

BOOMER HARDING- ONE GREAT GUY

CHATHAM- Ask anybody here about Wilfred (Boomer) Harding and they'll tell you the man who delivered mail to their doors for 35 years is one of the finest human beings they've ever met.

Compassionate. never an unkind word, they say- unassuming. Loves dogs and kids. outwardly friendly and inwardly shy. Nice man. Everybody says Boomer Harding is a gentleman.

Few people here, however, rarely mention Boomer's standing as one of the city's most outstanding athletes over four decades...even in knowing his basement is a virtual sports hall of fame.

more than 60 trophies, three boxes of newspaper clippings and an end wall smothered with Chenille crests, medals and pictures of teams he played for, confirm his athletic prowess.

Anyone would be flattered to be so decorated. To Boomer Harding however, the memorabilia is simply that. memories. Good ones. Bad ones. reminders only of the fun he had and the lasting friendships he developed over 40-plus years of competition.

Ah, there's a great ol' photo. the 1954 Colored All-Stars baseball team- Chatham's first Ontario champions.

"It was strictly a fun thing with team." Boomer said. "There was no TV in those days. few people had radios and hardly anybody who grew up in the east end around Stirling Park had a car. if a young fella didn't get himself into baseball he generally got himself into jail. The game was a kind of release from it all for most of us. Gosh, what a great time we had..."

The colored All-Stars operated on a financial shoestring.

we had even less than that," Boomer said. "We had to go on the road and sort of barnstorm across the province to pick up enough money to buy our bats. We were an all colored team, of course and something of an attraction from that standpoint but we had an exceptionally good team too.

WE We travelled in borrowed cars and maybe without knowing it even stolen cars. I don't know. A lot of the trips were made with the whole team riding in the back of a Taylor's Mill flour ~~pickup~~ truck. we'd go anywhere, anytime for a ballgame.... and a dollar or two."

Earl (Flat) Chase, Don East Washington, a lefthanded third baseman by the name of King Terrell and Don Taborn were the acknowledged stars. Oldtimers in the area contend these four had major league potential. None of them were ever considered, of course, because blacks were barred from playing with the pros.

"We had an exhibition game one day against a Detroit team which include several of the Tigers," Boomer said. "When the Detroit manager found out we were colored he threatened to call off the game. Luckily he found out one of our players was an Indian chap by the name of Wally Shognosh. At that the Detroit manager said we'd better all be Indians in a hurry or his guys wouldn't take the field. So...for a day we were Indian."

Flat was unquestionably the most gifted player in the country at the time. His batting feats are legendary from Detroit to Penatanguishene.

"If you were in Welland today and told anybody you were from Chatham, the first thing they'd tell you would be about the homerun Flat hit there one day." Boomer said. "It was one of my greatest moments because I was on first base when he hit it. The ball not only cleared the right field fence, it cleared a building way behind the fence. People in Welland later said the ball ended up downtown. Flat was the most gifted hitter I've ever seen. There's no question in anybody's mind who ever saw him that he would have been a major

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