

# BASEBALL IRELAND



BASEBALL IRELAND NEWSLETTER – MAY '17  
20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

## NEW BASEBALL IRELAND PRESIDENT.



Tom Kelly

It was 20 years ago today, or something like that. Not Sergeant Pepper teaching his band how to play, but when baseball in Ireland got a structured adult league after a few rainy summers of pick-up ball that resembled sandlot play more than a national competition. The inaugural season of organised Irish baseball featured some teams that still feature in 2017- the Spartans, the North Stars, and the Hurricanes for example - as well as some clubs that are now defunct. Teams like the Panthers, champions of the premiere season, and the Dukes did not endure, giving way to new iterations like the DiMaggios, the Blue Devils, and the mostly Cuban stocked Tigers. The bats were metal, the innings were seven, and the M1 to Belfast was just an idea. If you stop to take a listen at Corkagh Park, you'll hear the names of past Irish baseball heroes whistling through the reeds and lane ways.

*“The bats were metal, the innings were seven,  
and the M1 to Belfast was just an idea”*

Names like Kenny McCarthy, the speedy center fielder, and his slugging brother John. Mike Kindle throwing to battery-mate Mick Manning, who wore the tools of ignorance as well as Sinatra in black tie. Cormac Eklof picking off an ambitious Fiachra Stokes as he leaned too far towards second base or the shouts of despair as Dougie Fiorilla breaks his wooden bat. The South County Dublin winds will carry these names forever. They will also carry mine because I was there too.

Looking back on 20 years of Irish adult league baseball, one can remember many key and memorable moments. Playoffs were not part of the early days, rather league points determined the Irish champion. In the pre-smartphone era, we also had an official scorer at each game, which allowed the NEC to run a fantastic Irish fantasy baseball league to raise funds. Players will remember Dave and his dog Pepper keeping score from a lawn chair. Team rivalries were momentarily put aside as you hoped that an RBI from Amory Schwartz would bolster your fantasy chances. Eventually the Greystones Mariners joined league play to the delight of every left handed hitter. Just ask anyone about the right field fence at the rugby club grounds if you want to understand why.

As President of Baseball Ireland I will put these past memories and experiences to good use as the NEC addresses pressing current needs in support of league play, youth development and the expansion of playing sites. We are rolling out a new National Team programme spearheaded this summer by an inaugural under-18 Irish team that will complete in Switzerland in June. Besides the Senior National Team traveling to Ontario, the third iteration of the Ashbourne International Baseball Tournament will commence in early July. We all welcome the addition of a representative Ulster team into the A League competition as well in 2017.

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I would like to acknowledge the continued hard work and dedication of our National Executive Committee and to give thanks to all of the players and coaches that make baseball in Ireland a possibility. Make sure to check into the Baseball Ireland website and Facebook pages to get updates and announcements. Play ball!

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Peter Kavanagh

**Tell us about your tenure as Baseball Ireland President?**

My three years as President were a massive challenge. As a minority sport, driven by volunteers, we can struggle to get things done with the same efficiency as other sports; but the passion our clubs show continues to surprise me. We saw some amazing things happen over the last three years, including new teams coming and going, and new ballparks opening in Ashbourne and Belfast. Growing the game was a priority, and while we've increased our profile significantly, we

still struggle to grow the numbers we have playing the game we all love.

**What have you learned?**

I've learned a lot about myself as a person, and as a leader, during my time as president. We have a great bunch of people involved in Baseball Ireland, who are all interested in driving the game forward in Ireland. Working with baseball supporters, teams and governing bodies from all over the world has been a great experience. We have to invest in the future of the sport now, as youth baseball is the only way to ensure that participation numbers grow and the game flourishes.

**What challenges and opportunities do you see ahead?**

We rely too much on a small number of volunteers. Too many of our players are happy just to turn up at weekends and play ball, without considering how that game is scheduled, umpired, reported and publicised. Every member of every club needs to look at what they can do for their own team or for the sport as a whole. There are lots of opportunities too. There are far more people who identify as Irish in the USA and Canada than there are here in Ireland. We need

to reach out to our diaspora and find more players, coaches and supporters. We have a golden opportunity to grow our national team and become big players on the world stage.

**Finally, what were the highlights and low lights of your presidency?**

The best thing about my time as President was undoubtedly the opening of two new ballparks. The amazing work done by the Ashbourne Giants and the Northstars and Buccaneers was inspiring. They worked with local authorities and the community and they have really shown how we can make baseball part of where we live.

There were no real lowlights, even though there were challenging times. It's never nice to see a baseball team struggle for players and withdraw from the league, and that can happen, even today. If I was forced to pick a "worst thing", it would probably be the lack of playing time I had. I don't know how I'm going to get back into the Hurricanes team after three years of being too busy trying to run the national federation!

le gach dea-ghuí,

**GREYSTONES MARINERS 25TH ANNIVERSARY**



Greystones Mariners... Familiar faces?

Last Friday (7/5/2016) the Greystones Mariners, the oldest baseball club in Ireland, celebrated their 25th anniversary. Organised by Mariner's talisman Gareth Donnelly, the event saw players, coaches and fans come together at the Harbour Bar, Bray to fondly walk down memory lane and immerse themselves in an evening rich in nostalgia and to contribute an affectionate anecdote or two... or ten.

While the Mariner's adult team has had many a success over the past two decades (Mariners A team winning the league in 2014 and the Mariners B

team having twice brought home the cup in 2007 and 2012) it seemed appropriate that the evening focused on the history of the Mariners' youth development. As a result, the Mariners decided the time was ripe to induct its first three Hall of Famers for their

unparalleled contributions to the Mariner's youth section over the last 25 years. The three inductees were John Marcus, Paul Murry and Michael Quilty. All three of these men have had a profound impact on the growth of Irish baseball, having spent countless hours down at the field hitting ground balls, organising trips abroad so that the Mariners could try and spread their style of baseball to the continent or simply trying to explain what an infield fly is, yet again. Any success that the Mariner's baseball club has had

over the past 25 years can be tracked back to one of these three men. They certainly were instrumental in there having been three 100% homegrown Mariners youth graduates on the Irish National team that competed in last year's European C pool Championship in Slovenia (one, of course, being the current national team captain, Leo Farrel).

All in all, it was a wonderful evening that celebrated a 25-year-old bond that has been bringing people together, creating friendships and inspiring new passions all for the love of the game that we all hold so dear. From a personal perspective, I hold my 15 years at the Mariner's as some of the happiest times of my life and I am already looking forward to what the next 25 year years will bring (excluding, of course, the impending onset of old age...). Thank you, Greystones Mariners for bringing to the people of Wicklow the simple pleasure of baseball and all the elation that comes with it.

Jack Fairbairn

## QUALITY TIME WITH TIMMY



Timmy Rodriguez - Player Profile

Timmy Rodriguez, who played baseball professionally in the Texas Rangers organization, came to Ireland in 2015 and joined the Dublin City Hurricanes. Currently based in County Mayo, Timmy doggedly makes the journey to Dublin to participate in the Adult league demonstrating his love for the game and enthusiasm for Irish

baseball. We sat down with Timmy and asked him a few questions.

### ***What do you think makes the Irish league unique from any others you have played in?***

The Irish League is unique because of its purity, it runs solely on "the love of the game", no money, no contracts, no distractions: it is how the game is supposed to be played. Everyone in the league is just there because they just love baseball. It's a safe haven for non-Irish born players who grew up playing the game in other countries and brings people together with common purpose. It is exciting to see the game spreading to Ireland and to see how the league has progressed.

### ***What has been one your most memorable moments playing in Ireland and why?***

One of my most memorable moments was winning the league championship (2015) after over

a decade of drought for the Hurricanes. I was a newcomer and we took the championship in my first season. So I wasn't there to experience the long drought, but after we won it was a tremendous feeling... I knew what this meant to my team, especially the veterans, it was indescribable to be part of the team to bring back the championship to the Hurricanes.

### ***Slugfest or a No-No, which is better?***

SLUGFEST for sure, so much more fun when everyone is mashing. Everyone loves hitting and it's even more fun when the whole team is crushing the ball. A no-no is fun too, but if you ask any hitter we'd rather be crushing than playing defense.

## APRIL FOOLS

We had a huge reaction to the prank the NEC ran on April Fools Day in respect of requiring all team players on the roster to pitch throughout the season. Some of the best responses were as follows:

The names are omitted to save the blushes of those who fell for the prank but you know who you are!

"See this new bullxxxx rule change?"

"You also better get your cannon fodder in early lest they leave or

you run out of innings towards seasons end (walkovers or mercy rule can we nominate guys who would've pitched to satisfy the rule?)"

"That is absolutely insane! Do we now have to sacrifice being competitive to fulfill some absolute bullshit rule to appease the federation? This new rule is an absolute disgrace!"

"I'm sure there's a mistake here because this obviously doesn't

make any sense.

"What happens if we put a player in and they cannot hit the plate and walk consecutive batters. Are they obligated to pitch until they get 3 outs in league play irregardless of how many batters it takes? This may take several weeks.

"Wow!"

"Here I was thinking, is his keyboard broken or something, what's with the random letters....."





The clocks have changed, nights are getting longer and the sun has begun to appear from behind the clou..... nope, gone again.

Irish baseball is back.

Hopefully the Belfast Northstars will not be rocking too much of a hangover after last years' B league title but they are set to appear very different to last year's side thanks to the inclusion of a new team in the A league.

Formed as the brainchild of Cavan Comet Adrian Kelly, the Ulster baseball side was put together as a representative team for touring or to match up against the national side.

With members of the Ulster sides (Bucs, Comets and Stars) looking for some higher level competition, it was decided to enter the regional team into the A division.

The Ulster Team had its first outing last weekend vs. the Spartans in Clones. They shared the spoils with a 1-1 recorded to start the year on a solid footing. The team will take time to gel with as we have essentially two teams trying to play together as well as newcomers thrown in for good measure – the guys need game time to learn to play with each other. The Spartans are one of the most successful clubs in Baseball Ireland for a reason and they showed it at the weekend. The level of competition will be exceptionally high this season but we know Adrian, Randy and the guys are excited for the challenge.

And what of the champion Northstars? It will no doubt be a rebuilding campaign for the men in maroon but coach Sean Shackley remains positive about the teams chances thanks to a new-look pitching corps anchored by Shackley himself and with up-and-coming hurlers Josh Cuthbert and Sean McMahon ready to step up. Gord Cuthbert and Mark Smith will be waiting in the wings to provide more veteran support on the bump.

The Northstars were fortunate last year to be blessed with a deep bench which will be emptied this year with Gordon Lafferty, Jason Scott, Dave Gray and Mike McConville all expected to log serious innings this year. The Stars also welcome back Calvin Phillips to the squad who may well be an important part of the lineup before season's end.

Play ball.

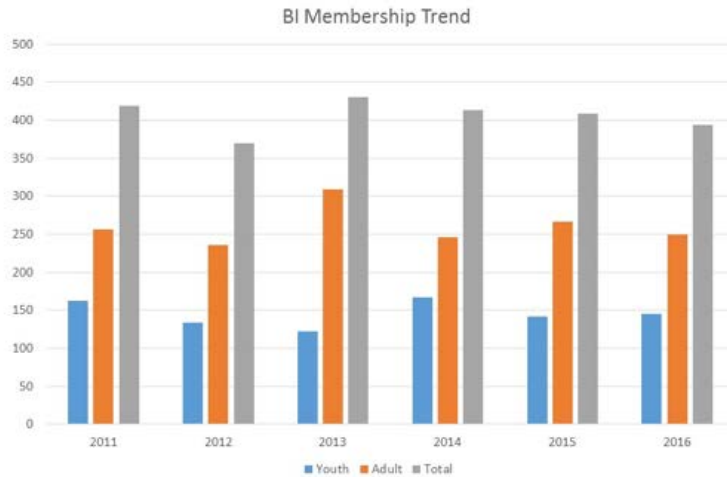
By Neil Boyd

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## CALL TO ACTION!



Baseball Player Membership in Ireland has remained steady over the last 5 years. 2016 saw a slight overall decline in players numbers and this is something the National Executive Committee want to address. We do not want to remain stagnant but rather we need to grow the sport on a national level. We need your help to do this. The 2017 season saw the introduction of mandatory club committee (Chairperson, Secretary & Treasurer). Public relations however

and the promotion of your club on a local level should not be ignored. Therefore we are asking each club to appoint Public Relations Officer and communicate the name of that person to the NEC. In the absence of such an appointment we will be communicating with the Chairpersons of each of the clubs to help them develop effective recruitment and player retention strategies. This will include shared learnings and strategies to form alliances with established local

sporting organisations. We will also be providing advice on cost effective advertising and brand building. The NEC will be working hard to promote Irish baseball on a national and international level however now is the time to also consolidate and grow what we have at 'grass roots' level! We look forward to your support on achieving this!

**Adrian Kelly**  
PRO Baseball Ireland

## WHY PLAY?



*"I don't want to play other sports like golf.  
When I hit a ball, I want someone else to chase it"*

Rogers Hornsby