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by Scott Kindberg  
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## Honoring An Area Baseball Legend

Town Of Ellery Celebrates The Legacy Of One Of Its Own



*Town of Ellery supervisor Arden Johnson, right, presents a plaque to Tom Brown, son of the late Walt Brown, on Saturday. The town is dedicating a Little League field in the name of Walt, a Bemus Point native and former major league pitcher.*

*P-J photo by Scott Kindberg*

ELLERY — When Tom Brown was a boy growing up in the mid-1960s in the Oriental Park area of Bemus Point, it wasn't unusual for him to see people drive onto his property just to get a closer look at his house. That's because Walt Brown, Tom's dad and a former major league baseball player, lived there.

It also wasn't unusual for Tom, then about 10 or 12, to find mail addressed to his father with a note requesting an autograph tucked inside the envelope.

That's because when you throw a baseball as well as anyone from these parts ever has, you can become pretty famous, even long after retirement.

"I just thought it was kind of neat," Tom said.



*Joining in the dedication of the Little League field in Walt Brown's name are, from the left, Bradley Brown, grandson; Kris Brown, grandson; Arden Johnson, Town of Ellery supervisor; Tom Brown, son; Barry Brown, son; John Cresanti, Town of Ellery council member; Doug Brown, grandson; and Andy Brown, grandson. P-J photo by Scott Kindberg*

Fast-forward more than 50 years.

Something else pretty neat happened Saturday morning at the Ellery Town Park as about three dozen family and friends turned out for the dedication of a baseball diamond in honor of the former St. Louis Browns hurler.

"We are honored to dedicate this Little League field in the name of Walter Brown," said Town of Ellery supervisor Arden Johnson.

Johnson then presented Tom with a plaque, bearing his late father's name and biographical information, that will be mounted behind the backstop for posterity.

"I know my dad would be very proud of this," Tom said.





*P-J photo by Scott Kindberg*

No one seemed to care that the dedication was in a pavilion several hundred yards away from the field because of the threat of foul weather.

Nothing could rain on the Brown family's parade on this day.

Walt was a graduate of Bemus Point High School in 1933 where he lettered in basketball, cross country, track and baseball, but it was in the latter sport where he truly made a name for himself.

In fact, he played minor league baseball for 18 seasons (1936-53) and spent part of the 1947 campaign in the majors with the Browns where he compiled a 1-0 record. Along the way he pitched against the likes of Ted Williams, Stan Musial, Yogi Berra and Joe DiMaggio. His accomplishments on the mound ultimately earned him induction into the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame in 1982.

But when he finally called it quits professionally, Walt didn't stop playing the game he loved, according to the testimonies yesterday. He was so proficient throwing the ball that he did so in the local county league decades later.

Mike Rodgers of Bemus Point recalled Saturday one particular season - 1961 - in which his pitching-

starved team needed help, so Walt threw himself into the rotation.

“He could still bring the heat,” said Rodgers, who was a young catcher back then.

But the 46-year-old hurler also liked to throw a knuckleball.

“It was almost not hittable and almost not catchable,” Rodgers said. “When Walt threw it, it was all over the place.”

During one particular game against a team from Onoville, Walt was pitching well, Rodgers recalled, but surrendered a triple to the third- or four-place hitter in the lineup.

“Walt was not happy,” Rodgers said. “He hated when people hit his knuckleball.”

The next time that same batter came to the plate, Walt had a different game plan.

“When I looked out at the mound, there was Walter Irving Brown totally in his element,” Rodgers said. “Any conversation would not change anything. Walt leaning over, staring down at the plate, chewing tobacco tucked in his cheek, the ball in his big right hand behind his back.”

Rodgers gave the sign for a fastball instead of a knuckleball.

“It was high, inside heat, and that put the batter on his backside as I caught the ball as it flew past his ear,” Rodgers said. “The batter returned to the batter’s box and stood as far from the plate as he could. He didn’t dig in.”

The poor batter eventually made the third out and as Rodgers walked back to the bench, Walt approached and said, “That’s how we used to do it (in the professional ranks).”

Noted Rodgers: “(Walt) never would have hit the guy, because he knew where that ball was going, but he was 46 years old, out of professional baseball and he still could do it.”

The Ellery Town Park is a well-maintained facility, complete with athletic fields and a newly expanded kiddie park. Johnson, the town supervisor, began having discussions with Tom several months ago about dedicating a Little League diamond in Walt’s honor.

“While I was coaching Little League baseball many years ago, Tom was a pitcher on my team,” Johnson said. “He was like his dad, and had a couple no-hitters. Walter and (his wife) Frances were always on the sidelines, cheering the team on. I can still see Walt with a smile on his face and a pipe in his mouth.”

If Walt were alive today - he passed away in 1991 at age 75 - his son believes his dad would be proud of the festivities Saturday.

“One thing I’ll always remember about my dad is he always said he wanted to give back to youth,” Tom said. “That’s pretty much what dad lived for.”

Thanks to the efforts of the Town of Ellery, the youngsters who descend on the field next to the flagpole will have a constant reminder of Walt’s baseball legacy, both locally and on the big stage.

“He would celebrate this for everybody,” Rodgers said. “This is all our honor. This is a jewel, just an incredible thing.”