

BOB WELBY MEMORIAL RECOGNITION OF SERVICE AWARD

Bob Tomlinson - Publisher - 2007

ISC Hall of Fame Member Bob Tomlinson

By Jason Hall



Bob Tomlinson was born in Poynette, Wisconsin just 11 days short of the mid-point of the 20th Century. He says he grew up at ball yards across Wisconsin. His father was a ball player and Bob seldom missed one of his father's games.

"I can think of a lot worse ways to grow up," he said when asked how he got his start in fastpitch softball. "My dad was an excellent player and a great role model. I just wanted to be able to play baseball and fastpitch softball like he did."

In June of 1964 at the age of 14 and right after he had just played a youth baseball game, Bob got plucked out of the bleachers as he was preparing to watch the men's' fastpitch games. Still in that baseball uniform, Bob agreed to play third base for the team that was short a player that night. Two singles and some plays at third were the highlights of that first-ever fastpitch game for him.

He continued to play baseball and fastpitch softball at the same time for the next eight years. He was a very successful collegiate pitcher on the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse baseball team from 1969-1972. In 1973 he became more involved in fastpitch softball and played on several highly successful teams for the next 16 years including a stint with the Farm Tavern in the mid-1970s.

In the mid-80s Bob was introduced to a publication called The Fastpitch Softball News Bulletin that was published by ISC Hall of Fame member, the late Ray Anderson. When Anderson's publication ceased being published in 1987, Bob, the sports writer for Poynette's weekly newspaper, decided to light a new torch and start his own publication in 1988. "I could always type fast, I enjoyed writing and I loved fastpitch softball so it was a natural thing to have happen," he said.

Unable to procure Anderson's mailing list due to circumstances in the state of Pennsylvania over the availability of the list, Bob chose to start from scratch. He started contacting people who were regular writers for Anderson. The Legendary Jack Addison of Oak Ridge, Tennessee; Betty Stout of Lake Elizabeth, California; Wayne Fisher of Iowa City, Iowa and Irv Kawarsky of Des Moines, Iowa all quickly agreed to start writing and submitting articles about men's' fastpitch in their areas or from the tournaments they attended. As the paper grew Bob added other feature writers such as Dennis Kowalko of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (Kowalko's Korner); feature stories by Bob Otto of California; and insightful articles by Peter Porcelli of Tampa, Florida, just to name a few.

Bob traveled far and wide in 1988 and met dozens more people who agreed to be regular contributors to his new publication. He named it *The Fastpitch Chronicle*.

He compiled his first-ever issue in late July of 1988 and took 500 copies to the ISC World Tournament in Decatur, Illinois to hand out free. His goal was to get 100 subscribers by September 1, 1988. With a promise to return everyone's money if he didn't get the 100 people by that date and to publish all the news people sent in, Bob hawked new subscriptions in Decatur. He handed out all 500 free copies, watched the world tournament and headed home to wait and see if people were willing to risk \$15 on a new publication by a guy from Wisconsin they had only met once.

On August 29th the 100th subscription check arrived and *The Fastpitch Chronicle* took off. In its heyday, Anderson's Fastpitch Softball News Bulletin had 750 subscribers. Bob knows that to be a fact because he ultimately ended up with Ray Anderson's personal copy of the mailing list. By the end of the 1989 fastpitch season and the ISC World Tournament in Kimberly that year, Bob had increased his totals 10 fold. It just kept getting bigger and bigger.

As word spread across the country, Canada and the world, more and more subscribers came on board. More and more regular contributors quickly had Bob spending lots and lots of time putting each monthly issue together, all the while holding down a fulltime teaching and

coaching position at the school in Poynette. "There were hundreds of late nights working on the paper but every minute was a labor of love and I fell in love with the entire process."

Bob did more than just publish a newspaper. He provided one of the greatest services the game has ever known. He printed letters to the editor from paid subscribers only. He offered commentary in every issue and he challenged the people in the game to make the game better and think outside the normal way of doing things.

In the process Bob was the impetus behind Lloyd Simpson, a Canadian ISC commissioner, getting the ISC Youth Program started. Bob promised to enter a team in the first-ever ISC Midget Tournament no matter where it got held and he followed through and in the process introduced players now in their 30s to a game many of them still play.

Bob went on to reach more than 35,000 readers each month with "The Chronicle" and he offered the first-ever world wide website at www.fastpitchchronicle.com for people with computers in the 1990s. Bob went farther than that however for the ISC. He offered to organize the first-ever ISC 23-Under Tournament in Portage, Wisconsin and before he was done, he and his family had hosted no less than five ISC Developmental Tournaments in Portage where each team entered received travel money after completing their competition.

That was unprecedented and still is. Bob and The Fastpitch Chronicle sponsored at least one team in each of those events as well.

Fans soon looked forward to the Fastpitch Chronicle's North American Rankings where Bob and team of rankers actually ranked the continent's top teams. A look at ISC world tournament results and a check at the rankings just before the tournament started surely indicate that they knew their stuff.

Bob traveled the continent in an attempt to promote the game, the newspaper and the ISC for that matter. He met thousands of new friends along the way that all quickly became part of "The Chronicle family."

In the latter years of publishing the newspaper, Bob began a series of Fastpitch Chronicle Free Pitching clinics for men and boys. The clinics were a success and were the precursor to anything that is being done in that realm today. "There were pitching clinics in lots of places but none of them offered great instruction free of charge," he stated. "We wanted to do something for the game and not for ourselves. That was the biggest distinction between what others were doing and what we did."

In 2002, Bob was forced to bury The Fastpitch Chronicle. Times change and the world wide web, e-mail, instant messaging etc. made a monthly fastpitch rag obsolete. "It was one of the toughest things I have ever had to do," he said. "It was like saying goodbye to thousands of friends forever."

In 1999 Bob agreed to become the Wisconsin Area ISC commissioner. He then served one term on the ISC Executive Committee and in 2004 relinquished the commissioner position.

He still maintains The Fastpitch Chronicle website where people around the world can get information on fastpitch softball at any level, any division of play or about either gender.

"My time with the newspaper was a great experience," he said. "I met some great people, made some fantastic friends and was introduced to some real characters. Every one of them holds a place of one kind or another in my list of "forever memories" and I will cherish them always. Some are world renowned fastpitch legends and others are simply legends in the annals of The Fastpitch Chronicle.

"My years as an ISC commissioner and as Northern Vice President were certainly interesting," he said. "There were lots of issues and some high pressure politics during my time as a commissioner. I just always tried to do what was best for the game and for the teams and sponsors in the area I was representing. Another one of my goals was to promote the new lower level ISC II level of play. We had one of the largest ISC II area tournaments in the ISC and sent as many or more teams to that tournament as anyone."

In the end Bob says that it was the politics that made him choose to relinquish the commissioner position and move on in other areas of the game. "I believe that the newspaper and my work as a commissioner were good for the game and for the ISC. I took both jobs very seriously. There have been some positive changes that were a direct result of what the paper offered and my willingness to listen to people's thoughts and feelings gave me a perspective that allowed me to try to do what was best for the game."

Still a writer, Bob has embarked on a new project in 2007. He has started a book based upon the series of books "*Chicken Soup for the Soul*." The book will be a compilation of shorts stories drawn from the many experiences he has had a fastpitch player, manager, coach, administrator, commentator and publicist.

"Times do change," he said. "I've moved on to other areas in the world of fastpitch softball. The game itself is something that will always be dear to my heart and I will always be involved in the game in some capacity."