

By Waite Forsyth  
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## **Lou Collins**

THE LITTLE fellow, solidly built and near pink in physical condition despite the encroaching years, was stepping briskly as he neared the sports desk in the Jamestown Times-News bureau office.

“May I use your “phone?” he asked with nary a sign of preamble. Gaining nodded permission, he called someone, evidently a member of the Jamestown Jaycees, concerning some Burtis Bay condition, perhaps),

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THE ENTIRE ACT was typical of Louis “Lou” Collins for years Jamestown sports merchant prince and a one-man recreation department before said department, one of the busiest in the city’s government, came into being.

A scholastic and pro football and basketball standout in his own right, Collins entered Jamestown’s business ranks at an early age.

Perceptive and alert to the needs of the then-growing city and impelled by a deep love of sports, he turned to the promotion of matters athletic.

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ONE OF HIS first ventures in this field was the organization of a Chautauqua County Baseball League—later to be renamed the Chautauqua County Association—in 1921. The association is just completing its 44<sup>th</sup> season of operation, the oldest baseball organization of its kind, according to Ray Dumont’s National and World Baseball Congress, based in Wichita, Kans.

Only one thing interrupted the league’s long run of success - the 1943 season when World War II gas and tire rationing compelled a temporary close-down. During its 44 years, the association roster has ranged from six clubs to a two-division 16-club federation. Collins was the league secretary at the beginning and the secretary he still is.

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### **Learned Early**

LOU LEARNED as early as 1919 that thinking up the organization of leagues was only the beginning, it delved on him to search out the team sponsors, do the scheduling, arrange for playing fields, round up the umpires and referees, convene rules

meetings (held in his sports good store, mostly) “keep peace in the family” and attend to any other stray bits of work that happened to bob to the surface.

It was in 1919 that the young business man organized a six-team Muny Baseball League, which played its games on the Jamestown High School campus, known for years as “the rock pile” for obvious reasons. The circuit made an instant hit with the local players and fans and the following season it burgeoned to eight teams.

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SO ANXIOUS were the players of that era for competition that they purchased their own uniforms and person equipment such as spikes, gloves, mitts, bats and balls. And the umpires served without payment. The whole picture was a far cry from conditions hereabouts today.

During the 1920’s, Lou’s personal athletic empire branched out. He organized the Muny B League at this time, with an original roster of 12, which blossomed to 16 in its second season. Next on the scene was the Class C League for younger players which came into existence with 16 entries in two divisions.

LATER ON, the Class D League was formed of three six-club divisions, followed by the advent of the Industrial and Fraternal leagues, until some 60 teams, as Collins recalls, were in action in the city and area during the Twenties and Thirties. Along about this time, the muny league was lifted to Double A ranking.

Playing fields were at a premium. The old campus, the long-gone Salisbury Field and almost any available open space was requisitioned. In later years, development of Allen and Roseland parks eased the situation.

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### **Turned to Basketball**

WHILE THE players of the early days supplied most of their own financing, the matter of operating funds became an increasing problem. Lou remembers that one year, the City Council appropriated \$300 to help the “recreation program and to support band concerts in Allen Park. But, he recalls, too, somewhat sadly, the City Fathers, voted down the appropriation the following year when some one or two of the members objected to the “useless waste” of public funds. In later years of course, the council provided funds for the hiring of game officials.

Encouraged by the success of his baseball league, Collins brought about the organization of the city basketball leagues, even one for the girls, which flourished for some 10 years. The men’s leagues lasted through the late Twenties and Thirties and until the present Recreation Department took over the reins.

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A FRATERNAL LEAGUE did a brisk business in the old YMCA building for a member of seasons and Collins also came up with a county cage loop. In addition, he helped the late Doc Demarest, YMCA physician director, with the organization of a Y loop which brought about some of the finest competition in the city's athletic history.

Nor did Collins neglect football. He was the prime mover in the formation of the munny league which was an outstanding success during the pre and early days of radio and produced the Liberties-Crescent feud, undoubtedly one of the hottest of all time in Jamestown.

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### **Kids League**

ANOTHER COLLINS venture was a kid league for youngsters not more than 12 years of age and weighing not more than 100 pounds, a forerunner of the Jaycee Midget League of today.

Collins also promoted speed boat races on Chautauqua Lake, being a lake enthusiast from his boyhood years. He had charge of the city's tennis courts (not too many) during these early years and his store was headquarters for the issuance of permits for one season. It might be noted that the city's tennis facilities started with one Allen Park court.