

Art Gillis, Saginaw, MI



Quite simply, Art Gillis, born in Saginaw, MI, has done it all... and much that he has tackled and accomplished, has been done for the “first time”.

In 1933, Art, in Plymouth MI, as an impressionable and wide-eyed eightyyear old watches, for the first time (and many thousands of times since) the action on a softball diamond across the street from his home. In 1941, Art, at age 16 in Detroit, begins a 30-year stint as a catcher. At age 46 in 1971, he tosses the mask and begins a decade-long mound affair, toeing the rubber in leagues in mid-Michigan.

Entrepreneurial in spirit, he first sponsors the Saginaw Bolters softball club. In 1962, Art recalls a memorable “on-field” moment. In a league championship game in the 11th inning, he hit a home run, unlike his other memorable “firsts”, he missed touching “first” base, and was called out, resulting in three innings of razzing and ridicule. In the 14th inning he hit a game-ending homer, and rounded the bases, this time emphatically jumping on “first”, and repeating the gesture on 2nd, 3rd and home bases.

In 1978, Art first meets ISC founder Carrol Forbes and promptly serves as the first-ever Michigan ISC Commissioner. The Bolters become the first-ever Michigan team in the ISC World Tournament. Art recruits Bolters’ pitcher, Kiwi Owen “The Fog” Walford, among the first to display skills from “down under” at the ISC event. In 1979, Art enters the Bolters into seven Michigan tournaments - winning all seven. Bolters, with Kiwi pitcher Kevin Herlihy, become the first (and still the only) Michigan team to win an ISC Championship. Art wins bid to be the first Michigan city to host the ISC championship (1981). In 1980, Art and crew revamp Saginaw Veterans Stadium (an abandoned and neglected former minor league baseball park) to prepare for 1981 ISC tourney. Bolters finish 8th at ISC with debut of youthful 18-year old Kiwi Michael White on the mound (White is now the winningest ISC pitcher.

In 1980, Art publishes “Softball World”, a tabloid newspaper which is a gem, packed full of fast-pitch memories (available at www.iscfastpitch.com – see 1981 archives). In 1981, Art and the Michigan softball community host the ISC tournament, featuring a 28-inning Tulsa vs shland match-up, which is overshadowed by the famous Midland vs. Madison 34 inning marathon.

The ’81 ISC tourney is mentioned for the first (and perhaps only) time on the NBC Today show. In 1982, Art provides missionary work in promoting the ISC in neighboring state Ohio. In 1983, Art becomes the first ambassador to and ISC commissioner in Florida. In 2006, Art recalls his most memorable player – Bonnie Jones, a legendary Detroit pitcher, who was the “measuring stick” against whom other pitchers were compared.

Retired from his career, but far from secluded from life and certainly not dismissed from the softball diamonds, Art has been an on-going and welcome fixture at fastpitch venues. As a widower, he enjoys his family Marc, Jayme (Henrickson) and youngest son Doug who pitched for the Midland Explorers as well as Team USA in international competition. In 1933, that first walk across the street to a ball diamond, is now, for the spry octogenarian, a simple, and very well-earned walk into the ISC Hall of Fame.