



The Strange, but True History of Whiffleball on the Planet Earth

Featuring the bizarre connection between baseball, the city of Mishawaka, Indiana and its great sporting heritage, sporting apparel worldwide, and plastic.

Timeline:

The following historical events are facts. *Items in italics are still being debated by historians.*

601 B.C.

The Etruscans invent armor for gladiator games, the first true use of sports-wear. The more famous Ancient Romans later steal the game after improving the look of the outerwear (see 1997).



412 B.C.

The first Buddhist monk walks on fire -- without the help of brand name tennis shoes (see 31 A.D. and 1991).

31 A.D.

Jesus of Nazareth *walks on water* – also without the help of brand name tennis shoes (see 1991).

1800

Indian war involving the Shawnees, Potawatomi and Ottawa Tribes. *Princess Mishawaka involved in war.*

1820

Indian village "Mish-a-wa-ka at the rapids" established just east of the south bend in the St. Joseph River in Northern Indiana (see 2000).

1838

The Indiana General Assembly combines four Indiana villages under the name Mishawaka.



1846

According to the Baseball Hall of Fame, Alexander Cartwright writes rules for the sport and puts together the first organized team, the Knickerbockers. The first baseball game played under "Cartwright rules" takes place at the Elysian Fields in Hoboken, New Jersey on June 19. The Knickerbockers play the New York Nine (see 1980).

1849

The Knickerbockers are the first team to wear an official uniform in a baseball game. (see 1985)

1870

Plastic invented and patented by printer John W. Hyatt using celluloid softened by camphor and vegetable oils (see 1953 and 1957).

1876

The National League plays its first baseball game ever: Red Stockings 6; Athletics 5.

1878

All-knit woolen boot created by Adolphus Eberhart and Martin Van Beiger (see 1930 and 1976) causing the growth of what will become the Ball Band/Uniroyal Company. (see 601 B.C. and 1997)

1892

Indiana resident, Benjamin Harrison is the first American President to attend a major-league baseball game.

1898

Alexander Cartwright dies, maybe of shock after "hitting the runner with the ball to achieve an out" is removed from the baseball rule book (see 1980).

1899

The Village of Mishawaka votes to incorporate into a city; Manuel M. Fisher elected the first mayor.

1901

Mishawaka native "Fat" Freddie Fitzsimmons, All-Star knuckle-curveballer for the New York Giants 1925-36, led the NL with a .731 (19-7) winning percentage in 1930. Brooklyn Dodgers 1937-41, again topped the league (and set a Dodger record) with an .889 (16-2) percentage in 1940. Managed the Philadelphia Phillies, 1943-45. Born in Mishawaka, July 28.

1904

The Simplex Motor Car Company of Mishawaka incorporated. In 1909, the name is changed to the Amplex Motor Car Company. In 1911, two Amplex autos are entered in the first Indianapolis 500. One car crashes, killing its driver and causing the first race fatality. The other car finishes seventh; the driver wins \$800.

**1909**

Leo Baekeland produces the first completely synthetic plastic, Bakelite, from phenol and formaldehyde.

1915

N.Y. Yankees wear pinstriped uniforms for the first time. (see 1993)

1920

The Mishawaka High School football team wins the Indiana State Championship — and again in 1925, 1926, 1935 and 1950.

1933

Jim "Gomer Pyle" Nabors is born in Alabama on June 12.

1934

Baseball Home Run king Henry Aaron is born.

1936

Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Honus Wagner, Christy Mathewson and Walter Johnson become the charter members of the Baseball's Hall-of-Fame (see 1990).

1951

More than twenty years before there are Nike athletic shoes, Red Ball Jets fever (canvas gym shoes made by Uniroyal in Mishawaka) sweeps the nation.

1953

The first perforated plastic "Wiffle Balls" are produced and sold in Shelton, Conn., after David Mullany and his son cut holes, diamonds, and other shapes out of plastic balls, to create an imbalance. The ball that works best has eight oblong holes on the top half, and a solid bottom. The company is named The Wiffle® Ball, Inc.

Henry Aaron signs with baseball's Milwaukee Braves.

1957

The "serious use" of plastic -- i.e. the Wiffle® Ball -- takes a hit, when Plastic Hall-of-Shame's Don Featherstone of Union Products invents the plastic Pink Flamingo for front lawns.

1960

Future World Whiffleball Championship founders Larry Grau and Jim Bottorff are born on Mishawaka's Eastside.

1962

Future bat-and-ball Home Run king Steve "OB" Obren is born.



1962-63

Future World Whiffleball Championship Commissioners Scott Ermeti, Mark "Gator" Waumans and Perry "Boykin" Baert are born on Mishawaka's Westside.

1970

The Beatles break up and John Lennon forms the Plastic Ono Band.

Ermeti and Waumans play whiffleball at Mishawaka's Rose Park.

1971

The last Red Ball Jets roll off the assembly line at Uniroyal.

1972

After coaching the 1972 USA Olympic Track Team, Bill Bowerman, legendary coach at the University of Oregon fills the void in the athletic shoe market left by the departure of Red Ball Jets. He invents the waffle sole, pouring liquid rubber into his wife's waffle iron. He and Phil Knight sell the resulting track shoes under the name Blue Ribbon Sports, now known as Nike. The campus is located less than one mile from the future World Whiffleball Championship Headquarters (1992-94).



1973

Native Hoosier David Lee Roth sings lead for a California rock band named "The Red Ball Jets." In 1974 he teams with Eddie and Alex Van Halen to form the rock band "Van Halen."

1974

Ward Baker Park opens on Mishawaka's Southeast side. Henry Aaron hits his 715th home run, breaking Babe Ruth's career record.

1976

The Obren Brothers -- Mark, Tim, Tom and Steve -- play their version of whiffleball at Strike's Field on the corner of Homewood and Beiger streets in Mishawaka. Steve Obren hits 81 homers, smashing Roger Maris' single season bat-and-ball record. Bottorff and Grau also play.

1979

Mishawaka's University Park Mall opens. Mishawaka native and NL All-Star "Fat" Freddie Fitzsimmons dies at the age of 77.

1980

On June 12, Bottorff lays out a "new-look" whiffleball field at (Bethel) College Park in Mishawaka, complete with Obren-inspired rules, six-foot high home run fences and new twists. Official Rules and Field Dimensions are copyrighted, including the return of the original 1846 "Cartwright rule" whereby it is legal to hit the runner with the ball to achieve an out. The exciting new game varies greatly in comparison to "fast-pitch" lineball tournaments held later elsewhere in the country.



On August 2, Bottorff, 19, and Grau, 19, hold the First Annual World Whiffleball Championship at College Park. Eight park teams participate in the double-elimination tournament. Bottorff and Steve Obren of "College Park I" take the first World Championship. Future Commissioner Rich Carrasco, 11, looks on.

The park has two playing fields, dimensionally identical to the standardized fields in use worldwide today.

1981

Mishawaka High School wins the Indiana State Volleyball Championship – and again in 1984 and 1989.

Ten teams invaded College Park. Future Commissioner and Hall-of-Famer Scott Ermeti's Homeboys, out of Baltimore, Maryland, manhandle College Park, 9-1, for the World Title, with future Commissioner Mark "Gator" Waumans hitting 11 home runs in 4 games.

1982

Ermeti discovers that mammoth Ward Baker Park is perfect for whiffleball and converts it into what will someday become, at 20 fields, the World's Largest Whiffleball Complex. Ermeti and Waumans join the Commission.

Four fields are utilized for the 10-team tournament.

Bottorff and Graus' Blue Ribbon Babies (Bloomington, Ind.) knock off the defending champion Homeboys in the final.

Marvin Gaye sings Francis Scott Key's "Star Spangled Banner" at the NBA All-Star Game in Los Angeles. A soulful rendition, it instantly becomes one of the most controversial and legendary interpretations of the anthem ever performed.

1983

Mishawaka's Barnaby's Pizza becomes the official Friday night watering hole of the World Whiffleball Championship.

Fourteen teams play on six fields. The defending champion Blue Ribbon Babies hit an astounding 93 team home runs in seven games en route to their second world championship.

The tournament is now run independently by Bottorff and Grau, outside of the Mishawaka Park Department.

A taped version of Marvin Gaye's "Star Spangled Banner," is played before the whiffleball tournament. A stunned group of Mishawaka whiffers don't quite know what to think. Today, it is considered a classic recording and is one of the most anticipated moments of a truly global World Whiffleball Championship.



1984

The Blue Ribbon Babies win a third straight title over Rose Park. Grau serves as acting Commissioner.

1985

The "Homeboys" become the first team to wear official whiffleball uniforms (see 1849). Mike Schuster, with his arm in a cast, pitches Mishawaka's Laidig to an upset victory over Baltimore, Maryland's Homeboys for the World Championship. Founder Bottorff resumes Commissioner duties.

1986

The Eighth Man-Made Wonder of the World, the Mishawaka underpass, is completed on South Union Street, providing not only access to the city's only hospital for emergency services, but a much-needed shortcut for Northside Mishawakans and Canadians to Ward Baker Park, at eight fields, the world's largest whiffleball complex.

The Homeboys (Baltimore, MD) defeat Steve Obren's Dream Team II (Mishawaka) in the World Final.

Mark "Gator" Waumans is nicknamed "the all-time mythical home run champ" for his consistent ability to beat the plastic.

1987

Bottorff's father, Dick, a Mishawaka native, personally deposits a tournament-used Wiffle® Ball in Chengdu, China --- half-a-world away from Mishawaka.

At the 8th Annual World Whiffleball Championship, Mayor Robert Beutter dubs Mishawaka the "Center of the Universe" before throwing out the tournament's first pitch.

Dud's Gang, out of South Bend, Indiana, go undefeated by beating The Westsiders (South Bend, IN) for the World Championship. Dave Reed hits well over 20 home runs to establish himself as the game's new "Prince of Plastic."



Sports Illustrated writer Franz Lidz brings a team from New York City to the tournament. The media frenzy that accompanies Lidz' attendance ensures that the tournament receives heavy media attention in the years to come.

For the first time, the Commission charges a entry fee. The amount - \$10.

1988

Now officially named "The World Whiffleball Championship," Indianapolis hosts the first World Whiffleball Regional. In years to come, Seymour, Ind., Baltimore, Syracuse, N.Y., Los Angeles, Eugene, Ore. and Barcelona, Spain follow suit.

Dud's Gang successfully defends in 1988 looking invincible in trouncing The All-Stars (Osceola, IN) in the final. Twenty-four teams play on 12 fields.

1989

In the 10th Annual World Whiffleball Championship, Dud's Gang defeats The Sure Things (Louisville, KY), in a three game series for their third title in a row.

1990

In commemoration of its 10th Anniversary, The World Whiffleball Commission names twelve players to its newly formed Hall-of-Fame. Charter members include Dan Reed, Dave Reed, Keith Hadary, Steve Obren, Jim Wiesjahn, Mike Schuster, Perry Baert, Mark Waumans, Scott Ermeti, founders Larry Grau and Jim Bottorff, and Player of the 80s, Dave Steinbilber (see 1936).



The tournament swells to 45 teams in 1990, adding regional tournaments in Baltimore, Maryland; Indianapolis and Seymour, Indiana. Uncle Buck's Boozers win the Baltimore Regional, The Dittos win in Indianapolis and Hammertime wins the Seymour Regional.

Dud's Gang wades through the most formidable field in tournament history, winning their record fourth consecutive World Whiffleball Championship.

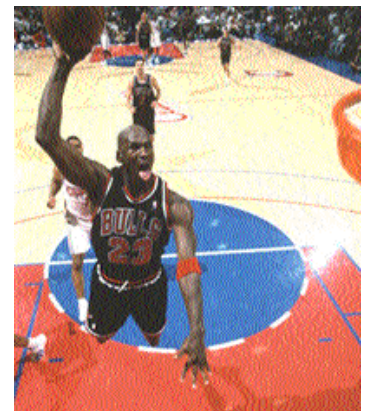
1991

Mishawaka High School wins the Indiana State Championship in Wrestling.

Michael Jordan walks on air with the benefit of "modern Red Ball Jets" -- Nike's "Air Jordans" (see 31 A.D.).

Ward Baker Park, already the world's largest whiffleball complex, expands to 15 fields.

Dud's Gang stages a late comeback to defeat the Weasels (Indianapolis) 14-12, to take its fifth consecutive World Whiffleball crown.



Skip Wright of the Sure Things is named to the Hall-of-Fame.

The first sign of the whiffleball tournament's future global status begins when a team from Maryland drives 650 miles to play in the World Whiffleball Championship. The Baltimore Regional Champs "Who's on First" go to the Sweet 16 on Sunday, then after being eliminated, stay to watch the World Championship game. One of home run hero and team captain Ed Weber's whiffleball groupies exclaims, "This was the greatest weekend of our lives!" By 1997, it is common for teams around the country - and the world - to fly in for the World Whiffleball Championship.

1992

Bottorff moves World Whiffleball Championship Headquarters to Eugene, Oregon, home of Nike founder Bill Bowerman.

The Opening Ceremonies of the World Whiffleball Championship are kicked off by a rousing Jim Nabors' version of the MacDonald and Hanley tune "Back Home Again in Indiana." The opening becomes another tournament tradition.



The Sure Things win the 13th Annual World Whiffleball Championship, defeating Mishawaka, Indiana's Buff Co., the first Mishawaka team to make it to the final game since 1985.

Dud's Gang is defeated by the Weasels in the first game on Sunday. The game is a rematch of the 1991 World Final. The loss ends the reign of the five-time champs, who had never lost a Championship since their debut in 1987.

Scott Shroyer of Dud's Gang is named to the Hall-of-Fame.

Ward Baker Park expands to 19 fields.

1993

Homeboys first whiffleball team to wear pinstripes. (see 1915)

Dud's Gang overpowers Jason Zolman's Louisiana Fur Trappers (South Bend, Ind.) to take their sixth World Championship.

1994

East 19th St. Café, a brewpub in Eugene, Oregon, hosts the first and last whiffleball winter meetings. Bowerman invited, but a no-show.

In April, Eugene, Oregon hosts the first Whiffleball Regional west of the Mississippi. Los Angeles follows six months later.

Jim Nabors survives liver transplant surgery (see 1992).

The Weasels, from Indianapolis, defeat Dud's Gang for the world crown.

Regional tournaments are played in Syracuse, NY; Seymour, IN; Los Angeles, CA; and Eugene, OR. A record 73 teams play in all tournaments with 53 playing in the finals in Mishawaka. The tournament entry fee is now \$90, including four guaranteed games and free t-shirts.

Tony Swihart of the 1981 World Champion Homeboys is named to the Hall-of-Fame posthumously.

After 15 years, tournament founder Bottorff retires as full-time commissioner.

1995

Perry Baert assumes commissioner responsibilities in 1995. The Blue Ribbon Builders (Granger, IN) defeat the Fun Bunch (Mishawaka, Indiana) 11-1, in the final game of tournament play.

The Spitting Cobras' Terri Bertrang of Indianapolis, becomes the first female participant in the history of the World Whiffleball Championship to hit an "outside the park" home run.



Mark "Gator" Waumans puts the World Whiffleball Championship live on the World Wide Web.

1996

The Blue Ribbon Builders, successfully defend their 1995 crown defeating the Reservoir Dogs (South Bend, Ind.).

Mark "Gator" Waumans is named full-time commissioner. Headquarters move to Carlsbad, California.

1997

Mishawakan Ermeti carries on the Mishawaka sportswear/gear tradition (see 1878), after moving to Barcelona, Spain to open up a European division of his employer's company, Peli Products. He also starts a regional whiffleball tournament there with the help of Spaniard Adolfo Pons. Pons, who stumbles upon the whiffleball web site, contacts Waumans by email in California, and to his surprise, finds that Commissioner Ermeti also lives in Barcelona.



Los Angeles-based teams, CHUDS I, II and III, run naked in the streets of Mishawaka after the World Championship's opening round.

The 1997 tournament truly becomes international with teams from Spain and Australia making the trek to Mishawaka's Ward Baker Park. Teams from California, Missouri, Illinois, Michigan, Kentucky, Oregon and Georgia also participate. The Blue Ribbon Builders "three-peat," defeating Fisher Concrete (Mishawaka, IN) for the World Championship.

1998

The Sure Things win their second, and the 19th Annual, World Whiffleball Championship, defeating defending champion Blue Ribbon Builders 12-11 in the championship.

Jason Zolman of the Blue Ribbon Builders and Andy Schoettle of Indianapolis' Weasels become the 16th and 17th players named to the World Whiffleball Hall-of Fame.

Controversy arises for the first time in the history of the tournament when a team is caught loading its bats. Fans show up with signs on Sunday, which read, "No hits, no runs, no cork," "Cork, the other white meat" and "It's only 100 feet, for god's sake!"

1999

Carrasco named to Commission.

Park reconfiguration turns Mishawaka's Ward Baker Park into a 20-field whiffleball complex.

The Blue Ribbon Builders (Granger, Indiana) reclaim the crown over Mishawaka's Chowder Box during the 20th Annual World Whiffleball Championship, winning their fourth world title in five years.

Terry Snyder, Kerry Snyder, and Mike Weber, named to the Hall-of-Fame.

2000

Mishawaka's Uniroyal factory imploded during a live television "blast cast." Another "Red Ball Jets" group, a rockabilly band out of Fort Wayne, Indiana, receives national critical acclaim; embark on first national tour.

The World Whiffleball Championship celebrates its 20th Anniversary on July 29.

Carrasco named full-time Commissioner. World Headquarters moves back to Mishawaka for the first time since 1984.

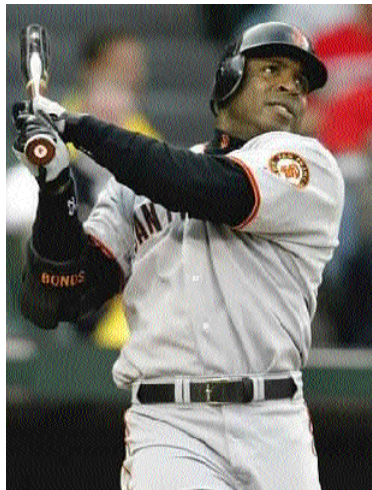
Forty-eight teams travel from all over the world to play for the 21st Annual World Whiffleball Championship. The Looney Wifflers (New Carlisle, IN) take the title, defeating Mike's Meatheads (Sullivan, IN).

2001

Hall-of-Famers Jason Zolman and Dave Reed are named Co-Players of the 1990s.

Newly-retired Commissioners Emeriti Mark Waumans, Perry Baert, Scott Ermeti and Larry Grau are presented with inscribed plaques honoring their direction of the Championship for more than 20 years and are given keys to the city by Mishawaka Mayor Robert C. Beutter.

The Sure Things of Atlanta, Ga., sweep through a record 59 teams to the 22nd Annual World Whiffleball Championship, beating Chowder Box of Mishawaka, Indiana in the final game on Sunday for their third World Title.



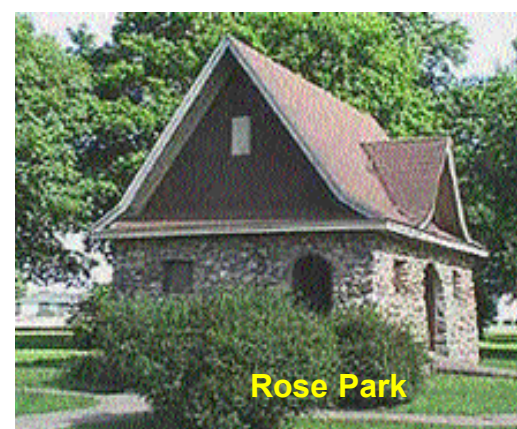
Accused steroid user Barry Bonds, hits 73 home runs, still falling eight dingers short of Steve Obren's bat-and-ball record of 81, hit in 1976.

2002

The Blue Ribbon Builders take their fifth world title at Mishawaka's Rose Park, at 22 fields, the new world's largest whiffleball complex. A record 63 teams compete. South Bend, Indiana's "Killer Bees" finish second. The aging Homeboys (ages 39-40)

stun the whiffleball world by reaching their 10th final four.

The Montreal Frappeurs become the first Canadian team to enter the tournament.



Rockford, Michigan's Fat Bastards become the first nationally known fast-pitch team to play in the World Whiffleball Championship. The 'Fatties' finish fifth out of 63, and help bring peace and understanding to the w(h)iffleball world.

Ken Humphrey becomes the twenty-first player named to the World Whiffleball Hall-of-Fame.

2003

Rich Carrasco retires as tournament director becoming the sixth former Commissioner to obtain the title "Commissioner Emeritus." He also becomes the twenty-second player named to the World Whiffleball Hall-of-Fame.

The Blue Ribbon Builders win their record-tying sixth World Championship over Munster, Indiana's Club Ripped.

The Opening Ceremonies' tape of Jim Nabors' singing "Back Home Again in Indiana" is misplaced. 73-year-old Dick Bottorff, father of Commissioner Jim Bottorff, steps in and belts out the tune, never missing a note. Another tournament tradition is born.



2004

South Bend, Indiana's Dud's Gang is named the number one whiffleball team of all-time as part of the World Whiffleball Championship's Silver Anniversary (see "News" page). Other greats are: 2. Blue Ribbon Builders - South Bend, Ind. 3. Sure Things - Indianapolis/Louisville/Atlanta 4. Homeboys - Barcelona, Spain 5. Weasels - Indianapolis 6. Blue Ribbon Babies - Bloomington, Ind. 7. Looney Wifflers - New Carlisle, Ind. 8. Dream Team II - Mishawaka, Ind. 9. Mike's Meatheads -North Vernon, Ind. and 10. Fight the Power - Annapolis, Md.

The World Whiffleball Championship holds its 25th annual tournament on July 31. The silver anniversary milestone again marks Mishawaka's sports institution as the world's oldest w(h)iffleball tournament.

Dick Bottorff again sings "Back Home Again in Indiana," this time changing the words from "along the Wabash" to "along the ole' St. Joe."

Ben Downey is the 23rd (and second youngest) player named to the World Whiffleball Hall-of-Fame.

Playing in his 30th tourney (including regional events), Mark "Gator" Waumans, the all-time mythical homerun champ, hits his 400th homerun.

Club Ripped of Munster, Indiana wins the 25th Annual World Whiffleball Championship, defeating the Funky Plastic Offspring, led by 43-year-old Mike Schuster, captain of 1985 champion, Laidig.

After 25 years, the directors of the oldest and largest w(h)iffleball tournament in the world quietly retire, turning the tournament over to Rich Carrasco and the Children's Campus of Mishawaka, Indiana's Family and Children's Center. Some of the event's highlights include:



- 1980 - The first World Whiffleball Championship is held in Mishawaka, Indiana.
- 1987 - *Sports Illustrated* staff writer Franz Lidz plays in the 8th Annual tournament.
- 1990 - Hall of Fame established (see bottom of "History" page).
Regional tournaments begin breaking out nationwide.
- 1994 - The first regional tournament is held west of the Mississippi, in Eugene, Oregon.
- 1998 - Barcelona, Spain hosts the first World Whiffleball Championship - Europe.
- 2002 - The Championship hosts a record 63 teams at Mishawaka, Indiana's Rose Park.
- 2004 - *ESPN the Magazine* features the tournament in its August 2 issue.
- 2004 - The tournament celebrates its 25th Anniversary.

2005

Former commissioner Rich Carrasco successfully runs Wiffle®Ballin' for Kids, a huge new charity tournament for the Children's Campus of Mishawaka, Indiana's Family and Children's Center. The



the new World Whiffleball Championship event draws 36 teams to Rose Park (still the world's largest whiffleball complex), with now seven-time world champion 'Blue Ribbon Builders' taking the top prize.

The World Whiffleball Commission remains live, extending the commission's rich legacy - and guaranteeing the naming of a true World Champion for years to come.

2006

Club Ripped wins their second world title, defeating seven-time champion, Blue Ribbon Builders. Forty-nine teams compete in the charity event.

