

AN ORAL HISTORY OF BASEBALL IN BUTTE FROM THE EARLY DAYS AT THE COLUMBIA GARDENS TO 1954 WITH TOM MULCAHY.

Background – Tom Mulcahy is a Butte native and lived in Cork Town. He attended St. Mary's School and Butte Central High School where he was active in football, basketball and baseball. After a year at Montana State in Bozeman where he played on a basketball scholarship he went to Gonzaga University on a baseball scholarship, played three years and graduated.

After graduation he went to Hollywood, California where he was signed to a contract by Bing Crosby to play for the Pittsburgh Pirates. Crosby was a Gonzaga graduate and one of the owners of the Pirates. He spent three years in the minor leagues with Topeka, Lincoln and Spokane.

After several years of part-time Scouting for the San Diego Padres and coaching at San Diego University, he came Director of Sales for the team and stayed on for 27 years.

He later opened a Sports Bar in San Diego with two Butte "rats" Emmett Casey and Casey. He operated it for 14 years, retired and returned to Butte early this year.

Early day baseball in Butte centered around the field at the Columbia Gardens. It was the scene of inter-mine teams and out-of-town teams. It was the local football field at the time with such greats as Danny Hanley, Birdie Aho and Ricka Nugent

Right after World War I, W. A. Clark built a state-of-art baseball field which seated 4,000 spectators in the Grand Stand and bleachers. The field was de-composed granite and was never grassed. All high school and college football games were played there, this included the Bobcat-Grizzly game until 1939 when Naranche stadium was built.

During the 1920's the Butte Mines league operated. The four teams were the Clarks, ACM, Montana Power and Anaconda. There was a fierce rivalry between the four organizations and baseball players were imported from all over the country. Famous players who went up to the big leagues were Earl Averill, Cleveland; Hal Schumacher, Giants, Frankie Crosetti, Yankees; Dick Bartell, Giants and Phillies and Earl Brucker, Cardinals. One paid hand recruited right of Colorado School of Mines was Ed McGlone, who later became a vice president of the Anaconda Company in Butte and later New York.

During the depression years there was the City League. Games were played at the Cinders field on South Clark street and at the Hebgen field on East Second street. The teams had company sponsors such as Western Fuel, Pioneer Lumber and Butte Beer. Most of the players did not have regulation uniforms. The uniforms consisted of blue jeans, a logo sweat shirt and a baseball cap. Some of the players were Ed Geary who later coached the American Legion team, Jim Freebourn, who later became a District Judge; Fish Pajnich, Dewey McGeehan, Tom & Ed Jovich and Smoke Martinich. Adult baseball was interrupted by World War II.

In the 1930's, 40's & 50's there was a Grade School league sponsored by School District #1 in the summer months and was ran by Bill Cullen. It included both public and parochial schools. Mulcahy described Cullen as "one of the finest gentlemen he ever knew. The teams were divided into two leagues with the teams from the hill in the Western league and teams from the East side and the flat in the Southern League. The Southern league played their games in the morning at Clark Park and the Western league played their games in the afternoons at the Cinders. The great thing about the Grade School league according to Mulcahy, because of the time of day there was no involvement by parents. The players, Umpires and volunteer coaches could play the games and enjoy it without parents interfering or trying to call the shots. This did not occur until Eddie Foley brought Little League baseball to Butte in the 1950's

An aside here: in the Grade School league, the pitching mound was 50 feet from home plate. Mulcahy in his own words was 6 feet tall when he was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Cullen made him pitch from the regulation 60 foot mound. Mulcahy pitched for St. Mary's School in the Grade School league and the Butte American Legion team in the same year.

American Legion baseball was started by the National Organization in the 1930's for young baseball players under the age of 18. Since this time many of the major league baseball players got their start in Legion baseball. Every year, through a series of playoff tournaments a National Champion is selected.

Butte won its first championship in 1936 when Eddie Geary was Manager. Two of the outstanding players were Doug Edwards and all-around athlete from Butte High School and Rich Navarro a catcher from Butte Central. Edwards was on his way to the Major Leagues when World War II broke out.

Butte won its next state championship in 1946. The team included Jim Sweeney, who went on to become one of the leading college football coaches in the Country. Wilbur Johnson who played for the Cincinnati Reds and later worked for many years in this baseball organization, Muz Faroni, who owns the Freeway Tavern in Butte (the home of

the "Wop" chop), Jim McCaughey, George Vucurovich, Paul Driscoll and Bob Pavlovich who owned the Met Tavern for many years. And of course Tom Mulcahy. Butte won the state championship in 1948 and 49 with Geary still coaching. Some of the notable names added to the above included Jim Hanley, Lenny Stevens, Fred Girard, Sly Jim Sullivan, Emmet Casey, Owen Bush and John Frankino  
. Butte won its last championship in 1954..

At this time Eddie Bayne of Billings took over the coaching and managing of the American Legion baseball program. Billings teams have dominated Legion baseball in Montana since this time.

Since World War II and the Korean war the leader of the American Legion baseball program in Butte has been Judge Jack Whelan. It has been the love of his life. He has raised large sums of money, sold advertising, took tickets, drove the team bus and cooked the hot dogs in the Concession stand. He retired this year as District Judge at age 75. While not active anymore in the day to day activity of the Butte program, according to Mulcahy, he still maintains an active interest in it and attends many of the games now played at the Tech Alumni Coliseum.

1945 & 46 saw the emergence of the Copper League in Butte. This was composed of adult players age 18 and more who had used up their eligibility in American Legion baseball, most where in their twenties and some where in their thirties.

The five teams in the league where the North Side, Miners Union, South Side, Silver Bow Parks and McQueen. All the games where played at Clark Park and started at 5:30 p.m. This was because there where no lights at the Park.

For this reason, Butte and Anaconda were the only cities in Montana to go on Daylight Saving time. The time started the day before Memorial Day and ended the day after Labor Day. This situation caused unhappiness on the part of some Merchants whose out-of-town customers who were confused by the time and found the stores closed when they got to Butte. The City Council at this time felt there was no reason to spend the money to light Clark Park, because the present system worked so well.

Tom Mulcahy pitched for the North Side. Others on the team included Jim Sweeney, Steve Podgurski, Bill Leybold, Jim McCaughey and Wilbur Johnson. Johnson later played with the Philadelphia Phillies and is still scouting for the organization today.

McQueen had a notable infield who played together for many years: Fish Pajnich, Pee Wee Mihelich, Joe Kristich and Lou Spear. Elmer Rossellini, who played Center Field with this team, later became Clerk of the Federal Court and was one of Butte's premier wine makers.

The Silver Bow Parks team included Lefty Meherns and Joe Phillips from Anaconda. Mehrens was one of the best pitchers in the League and was in the New York Yankees organization for several years. The first baseman on the team was Bob Koprivica who later was very successful in the beer business in Butte and was President of the Serbian Orthodox Congregation for many years. Jim Wedin played Center Field and went up to the majors with the New York Giants.

The South Side included three players from East Helena: Joe and Bob Srenar and Herbie Plews. Plews later played in the Yankee organization.

Two pitchers in the league came from Miles City, Jim Lucas and Paul Caine. Both later pitched for the University of Montana when Mulcahy was pitching for Gonzaga. Lucas, who became a lawyer from Miles City was on the Montana Power Company Board of Directors. Caine, was a career Navy officer and is still active in the U of M Alumni. Mulcahy noted when he was pitching for Gonzaga there were four other of his St. Mary classmates on the team, Steve Kasun, Dirk Sullivan Steve Matule and Harvey Hall.

The Copper League ended in the early 1950's for lack of player interest. Clark Park was destroyed by fire in the summer of 1962. C. J. Hanson, the reporter for the Montana Standard, wrote in his lead for the story "Clark Park played to its largest and finest audience last night and ended a marvelous era in Butte's history. Later Montana Tech built its Alumni Coliseum which was lighted for football and baseball. This is currently the home of Butte baseball today.

Mulcahy in his travels in Los Angeles recalls meeting Bob Cobb, who was originally from Billings. Cobb Field, the Billings ball field was named after his father. Cobb owned the Brown Derby restaurants in Los Angeles and Hollywood at this time. The featured menu item was the famous Cobb Salad. This was developed by Cobb's Mother who ran a boarding house in Billings.

Jim: You said if I could hold my interview with Mulcahy to a half hour it would be a miracle. I timed it out...it was just 30 minutes.