantasy league for them you know but now here in this area you know it's kind of ah, you kind of as a group of core players you kind of recruit kids or you see if such-and-such is going to...you know...going to make it or you know...once again you go into the fact that you want guys that are going to be committed you know you don't want to say ok I'll be here for this game. I'm going to be gone the next game. Here this game, next game. I mean to me that's a slow pitch softball mentality because a lot of teams go around with ten, twelve guys any more. Which is unfortunate but today's generation of kids it's ...I'll be there, I'll come if I'm going to play. You know when I first started playing I never played. There was probably sixteen kid...guys there and you sat basically.... You got in the game. You know but you took your turn and you earned your position. And that's the way it still is with us you know everybody has this big misconception that the Cascade Reds you know you're not going to crack the line-up. And to be honest for a while you weren't going to crack it. You know you had to be damn good if you were...I mean we played with local kids. When we had our successful run it was with local kids. Everybody was from Cascade. Ah, I mean we granted we might have had a pitcher, but for the most...they you know we did with our home grown talent.

That actually leads me to my next question. Talk about ...you know guys...I don't want to say jumping teams, but the hiring out and stuff. You want to talk about that a little bit how that works? And, and, and who does it more than others and that type of thing? And if you don't want to talk about specific teams, that's fine. But just in general.

Oh no. I mean...I...You know. When I first started playing, hired pitching was the most common thing that you came across. That To me that was the exciting part of it...Ok as far as the hiring, it was very common. You'd see the you know middle of the pack or less type teams go out and hire pitching. And that back then when I first started playing, definitely the first ten years ah, it happened often. And it was always a chess match of which team...who, who had the best black book. And probably the team who had the best black book was the team that was the best team. You know Dyersville and Farley. They will still do it. And everybody used to bitch about them, but I thought heck you know why wouldn't you. No one remembers who gets second or third in a tournament but you remember who wins the tournament. Whether they chose to hire a pitcher in the second round against Cascade Reds or they chose to hire a pitcher in the championship game against Bernard or Monticello that's what they did. They picked and chose where they needed solid pitching. Because a pitcher can win the game. And so you see that often. Does that happen? It doesn't happen right now anymore as far as hired pitching. It does but not to the extent of back then. One thing you didn't see back then was people...If I was from Cascade, I didn't play for Monticello. If I was from Dubuque or if I was from Dyersville I didn't

play for Farley. And if they did the fans would let them know it. I mean they'd call them stump jumpers. They'd call them everything in the book at tournament times you know when the crowds get bigger and you know the adult beverages take over. I mean they let them know it. You know where they're from and who's from where and so forth.

So where did they usually hire from then if they could go local?

I mean people have connections right out of the minor leagues. There was Guys that had gotten released from AAA somehow that would show up and pitch. There were guys you know who you know just got released from say the Quad Cities or Cedar Rapids and that were still in the area and somebody got a hold of them. And they'd come up and pitch and they made good money. I mean you've heard of people getting paid you know a hundred, two hundred, three hundred dollars just to pitch. And the... And the purse might be three hundred dollars to win the tournament. People didn't care you know. The fact is you wanted to win and have a reason to celebrate.

And being a pitcher did you ever hire out?

Yeah, I've... I remember hiring out when I was eighteen years old and ah, it was kind of a horse shit deal on my end. It was when the Sheryl Tournament was still going on and I wasn't starting for the Reds. I was a bench player so they needed a pitcher and a friend of mine who was catching for them that had played at West Dubuque Dale Digmann had called and asked me if I'd pitch. And I said sure. Well actually you know I didn't have a car or anything but P.J. Sole and Tom Simon I was riding to the game with them at Petersburg and they dropped me off in Worthington and I hooked a ride from Worthington over to Sheryl to pitch in the championship game ah, against Sheryl. And I was... And ah, when they got... when P.J. and Tom Simon got to Petersburg and told my... our coach Lee Simon... asking where Yipe is and they told him... he wasn't too happy. I mean I... I... it was wrong for what I did. I mean I made \$25 which is a lot for me and ah, but the next day I was told you know you make a choice where you want to play. You don't do that. And it was wrong and, but I hired out... and then after that I never... I pitched for teams if we got beat out of a tournament you know then I'd be available to pitch if I didn't play in that tournament. You know so I might have been... you know... and there were tournaments that teams played in that we did not play in that I would pitch for. But very seldom did I take money for it. I... I... it wasn't about the money. It was about the opportunity to pitch you know that I enjoyed.

What kind of changes do you remember like in the field or regulations just over the years?

Changes how games are kind of run.

There's been a tremendous amount of changes from when I first started playing in just from as far as a player aspect here in these tournaments. Every team always took infield. Home team, visiting team took a full infield ah, tournament like this first game, second game. And uh, you know I understand why they got rid of it you know it's kind of ... I see pros and cons why they got rid of it you know it speeds things up maybe a little bit, but one thing about it also teams don't, players show up five minutes before the game, ten minutes before the game. So you loose that part of it you know. As far as teams really not being ready. They're here to take infield. There's a lot of pride taken in the fields now and even back then I'm sure there was pride taken in the beauty of the parks but you know the facilities have really changed. You know from what Cascade's done to their field from when I played. It used to be... when I first started playing it was, it was just sand and I mean it was a dirt infield. You know... and that is what I played with all through high school and then after I graduated my first year of semi-pro baseball they put in

the grass infield. Ah, and from that they redid the outfield fence and ah, put the sun screen in centerfield...

What year did they put the screen up? Do you remember?

Ah, that was put up in the...let's see Rex Dale died in nineteen eighty...eighty eight? It was put up in the fall of eighty nine.

You had mentioned those aluminum bats. I assume they all went away. I see everyone's using wood now.

Back to the wood? Yeah. How that all came about was...one it was...aluminum bats became so lethal it was ridiculous. I mean as I say as a pitcher going back to wood extended my career ten years easily. I mean because when you pitched in this park and this is a legit park every...one through nine was a legit...was a home run threat. And I witnessed it. You know with the C4s, minus 5s, reflexes, I mean they were just...it was dangerous and we never really had any injuries in this league that would have led to you know banning them but we kind of went away from, being more proactive as far as you know let's turn back into making it baseball. And it started with the Cascade Tournament when it celebrated its 50th anniversary we decided to use...do an all wood bat tournament. And ah, so we were the first tournament. And we stuck with it for fifteen...you know with this being the 65th year. That's been how long we've gone wood. Now the league went full wood three years after Cascade did that because Cascade did that for their next tournament and then when Epworth... I mean Worthington celebrated its 50th anniversary it also went to an all wood bat. And then we had a little...a part where you could use aluminum or wood but both teams had to agree to it in the Prairie League. And ah, so you were getting some teams, you know...I know...witnessed Cascade Reds team if you chose to play us with aluminum bats it wasn't going to be pretty. I mean because it...it took the top teams and we went wood and anybody who knows anything about baseball and it brought us closer together you know.

Well you look at college players now.

Exactly.

Guys bat six, seven hundred and then they get in the pros and they bat two hundred.

Yeah. And even now that they've densened, deadened the aluminum bat once again there it is you know. In which that's for the betterment of the game. That's a pure baseball...that's as purist baseball right there as you can get. I don't think college and high school will ever go wood. But they definitely can go to...and what this league has really settled into is the, is the composite bat which is the same thing as a wood bat but it's more durable and it's more cost efficient you know. These guys don't get paid to play this game and they've got to buy their own bats and you know so if their investing a hundred and forty dollars in a composite bat that's going to last them three years that's better than spending thirty or forty dollars on a wood bat, Louisville Slugger that could bust in one swing you know. So...I mean aluminum bats have been around you know basically since for thirteen years consistently...it's here to stay the aluminum...

And Cascade's tournament is the oldest isn't it? I think.

Yeah it is the oldest semi-pro tournament in Iowa and as far as we know in the country. You know no one...can prove it any differently. And Worthington is the second oldest.

Um, Where do...Well talk about Cascade, where do they get their financial backing? Like how do you pay for the umps the players uniforms all that stuff? Obviously, I'm sure the tournament brings in money but how is it all managed?

Basically we're sponsored by the American Legion post 528. that's how the Cascade Reds got started and so they have, they have pretty much covered all of our expenses that we may have as far as the baseball field, the umpires, uniforms, ah, equipment you know but with that said it's kind of a...it's pretty easy to explain how we can set up a budget each year to operate under because with our advertisement on our outfield fence, ah, the legion gets a hundred dollars per sign. You know twenty-five signs out there so that's \$2500 to start with. They rent the field to Western Dubuque for I think \$3000. Ah, so that's \$5,500 they start with a budget for our baseball expenses. Then you know any type of revenue we receive ah, from...you know during the season it's pretty much a wash as far as playing our regular season games for what we pay the umpires ah, for the ah, lights. Um, from our concession stand you know we usually can make enough money to cover the expenses for that ball game that night. And plus it's free entertainment to the community. Um, and then of course and then the big thing for us is the semi-pro tournament. You know where the legion makes their money. You know and with that said, you know they can make anywhere between you know profit...anywhere between five and ten thousand dollars for the semi-pro tournament. Averaged over the years. You know in the early years they made more you know when the crowds were naturally bigger. But you know with so much going on with the two county fairs that the town lies in happening at the same time as the semi-pro tournament is. They're really competing against a lot. But they still end up in the black and if you're...you're a buck ahead at the end of the year it's been a good year as far as we look at it... But we're fortunate we don't have to chip in money, you know some teams do. You know but we're fortunate to basically I mean you could call it a low minor league system because we can offer everything at this field you know as far as adult beverages they sell. I mean a nice field and running a tournament.

What about support from, from like fan support? You know do some cities have better fan support than others?

Yeah, I would, I would say you know when you run your local tournament, I mean it's easy to pick out teams that don't have much support. Teams that draw well, you know we've drawn very well I think. It's a love-hate thing when we play in other people's tournaments as far as our Cascade team. You know people like to see us win financially because they know people are going to follow us. They're going to stay and ah...there in that run that we had they want to us to lose too. To give the home team a chance to win their own tournament. But you know for us...for me what I've noticed you know Farley was always a good draw. For us locally, Bernard is a good draw for us to stay in this tournament um, Rickardsville gets a good following. There's a lot of teams that they know they can round up their base fans you know twenty, thirty people that are going to come there and you know when they are paying five dollars...five bucks a pop to get into the tournament or whatever and spend their money you know it's definitely going to be a beneficial to keep that team in the tournament as long as you possibly can.

You kind of already touched on this, but I don't know if we even really need to ask but the question is do the teams have their own fields? Obviously you said this is the American Legions and you talked about sharing it with the schools. Does the Legion then maintain it or does the manager maintain the field as far as dragging it and all that stuff?

The Legion maintains it ah, as far as giving it the equipment support. They also...they hire a kid or a couple of kids to take care of field during the season with the help of the Reds players, the

high school staff. It's more or less what I would call a group effort you know. There have been a lot of people who have come over here and will help out you know. If there's a game to be played that night whether high school or Reds...you know it's in question. That's one thing neat about it you'll get all kinds of people that will come by and see if we're going to play and help out if they can help out. You know as far as getting the field ready adding to the surface you know quick-dry. So basically, I mean there's not one person that's put in charge, the kids are put in charge of picking up the grounds and stuff. But, As far as the field maintenance goes it would be called a group effort.

Has there been any big problems that the league has had to overcome over the years? Or maybe Cascade did specifically? Any obstacles?

I would say the biggest obstacle is consistently having...teams. You know ah, not necessarily teams at least would fold but you know from when I started playing you know within a thirty-five mile radius, twenty five mile radius of say Dubuque ah, you had thirty teams. You know and now we're down to maybe... back to sixteen, seventeen. You know that's the lowest it's ever been you know. Of course you need sixteen teams to run a sixteen team tournament. You know you got to the point where we had eighteen teams and they want to ...or you had seventeen teams and you didn't one team to feel left out so you had a play in game. But I think looking at these sixteen teams we have now are pretty much here to stay for a while.

So you talked about teams failing. Was the league ever in danger of failing you think? Eastern Iowa pretty solid?

Oh, depends who you talk to. You know I...you know you look... as I mentioned earlier you know talking about people in all these communities that run that team. You know if they were to ever step aside I don't know who'd take over. That's the biggest thing. You know I think they have their own personal reasons for wanting to keep it going and I've always said you know somebody kept it going for me when I first started playing I felt...you know I've done my share of work to keep it going hopefully for people younger than me, and guys that I play with you know. But I think they think the same way because you...yeah I look forward to the day where I can come over here when I'm seventy, seventy five I don't know maybe I'll still be playing, maybe not, but I want to sit there and remember you know when I was ten years old sitting on the box and chasing foul balls. Just as I listen to some of these older guys talk, you know. I mean it's...I think it's important to keep going because I do believe once it's gone it's gone forever. It's like anything. You know we've had a few teams that folded and wanted to come back. They've...its...they've done it for a year and it's not worked out, you know...it's...it's like the religion you know you have to stay with it. It's got to be consistent. And I feel you know we have sixteen teams now that...there's a couple teams that are on life support. But you know I think they're here to stay.

Um, what are some...you've mentioned some, but any specific memories about the league or specific games you played?

Oh, I mean...I guess one thing that I remember the best about my semi-pro personally is winning this tournament...you know at...at Cascade hadn't won for twenty-eight years you know and being part of that...knowing there was lots of Reds players before me who never had an opportunity to win that. And ah, so to celebrate that and be a part of that you know is special. You know and to win it the number of times in which we've won it since then is you know phenomenal in its self. Regardless if it's your own tournament or not...even if you're set up to win it you know it's still...I always feel that the pressure's on the home team. You know you can

go through all the history books of all...of every team that have had their own tournament...I don't think any of them have won it as many times as the Cascade Reds have won their tournament. And that's not...That's not just because we're sixty-five years old. You know...it's special...you know the year we went 64-1 of course you know being part of that not that...you know not that it can't ever be done again by somebody but highly unlikely. Ah, just the simple fact that no one's going to play that many games again.

Was that...were you guys in Prairie...were you in both leagues at the time?

We were in both leagues at the time, yes. So,

Any specific games? Pitching that you remember? Or too many to remember?

Yeah I've had a lot. I don't...Personally...I don't know...they're all, every one's important. I mean, you know win or lose I mean you feel like every time you go out there you're trying to do something. Um, The games I pitched in the Cascade Tournament are probably the most important because ...because you know there's a lot of history here and there's a lot of people that I respect who have played this game before me, that helped me, you know become a better player than... you know than I ever thought I could possibly be. You know whether the person's someone older than me, younger than me, ah, someone's in high school when I was coaching you know... you always wanted to try to impress somebody and sometimes you don't always impress them you know you do a stupid thing but you know you try to move on, move forward and I've always taken things personally. And I take it to the mound and I try to feel myself with that, um ...Somebody did ask me this question one other time you know about what...there's a championship game that I think we played ah ... another team that I forgot to mention that was dominant team was New Vienna. And they were a very dominant team and we might not have had our best line up that night offensively but you know they had a very good pitcher, Dave Schenck on the mound and an outstanding line up. You know with Chris Kerper still playing there, the Wedewers and we pretty much were going in not with our guns fully loaded. I think there were a couple big bats missing in our line up. And you know I knew what I had to do on the mound. It was the first game I got to start in the tournament. And Loras had lined it up that way and... you know we ended up going out and winning 5-0. Ah but I just kind of took the approach of it's an inning at a time. You know Get through this inning and next inning then all of sudden you've got a one run lead. Got out of a big jam in the first inning, you know first and third, nobody out. Got a pick off. I can remember every detail. Then all of a sudden I got into control and got in a groove and ah, we added a run, added two runs. I think Roman got a big two run single. It just...that, that championship game will stick out a lot as far as me personally being a game that I felt I pitched the best as far as a championship game goes.

Was that, that year? The 64-1 year? Or was that a different year?

No that was a different year. That was still aluminum bat era. So...um personally you know I mean I've thrown some no hitters and stuff like that but nothing that would you know...personally I always want to go out and shut out the team.

Why do you think this league and the teams in this area have been able to stay viable when town ball teams have faded in other areas? You know it used to be almost every team, go back a hundred years you know everybody had a team even fifty years ago almost everybody had a team. You know why here? You know there's hardly any teams anywhere anymore, now honestly a lot of them even the ones down by Norway and stuff to me more like collegiate.

I think it's, it's the fact that... most...most of the towns have tried to make that effort to keep it local. You know, ah, nobody's gone out and tried to say I'm just going get the nine best players I can possibly get not necessarily from my town. But, they've kept, tried to keep that local tie. And ah, the communities some way or another support it. You know maybe they don't support by attendance wise but they do support it. I think any one of those sixteen teams would hate to see their town team baseball fold you know. I don't care if it's Placid, Key West, Bernard, or what, even Balltown but you know one it's the community support, it's local support but you can pinpoint to an individual in certain places that it's still going ...you know...as it comes to mind, you know Balltown's one of them. You know I didn't mention Joey Sigworth. Joey Sigworth is...he's probably spent more money than any individual that I know in almost thirty years that I've played easily. You know because Joey's had to buy pitchers, he's had to strictly pay for his umpires, baseballs, equipment out of his pocket you know. And it's because it's his passion and so you respect guys like that I mean and you wish them well you know, but I mean he's had to buy a team. You know Balltown's not a...it's not a town...it's a little...

Yeah I wondered how they got nine people. I mean seriously

Yeah, and they used to be a very good team. I mean when I first started playing they were amazing.

So mostly like the passion, nostalgia whatever around baseball keeps it going?

Yeah it...no team is really you know...you hear a team, oh they're going to fold, they're going to fold, they're going to fold, they're all... I know the last one that did, Holy Cross, that one surprised me. There was nobody local there. The person who kept it going, Marv Rolling no longer lived in Holy Cross you know he was starting a family...so. I'm sure he said hey, somebody take it over otherwise not. People probably said aah, forget it. You know, so...you know I was sad to see that go because that was one of the oldest tournaments you know that I had an opportunity to play in.

What is your hope and wish for the future of the league?

As I mentioned before I hope to be able to come over here someday and watch this tournament when I'm sixty or seventy years old... That everybody, that people start taking the understanding the fact that we got to play this game in this area because someone else had enough decency to start it and continue it. So I would think that the people that are still playing you know as I mentioned... kind of the leaders of all those communities that they think the same way you know that you keep this going. You get enough guys involved that they respect and understand how the whole thing operates. Not just what happens out there between the lines but how it happens up here. it happens you know before the season starts, getting players. That... you know it takes work and it takes a group effort. You know I don't want...I wouldn't want Cascade baseball to think it's going to die because one person quits. And it won't be that way. It's not that way and It shouldn't be that way. But in some communities maybe it is that way. But I wouldn't think...I would think there's a parent sitting out there, somebody who's not maybe involved that says I'll step in and help out. Ah, because it is something special. And like I've said, I've talked to a lot of people not from this area and gone and played in baseball in other states and they ask me what you do or the league you're in and they say "What is it?" And you explain what it is and how you set up a tournament and they have awards you know and they think wow that would be cool and yeah it's not slow pitch softball and it's not...you wear uniforms, you practice or you know...it's...it is, it's very unique in itself. You know I don't think you'll ever find something like this in the country.

**Personal interview with Jim Leitner
By Todd Hospodarsky
Date: November 20, 2011**

Let me start with a date which we said was November 20th, 2011. And what is your name?
My name is Jim Leitner, and I am the sports editor at the *Telegraph Herald* newspaper in Dubuque.

Perfect, and what has been your connection to the Eastern Iowa Hawkeye Baseball League or any other names... I don't know how long you been the sports editor?

Well I'm actually from Dubuque and I played semi-pro baseball for a couple of years back in the late eighty's. And then...then I've been here at the newspaper since back in 1990. So I've been covering it since 1990. So for twenty some years.

Did you play for Dubuque or...?

I played for the Dubuque Blues for... or no they were the Dubuque Pilots is what they were back then going way back for a couple of years. And I actually filled in sometimes I played for New Vienna their team out there which was pretty interesting. I'm trying to think maybe a couple others just like one game or something.

What position?

I was a catcher.

I've interviewed a lot of catchers. That seems to be that's the people that want to talk to me. And you mentioned this a little bit maybe we can just review what years were you involved in the league?

I, as soon as I got out of high school. I got out of high school in 1986 and then I played a little bit at the end of the year and then probably the next two or three years I played.

Ok, how did you become involved in baseball? And who influenced you?

I became in... baseball... my father was a baseball coach here in town so I couldn't even tell you when I started you know. It was just basically natural. My memory doesn't even go back that far too even have a good idea so. Back from that I played high school played youth league baseball here. I played at Loras College for a couple of years until I found out this was a better job for me. I had a better future in the newspaper business than in baseball. So that's where that went.

Did your father play semi-pro at all?

He did not. He actually didn't play. He had... we had back then what was called the Holy Name League. Each parish had their own team. And he wasn't a player but he got involved in leading that up and he coached that for twenty some years. He had like over 300 wins. You know that was when they were only playing 20-25 games a year or so. So that was pretty impressive. I just grew up with him you know leading the way so I just naturally fell into it.

What can you tell me about the formation and the running of the league? And I know the Prairie League is also an existence you can talk about either one. Semi-pro baseball in northeast Iowa in general. I know you have done articles on both.

What in... I guess...?

I guess what do you know about like its formation, the...I know Paul Scherrman I interviewed obviously so I kind of have an idea of the hierarchy but pretty much anything from your standpoint from a newspaper?

Yeah I'm not sure exactly how that all started. But it seems like every single small town in this region has a team or has had a team you know for fifty years or so. As far as the way it all got together I'm not sure how that all, how that all happened. It's been pretty neat to see it all come together.

Do you remember when did the Dubuque County Hall-of-Fame get started? I interviewed Jude a while back but I don't remember.

I believe we've been having we've been hosting The *Telegraph Herald* All-Star Game for twenty-four years. This year the summer was our 24th and I believe it started at that same time. But as far as that goes the *Telegraph Herald* we saw that as a neat opportunity because the semi-pro teams. Every little community in our area had a team so it is a natural thing for us to sponsor and to cover because it encompasses our whole area. So I'm pretty sure that's where the hall-of-fame got started. They wanted to have an all-star game and a ceremony together. So that's where they went with that.

Perfect. Who in your opinion, I mentioned Paul Scherrman, are key people in the running of the league? Who has been to leaders in the league from a newspaper standpoint?

Paul Scherrman has for years has done a great job. He was the guy who kind of he came to me and asked if we could like increase our coverage. Or he asked us what the teams could do to help us help us to help cover it better. So Paul was really good. Right now he's kind of pass the baton on to Jim Winter who actually also works at the newspaper too. Jim Winter, he works here at the newspaper. And he's the co-manager of the Dubuque Blues and he's kind of taken care of the secretary type stuff. And I know Frank Dardas but I think he was more Prairie League. But he's, I know he's... a lot of times you know the Prairie League versus Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League it's kind of they both, they're both, they both exist to kind of help each other. It is not as if it is so cut throat that one league against the other. I think they're all in it for the good of semi-pro baseball in general not just in it for the Prairie League or Eastern Iowa League. But Frank Dardas I know is a big one. Those are the big ones like right now for last fifteen or twenty years.

What players or coaches stick out in your mind from your playing days but you been a reporter for a lot longer. Who jumps out?

Well I... we've really covered...started to cover it a lot heavier the last ten years or so. So, Cascade is really you know Cascade is one that really jumps out. The Andrews boys at Cascade. Pat Weber. It seems like you go up and down the Cascade lineup and you'd find people in there. Paul Scherrman for a long time was you know a great player. The Wedewer boys from New Vienna and Dyersville. Those guys were the big stars and fun to follow.

Um, are there any teams? Well, you mentioned Cascade, are there any other teams I guess that you remember being a specially good over the years?

I felt really fortunate to play with New Vienna because they were really good at that time. And now they're not quite is good. But back in the early or late eighty's and early ninety's they were really good. And that really kind of where I, you know when I played for Dubuque you know what I have... my true feelings of what semi-pro baseball was about. Getting a chance to play with New Vienna because they were such good team. And you know what I saw was I saw these guys who lived on the farm and work on the farm they'd get up at the crack of dawn. They'd

work so hard all day long and then they go play baseball at night and they were phenomenal baseball players and a look like they had all kinds of energy. You know, here I was just a twenty year old college student I had nowhere near the energy that these guys did. I didn't work as hard as they did during the day. That's kind of what really impressed me you know was seeing these guys who worked so hard during the day at you know blue collar... blue collar jobs and then they'd come out and they were just you know...they'd act like they'd been playing baseball forever and they're just phenomenal.

In your opinion, have you noticed in your last ten years of reporting has that changed? Is the league still blue collar guys or...?

I think it is... I think it is but you do have a lot of... you have a lot of college guys who you know, they're playing college ball in the spring and they're looking for a place to play in the spring or the in the summer. And this is a great opportunity for them to play. And I think a lot of their college coaches really like the fact that they're getting you know they're playing quality people during the, during the summer.

That's why I asked because I know just in my research I've noticed that the Prairie League in the Eastern Iowa League really are still run the same way they were fifty and a hundred years ago. You know very small townish where...and there are other semi-pro leagues. Des Moines I know has a big one but they...I really see in my opinion they're really more of a collegiate league like a summer league. They're almost run from that standpoint. They aren't' even really like the New Vienna's and...

You see I don't know if there's any, any other place in the country. I've been told that there is no other place like this in the country. Where you have, you know, every single town in the county basically has a team. Still has a team from fifty years ago and they're guys who, their not just college guys. But they're guys who have, you have guys who played into their forties and you know you have Pat Weber I believe is forty-five. What was the guy from Dyersville? Nadermann? Jeff Nadermann. I think he just retired and he's in his forties. You know so that's ... it's very unique. You know, A lot of times when you guys get to age thirty they'd move on to like a thirty and over league or you know a senior league or whatever they call it. But around here they still play. You'll have a forty year old guy playing with to a guy who's you know in college. You know a freshman or sophomore in college which makes it very, very unique.

Right, um, in your opinion what separated the good teams? The Cascades and the New Vienna's from others?

I think you know especially in the last ten years is Cascade had the same nine or ten guys there every single time. You know if you look at the talent, talent level for say a Cascade and a Dyersville. The same group kind of came up together in high school and everything. It seems like Dyersville would do really well in high school. And then you get to the semi-pro and Cascade, those guys stuck together a little bit better and a little bit longer. And like we said they're the same guys there every time you're consistent. Pitchers and everything and so they were winning all the time. I think really they were the only team that really had that kind of core group that everybody was there night-after-night for fifty to sixty games.

Any opinion why... why they're able to stick together?

I know in Cascade it's a really, it's a really big deal. They really...you know they really take it pretty seriously out there. Maybe too seriously sometimes, unfortunately. But I think that might

be it. I think in other communities they say you know I'm taking my vacation this week and I'm gone. But it seems like, I don't know if those guys ever take vacation.

I think what Pat Weber told me was and it wasn't his... it was probably Loras Simon or somebody said something about if you're going to be gone it better be for a funeral your own if possible or something along those lines.

He probably weren't kidding when they said that either.

Any idea...well I guess I kind of already got that from other people so we could skip that I think. Are you familiar with any kind of teams or maybe when you played for New Vienna getting compensation? I mean it is called semi-pro so there's obviously money around somewhere. With the professionalism it's not just a town ball thing.

Back when I played it seemed like they'd have...you know some of the top teams would bring in a guy and maybe they'd pay him fifty bucks or pay him mileage or whatever to come in and pitch. That was about all I ever remember. I don't know if they really do that as much anymore.

It depends who you talk to. Lenny Tekippe really was the one who basically I think summed it up best is that in what's been happening recently is, it's just not economically feasible. You used to give them gas money well that used to be... now at what four bucks a gallon it's a hundred and twenty-five dollars depending were the guy's driving from. So it's not economically feasible anymore. I think it depends on who you talk to. But I just wasn't sure like when you played for New Vienna they probably didn't pay you...

They did to give me gas money you know because I lived in Dubuque and I would go out there. And you know it would only be five or ten bucks. Which you know is...it's hardly professional. You know it was really just enough to cover the gas and everything. You know they'd... after the game they'd take me out to go to the tavern or whatever. I don't know if that's compensation or not. I do think that there are some tournaments if, like if you win the MVP that they'll give you a cash prize. I know the college guys are pretty adamant. They deny that. They give it back to the team. or whatever. Or give it to the team fund. Because they're pretty strict about that.

Yeah and that was one I didn't realize that. But I was at the Worthington Tournament finals and the Dubuque Blues kid that won the MVP and he donated it back to the team.

Ryan Doty and I think that's... you know it's not a ton of money but it's...

That is something I've been working on in the paper. I wasn't a struggle but it was...because a lot of the players even really consider themselves town ball even though they're called semi-pro. And that was something I had to work through the definitions and how it kind of played out like you said it's really not when you think about the money. And even the pitchers are really making much.

I think you know if you went back, you know several, several years ago, thirty and forty years ago they might have given them a little bit more money. And that might have been where the term semi-pro kind of came into vogue. But it is basically the same teams and the same towns are still in it so maybe the name kind of carried over. But I don't know if it's that prevalent but there's that much money out there for these guys.

What changes do you remember in fields? In regulations? Pretty much anything like non-player related.

I think the biggest thing that's, that's changed... I think it was in 1996 or 97 Cascade came up with this crazy idea that they would use wooden bats for their tournament. Just for the one, I think it was like their fortieth anniversary or fiftieth anniversary. Yeah I think 1996 or 97 they said well let's just try wooden bats. You know see how it is just kind of a nostalgic thing. It really took off. And you know then the league said would it be economically feasible to go strictly to wooden bats. I think they found out that it wasn't as cost prohibitive as they would have thought it was going with aluminum bats. And really that leveled the playing field. You brought a lot of the scores down, you put more emphasis on pitching and defense. And I think as far as I'm concerned that really saved semi-pro baseball you know a decade ago. Because more people were interested in playing because they knew they could be competitive. They knew it wasn't going to be like a slow-pitch softball score. And I think a lot of guys who are in their early twenties, you know they want to play ball but they also, they don't want to be there for four hours to play a seven inning game. Whereas with slow pitch softball you're there, you're only there for an hour. You're guaranteed you're only there for an hour. You know you can run around and do whatever. But now with semi-pro baseball those games are probably two hours or less so it's a lot quicker pace with the wooden bats. You know there's a lot more strategy involved. You know I think it's way better for the game and I have a lot of people tell me that that's one thing that really changed the game and really saved semi-pro baseball in this area.

Yeah I wish college would go wooden bats.

Well it seems like they're going to

Yeah they're doing those composites or whatever. I just wish they would say you know what, this kids batting .600 and he goes to the pros and bats .195. There's something wrong with that.

Well, I think the pros kind of want them to do that too because they get a more accurate read on them. You know when are scouting them to make it a better idea what to tell what kind of talent they have for the next level.

I don't know if you're familiar with this one but where do teams and the league get their financial backing? Where do they get the money to pay for ump's in the field etc.?

I think a lot of times they'll get...they'll still have sponsors. But then a lot of them have their own tournaments. So they will rely on entry fees and gate... you know attendance gates and stuff like that. I think that's what the big fundraisers for but I think those are the main areas. I don't think there's too many teams for the players have to pay to play. I think there might be some but the the ones that don't have their own tournaments or whatever, they'll do that. For the most part I think if you have you know if you're running a town team and you have a big tournament you're talking about two weeks and you talking about concession sales and you're talking about gate fees so you can make some pretty nice money that can help pay for your whole summer.

I'm just thinking this is totally off subject but the Dubuque Blues where do they play?

They play at Petrakis which is downtown. Which is probably one of the worst fields in the in the whole Eastern Iowa Hawkeye League or the Prairie League. We are very blessed because we have some really beautiful facilities for baseball in this county.

Oh yeah. What kind of support do you know of the cities that host the teams? Are there some cities that are more supportive than others? Either... you can look at it two different ways you know, fan support for the teams or the city itself offering you know financial support or the field set up or whatever?

Yeah I think here in Dubuque it's, it's not as big a deal. Basically you have friends and family there that go to the games. But when you get into a lot of the other communities you know you can get the entire town to come out even if they don't have a vested interest in a player or two or they don't there's not a relative or friend playing. They come out because they enjoy the game. But I think you see that in places like Dyersville and Cascade where they... they know the high school schedule and they know the semi-pro schedule equally as well. They're not out of every single game but they know the big games and they know the tournament games and their out there supporting those games. And you know it really interesting coming from here in Dubuque where you'll just see friends and family at a game and then you go to Cascade or Dyersville and it's the whole community or parents of players who haven't been playing for five or ten years. It's really neat to see that kind of community support.

Um... You kind of answer that one so I was going to skip that one. What problems... to your knowledge have there been any problems that the league has had to overcome over the years? You mentioned the baseball bat or wood bats kind of save them has there been anything else that was endangering the league or semi-pro baseball?

I think that one problem that every team has had to overcome to a certain degree is you have players who when they come out of high school they're all excited about playing semi-pro baseball. And you know they play through their college years. And then they enter the real world and get a job and you know they realize that their schedules a little tighter than they were when they were carefree. I think that player retention that's an issue. But I think with the wooden bats I think that's helped it a lot. And I think to about the three colleges that are here in town they supply a lot of players. I mean a kid might be from California or whatever and find a place to play here. Other than that, I know there's been some rivalries that might have gotten out of hand or gotten a little ugly here-and-there. But I know the leagues have addressed those and it seems they don't last too terribly long.

In your opinion was the league ever in danger of failing? And when I say league again you can talk Prairie League or Eastern Iowa or both.

You know what I think when we were getting down to the late ninety's I think we were. I think it was getting a little in danger. You know some of the smaller communities were in danger of losing their teams. Like I think the wooden bat really saved it. It prolonged a lot of players careers and they were a lot more interested in sticking around. I think, you know, I think before the wooden bats I wouldn't have been surprised if it would have faded away in a lot of communities. I think you still would've had your hardcore you know your Dyersvilles, and your Cascades, and your Peostas. You know you've got some real good solid core ones but a lot of your smaller towns were really in danger of fading away.

Are there any certain people to your knowledge that were responsible for keeping the league alive or what is just kind of tweaking the rules to make people to stick around?

I'm not really sure who they were but that core group that said you know wooden bats is a good idea. I think that's... those are the people would be really influential. You know I give them a lot of credit because you know I think at every level of baseball they've said geez wooden bats are way too expensive. There is no way we can do it. You know I give them credit for at least looking

into it and deciding that hey this might be something that could work. You know with those composite bats they have almost the durability of an aluminum bat and they don't have that bounce factor that an aluminum bat does. Whoever that group was they deserve a lot of credit.

What memories do you have of the league or specific games played, specific plays?

I think you know when I look back like to a point when I played granted it wasn't a long time but when I played for a few games for New Vienna we played at the Dyersville Tournament and they would have that queen's pageant you know. It's just coming from the bigger city of Dubuque that didn't really...it wasn't that big of a deal. But then you go out there and it was a major production. You know the queens would come in in convertibles and you know it was really a neat thing. That's one thing that really stands out to me because you know here we're playing semi-pro baseball, the Dyersville Commercial Club is, is packed with people. Because the queen's pageant, they come out in droves for that. And you know, I played at Hempstead here in Dubuque we made it down to the state tournament you know my senior year. So it was really, it was really comparable to playing in the state tournament as far as the atmosphere there and the people and how much they really cared about it. So growing up here in Dubuque I kind of felt deprived really when you see what kind of support they get out there and how big of a deal these things were. You know, I wish it was something baseball related but that is one thing but really stands out to me is that. You know that queen's pageant and how big of a deal it was...

And has been for so long.

You know it really is. And I had it's been a few years now. But I had a chance to judge the queen's pageant.

I bet that was tough.

You know it was, and it wasn't. You know going into it I didn't really know what to think. But then you're interviewing these girls and I think they're fourteen or fifteen years old and they were so nervous and they're so you know they're so taken back by this whole process. Then it really hits home to you too how big a deal it is to them and to their communities. They wanted to make sure they give you the right answers. It's really kind of neat and how it is. You know it kind of makes you take a step back and you know really appreciate small town Iowa. Because I think in Dubuque or Cedar Rapids or Waterloo or the bigger cities in Iowa you don't really get that flavor as much. But you know it was pretty cool to get that feel for it. To understand how big of a deal it was to those people.

In your opinion this is kind of the crux of my paper actually is...is what brought me to this project was it dawned on me one day when I was driving into Monticello is that we still have a semi-pro baseball team. And you know years ago, a hundred years ago everybody across the state, across the nation pretty much every town had an adult baseball team. And now obviously many don't. We have a few. So in your opinion, why and how has this league the Prairie League the semi-pro teams in northeast Iowa been able to stay viable when town baseball teams have faded in other parts of the country?

That's a... that's a great question. I think you know we've had such I think one big thing is the players who played forty and fifty years ago were really got involved in their communities and were really good at coaching and bringing these kids up. And you know they're playing at the semi-pro level and there coaching these kids and they're very impressionable and all of a sudden the younger kids kind of get an idea that this is a pretty big deal and it is pretty fun or would be fun to play at that level when they get older. I think that has a lot to do with it. You know so

much of it is passed on. I don't know why that wasn't passed on in other communities or why it's more prevalent here but it seems like that really is a big part of it. I don't know if it's these small communities really don't have much else to do or whatever but it is really a blessing that they've stayed together and continued year after year.

And my last question unless something pops up is what is your hope or wish for the future of semi-pro baseball and the two leagues?

You know I really hope that it stays on the same path that it's on right now. They do such a good job with it. From my standpoint they do a real nice job of promoting it. After every game they call us in their box scores. They're really easy to work with from my standpoint. If we need a story or want to do a story on them they are very accommodating. You know so I just hope they stay the course and continue to do what they've been doing. I hope it lasts forever because it's such a neat part of America, neat part of the small town piece of Iowa that I hope it stays. You know I think a big part of it is fifty years ago a lot of these little communities were kind of self-sustaining and they got their own store. If you lived in New Vienna you didn't have to go anywhere else. Now you know with the highways, the way everything...it's easy for people in New Vienna to come to Dubuque for a little bit and go back. So I think it's great that all these little communities are able to sustain these baseball programs when small town Iowa and small town United States is really dying. And it's really neat that they can keep the identity and keep these teams and keep that... keep that going.

Is there anything else you'd like to add along those lines?

I don't think so I think it's a...it's a sport or I guess a level of sport that's very unique to any sport or any level. When you're...Usually when you're a high school that's the end of your career you know so I think it's really cool that you get a lot of baseball players who continue to play baseball instead of going to slow-pitch softball or giving up the sport all together. I think that's really, I mean it's a really unique, a really unique outlet for these guys. And like I said I hope it continues for a long time.