

Second career fits this happy Parma resident and Softball Legend like a glove: Jack Marschall



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JACK MARSCHALL

There's something very special about a boy's first baseball glove. I still have mine — tattered and smelly. I took it out of a storage box the other day for the first time in years. The mildew odor is distinct.

The glove means a lot to me, although it has little resemblance to the new J.C. Higgins glove my parents bought me in the early 1960s at Sears and Roebuck, when I was about 7 or 8 years old.

I imagine I still have it because it's connected to me like other pieces and parts of memorabilia in our lives that define who we are. I can hear your reaction loud and clear: "Really? A baseball mitt?" Just ask your grandpa, dad, husband, brother or boyfriend. They'll understand.

Here's a quick history lesson on my prowess as a baseball player: I played the bench. I was naive enough to believe the victory was not playing the game as much as it was making the team, presenting the slim possibility of getting in a game if all the other reserve players were injured or sick.

My team in East Cleveland was Don Fisher Furnace. It was always at the top of the Little League standings. That's why I was at the bottom of the roster. Still, I received a uniform, a cap and stockings. I looked cool.

Yeah, there is something very special about the game of baseball. I'm one of many guys who wept in the theater watching the movie "Field of Dreams." The line "Hey dad, wanna have a catch" had me burying my head in my popcorn as I desperately tried catching my breath between sobs. Watching it on DVD has the same impact. A speck of DNA from the characters John and Ray Kinsella is buried in many a man who played, watched or had a love for the game.

I don't remember having a catch with my dad because he was forever working, either at the firehouse or fixing washers and dryers on his "off" days. He was the greatest dad in the world, but he never had time to have a catch.

By default, my mom became my go-to baseball fan and historian. She told me stories of Indians' owner Bill Veeck and players like Lou Boudreau and Herb Score. My favorite player during my era was, of course, Rocky Colavito. He exemplified the player all kids wanted to become.



I went to only a handful of Indians games back then. I saw Jim “Mudcat” Grant in uniform walking through the concourse with another player between a Sunday double-header. I was in awe.

My “Bob” Clemente baseball glove, model number 188, was at my side at the old Municipal Stadium and throughout my optimism-filled journey as a young baseball player. The name Bob was the Americanized version of Roberto before the hall-of-famer’s given name was properly used by the media and Pittsburgh Pirates, the team for which he played his entire career.

My glove still bears the red, rubber-coated wiring I used to re-string the top of the webbing when it began to disintegrate, coinciding with my lackluster career on the baseball field. There was no one around in the ’60s to fix a baseball mitt other than the local shoemaker, and then the repaired glove smelled like shoe polish when it left the shop.

Times have changed, my friend. Now you can take that precious mitt to Gordon King of Parma. He has the knowledge and passion for repairing, reconditioning and giving life to baseball gloves in need of repair.

“I grew-up in Parma and played ball from the time I was 6 years old,” said King. “My dad bought me my first glove and I had it broken in by the time I turned 7. He taught me how important it was to treat it properly because it was an important piece of equipment. It was also expensive. I took care of it as best I could and had it for a long time.”

King, 54, says his first mitt survived because he was constantly cleaning it, wiping it out with whatever he could find. He says his dad bought him a second glove as he got older for playing ball in the neighborhood or at school. According to King, the basic lessons of responsibility taught by his dad stuck with him for a lifetime.



Gordon King works to restore a couple of baseball mitts.

As an adult, King played softball for 30 years and was chosen commissioner of the Co-Ed Softball League of Cleveland. It was during that time that fixing and maintaining his baseball glove and others’ became second nature. Customer satisfaction has always come first.

“So many people come to me with their high school glove — people in their 40s and 50s — and they want it repaired because it means something to them,” said King. “I’m rebuilding one that belonged to the great-grandfather of a client that had been passed down for generations. It means everything to him. That’s the case with many of my clients.”

“People come to me with a positive attitude, but they’re not sure they want to leave their mitt,” King said with a hearty laugh. “It’s so funny because they want me to fix it but they don’t want to let go of it. I almost have to yank it out of their hand and assure them I’ll take good care of it and fix whatever needs fixing.”

King started his own company, A-1 Glove Repair, about five years ago after losing his job at an insurance company. It was his wife, **Joyce**, who suggested he start his own business because of his passion for the game and his knowledge of revitalizing baseball gloves. His hobby-turned-job is a self-taught art that improved with age as King constantly rebuilt every glove he owned.

“I think I caught my parents off guard when I decided to get serious about repairing gloves,” said King. “My mom said we were going to get rid of this old leather couch that was made of some really tough, quality material. I told my dad I wanted to strip the leather off the couch. He laughed and thought I was joking. I wasn’t. He asked me what I was going to do with it, and I told him I would use the leather to re-string my baseball glove. I think he was stunned. And that’s exactly how it all started.”

King uses nothing but leather materials to re-string a mitt along with glue and what he calls a “magic formula” to soften and recondition a mitt. He works out of his Parma home and says he feels right at home when given the responsibility to care for someone’s mitt. It’s reminiscent of what his dad taught him as a boy.

“Baseball gloves are so unique to people for a couple reasons,” said King. “As a player, they have spent a long time breaking it in to make it feel just right. Also, it’s the memory that the glove represents. It doesn’t matter how old you are, that mitt has a history that is very special.

“To many people I see, the glove is a memory they want to keep alive. They feel that can be done as long as someone like me can take that baseball glove and make it look almost new again.

“I’m not getting rich doing this, but I couldn’t be happier. My real reward is the smile I see on the faces of my clients when they see their ‘new and improved’ glove. Boy, now that makes it all worth it. It gives me a ton of personal satisfaction and pride.”

Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, defines a baseball mitt is a large leather glove that baseball players on the defending team are allowed to wear to assist them in catching and fielding balls hit by a batter or thrown by a teammate.

That’s true, but there’s so much more.

As Gordon King said, a baseball mitt has a history and personality all its own. You can better appreciate the treasured value of a leather glove by putting it to good use.

Why not head outside with your son or grandson and give it a shot? In other words, go have a catch.

For more information, call 440-655-2674 or visit **A1gloverepair.com**.