

The Martin 'Sports' Company
By Bill Cossaboom

I ran across a rather short article, while surfing the Internet, about a year and a half ago. It was published in a newspaper called the *Olean Times Herald*, and it was about a gentleman who had set up an endowment for the Olean Little League (Olean is located in western New York state). In describing his love of baseball, the gentleman had stated, "After playing there, I went into the service for two years. When I got out, I went to Annapolis and played baseball there," he said. "Then I went and played for the Glenn L. Martin Aircraft Bombers baseball team in Baltimore." I found this tidbit of information intriguing so decided to look into that bit of history. That is the genesis of this article. I found most information from many public sources.

In the mid 1930's, as the Glenn L. Martin Company (GLMC) became more and more successful and prosperous, Glenn L. (GL) was able to back off from 'mundane' day-to-day oversight of the company. GL had a management team in place to 'take-care-of-business' at that level. This was a man who remembered everyone's name as he walked through the facility -- especially if they were players.

One of his early ventures outside the company was in duck calls. GL had a duck blind (heated of course) on one of his properties. His investment in a recording company that recorded duck calls was a bust. Other less than successful off-site investments that did not go very well included an all-girl orchestra and diamond mines in America. That diamond mine property is now the Crater of Diamonds State Park in Arkansas.

Sports were his real love, and GL went all out. At times, there was even talk that GL was hiring people based upon their athletic abilities! That does seem to be the case, but those people also had talents that contributed to GLMC and many stayed for 30-40+ years in some cases -- long after they could contribute to a competitive sports

team. True, GL did know all the players by name and many rose to rather respectable positions within the company. True, GL did hire a dentist who just happened to be a former All-American football player to run recreation. True, GL did hire an opposing team pitcher when he applied for a job and immediately enlisted him to pitch for the Bombers. Two of GL's players hired for the women's' team held responsible procurement positions for years.

GL's two 'favorite' company teams were the men's baseball team (Bombers), and the women's basketball team (Bomberettes). It is interesting to note that when GL left the Wright-Martin Company to form the Glenn L. Martin Company, he was backed in part by the owner of the Cleveland Indians.

GL used company engineers to design the company's ballpark, which was thought to be the best amateur ballpark in the country. Prevailing winds were studied, soil conditions analyzed (special soil was brought in for the pitchers mound) and a special spectator's covering (an airplane wing) installed. It was noted that the drainage system was so advanced that games were rarely, if ever, rained out. In 1945, Baltimore set about building a new multi-use stadium and GL came up with the groundbreaking idea of building a domed stadium, which would have been the first in the country; however, it would not be until 1965 that Houston built the first domed stadium.

Now to the Bombers: The All-American Amateur Baseball Association was founded about 75 years ago in part by GL. In the teams beginning, GL *expected* his managers to provide the players with time away from their jobs in order to practice.



GL and his Bombers

GL's interest in his Bombers did not end with hiring the best players into the company. GL set his sights on developing a new more aerodynamic bat, and had the resources and equipment to do it. The model shop lathed the bats to GL's specifications from a black ash wood. Apparently, GL was in the shop quite often, making sure his specifications were met. According to one player, the bats 'were heavier than sin.'

Baltimore, June 28 — (AP) — Glenn L. Martin, aircraft manufacturer and designer, has come up with an "aerodynamic" baseball bat which he expects will add more punch to the game.

When the current shortage of bats threatened to put a crimp into the play of the Martin Company's 21 baseball teams, Martin designed a bat with more gripping surface, a narrower lower hitting surface and a slightly tapered "business end."

A woodshop located near the plant is turning out the bats in sufficient quantity to supply the Martin teams — and the players like them.

At a recent International League game in Baltimore between Baltimore and Buffalo, Ed Dutka, Buffalo first baseman, tried out one of the Martin bats in batting practice and put a ball into the stands. He used it his first time up and hit a home run.

The Bombers were regular winners of the industrial-series of ballgames, and often played exhibitions in Griffith Stadium (home of the Washington Senators), and could outplay many of the professional teams of the era. They truly were GL's pride and joy. When GL was out of town and could not attend a game, he would send a telegram to

his team manager asking who was starting and of course would have strong opinions on the conduct of the game afterwards. I think we call that 'micro-managing' today!

The Bomberettes were GL's star women's basketball team. I found at least three on-line obituaries of women and their families who considered participation on the team as one of the many proud highlights of their lives; Susannah Federico, Helen Lages, and Delores Peroutka. They won industrial-league titles and also the Maryland title. Two sisters who worked at the plant organized the team as an after work activity. GL heard about this team (and how good they were) so one afternoon, he showed up at the court. That evening the team became a GLMC sponsored team -- and a GL favorite. They began playing in 1944.

In keeping with GL's propensity to offer jobs to athletes, in order to enhance his teams, he approached the All-Star Haysi (Virginia) High School team of 1950. GL had offered jobs to four members of the Haysi team. Eudy Belcher was not hired, when it was discovered she was only 5'7" -- GL wanted women 5'9" or higher in height.

As a sponsored team, they had uniforms, travel paid for, and GL's micro-managing. GL had a miniature basketball court constructed along with tiny 'players' so that he could sit down with the team to discuss and illustrate his 'strategic' thoughts.



GL in one of his 'strategic' planning sessions

Modern business stresses teamwork. GL had a handle on that philosophy 40 years before it became popular. Forty years before companies began using paid consultants to teach them about teamwork. Forty years before Meyers-Briggs (ENTJ profiles used here) had to teach us about the personalities we were working with. He realized that working as a team for one goal was beneficial. His players took that spirit into their work for the company and helped make the company what it is today.

Today's company has many recreational activities/facilities that include baseball fields, gyms, shooting ranges, basketball courts etc... A legacy from GL that we should all be thankful for.