

BOB WELBY MEMORIAL RECOGNITION OF SERVICE AWARD

Art Gillis - Manager/Sponsor - 2006

Art Gillis and Softball

A Combination Still Going Strong After Eight Decades



1925 Art Gillis is born in Saginaw, Michigan.

1933 Watching countless hours of fastpitch softball as a wide eyed eight year old serves as one of Art's earliest recollections. The softball diamond was directly across the street from his boyhood home – Art Gillis has never been too far from a ball diamond ever since.

1941 Art begins his playing career as a sixteen year old catcher in Detroit, playing against some of the top teams of the era, including Detroit Briggs Beautyware and the Fort Wayne Zollner Pistons. Art plays on ten western Wayne County Championship teams.

1952 Art moves from the Detroit area back to Saginaw, Michigan. He brings his catcher's glove with him, playing on top teams in the area, including eleven City, and one State Champion.

1971 After thirty years as a catcher, forty-six year old Art decides to hang up his catcher's mask. However, he is not done playing. He makes another short walk, this time from behind the plate to the pitching circle. He spends the next decade pitching in various leagues around mid-Michigan.

Art begins sponsoring The Saginaw Bolters softball club.

1978 Art meets ISC founder Carrol Forbes. This meeting is the first of many "firsts" in connection with Art and the ISC.

Art serves as the first ever Michigan ISC Commissioner, exposing the ISC to thousands of fans during the height of softball popularity in Michigan.

His Saginaw Bolters become the first Michigan team to ever participate in the ISC World Tournament. The Bolters finish 7th with Owen Walford setting the tournament strikeout record.

1979 The Saginaw Bolters win the ISC World Championship. The Bolters Kevin Herlihy is named Outstanding Pitcher and MVP.

Art wins the bid to host the 1981 World Tournament in Saginaw, Michigan. Saginaw will mark the furthest east the ISC tournament will be held to date, exposing the ISC to a new (and very large) fan base.

During Art's tenure as ISC commissioner he spends countless hours at ballparks throughout Michigan touting the superiority of ISC softball.

In 1979, his ISC World Champion Saginaw Bolters meet the ASA National Champion Midland McArdles (with ex-Bolter pitcher Owen Walford) ten times. The Bolters win seven of the ten games, with each contest played in front of thousands of Mid-Michigan softball fans.

ISC Champion Saginaw wins the very strong Tri-County League Championship with ASA Champion Midland coming in second. The two teams play in one common tournament in 1979, the always tough Midland Invitational. The results are the same, championship won by ISC champ Saginaw, second place to ASA champ Midland.

The Saginaw Bolters participated in seven annual Midland tournaments - winning seven championships. The dominance enjoyed by Art's Bolter teams over their rivals from Midland provides for more than local bragging rights. Art served as the face (and voice) of the ISC in Michigan. There may have been a couple of softball fans left in the state that Art did not speak to regarding the caliber of ISC play, but, those few fans could find evidence of the same on the field and in the results of the contests played.

1980 The defending ISC World Champion Bolters finish 8th at the ISC World Tournament with eighteen year old youngster Michael White filling in for Kevin Herlihy.

Art takes over Saginaw Veterans Stadium, an abandoned run down former minor league ballpark. Art uses his own funds to; skin the infield, sod the outfield, install an outfield fence and foul polls, repair and paint seats, improve the press box, concession stand, PA system, and locker rooms - among numerous other improvements. All in preparation for hosting the '81 ISC World Tournament as a vacant stadium becomes a world class softball facility.

1981 Art and the Bolters put out a pre-season publication promoting the upcoming season, highlighting the ISC World Tournament coming to Saginaw. Thousands of copies are distributed to softball fans throughout the United States and Canada.

Art arranges a mid-season treat for area softball fans (and fans everywhere) when he brings in Ty Stofflet and his Reading, PA team to Saginaw to face Kevin Herlihy and the Saginaw Bolters. The Saturday and Sunday doubleheaders provide fans not one, but two opportunities to witness a rematch between the two legendary hurlers. Their previous meeting in the 1976 ISF World Championship is regarded by many as softball's greatest game.

Art involves mid-Michigan print, radio, and TV media in covering the Bolters and the ISC tournament. Two Billboards along major Michigan freeways also promote the ISC World tournament.

A new standard is set for tournament souvenir programs as Art decides the only advertisements will be on the inside and back covers. The rest of the program will feature only softball-related articles and pictures, with each ISC team and/or league being featured.

The ISC world tournament is held in Saginaw. Many highlights are featured including the famous Midland-Madison 34 inning game, an overshadowed 28 inning contest between Tulsa and Ashland, and the first of Camarillo's back to back championships.

The ISC's furthest venture east is deemed a success on all fronts. Softball historian Roger May writes:

"Saginaw, Michigan - the International Softball Congress World Fastpitch Tournament. That tournament of fastball gets my vote as the greatest tournament I have ever seen ...

... Michigan has a history of quality fastball teams and with Saginaw and Midland being close to home (300 miles), I've always enjoyed going there for various tournaments. The pitching rivalries in those two cities from 1979 through 1981 consisted of Owen Walford, Kevin Herlihy, Michael White, and Peter Finn. Art Gillis, sponsor of the Saginaw Bolters, played a large part in bringing each of those players into the area ...

... I doubt whether any tournament will be able to match 1981. What a tournament! ISC Saginaw, Michigan 1981".

The '81 ISC tournament is even mentioned on the NBC Today Show. The host Saginaw Bolters finish 7th.

1982 The Bolters finish 5th in the ISC World Tournament.

1983 - 1985 Art brings the ISC to another new region of the country, serving as ISC Commissioner in Florida.

1985 – 2005 Art is still a fixture at ballparks around the US and Canada, sharing stories with the many friends he has made through softball. Red letter dates every year on Art's calendar include the ISC World Tournament week in August. He always looks forward to the annual games – almost as much as he looks forward to the reconnection with softball buddies from around the world.

2006 The 2006 ISC World Tournament will provide a special treat during Art's eighth decade of involvement with softball. What started out in 1933 as a short walk across the street to the local ball diamond has developed into quite a trip. The journey has encompassed many towns, tournaments, ballparks and even a World Championship along the way. Next stop - the International Softball Congress Hall of Fame.