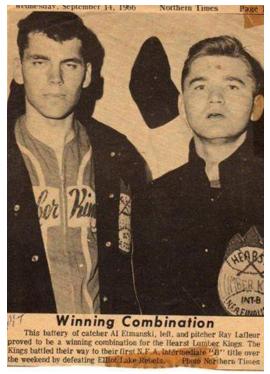
Ray (Iron - Arm) Lafleur The Passing of a Legend

By Ernie Bies, April 4, 2019



Legendary Hearst Lumberkings pitcher Ray Lafleur passed away yesterday leaving many memories of a man who contributed much to the sports history of the town. We will never forget his perfect game back on August 28, 1965. They beat the Mattagami Braves 1-0 in Hearst with Ray striking out 24 of the 27 players he faced, of which 17 were consecutive. His total pitch count was 96, during this historic game. The Lumber Kings went to the all Ontario finals.

The newspaper clipping on left dated September 14, 1966, shows Al Etmanski (catcher) and Ray Lafleur (pitcher) after winning the Lumberkings first ever N.F.A. Intermediate Championship by defeating Elliot

Lake Rebels. Al was only 17 years old when he joined the team. Clipping Courtesy Pit Hébert via Alan Jansson.

Al Etmanski posted his memories on his own blog 50 years later entitled "Glory Days" Posted by Al Etmanski on August 27, 2015 | 4 Comments

August 28th is the 50th anniversary of my near association with glory. I caught a perfect game for the Hearst Lumberkings. The game launched the Lumberkings on a magic season that led to the all-Ontario finals, a unique feat for a small Northern Ontario town.

It was also my first experience at being seen.

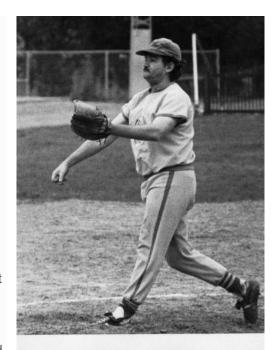
The star of course was the pitcher Ray Lafleur who struck out 24 of 27 batters. Ray's riser would hurtle towards the plate looking plump and tempting. The batter could see his destiny written on the ball. A perfect "out of the park" pitch. But then it rose, almost straight up, an unseen hand removing it from sight. Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh. It was my job to catch those darn things.

I was a high school kid and diamond rat (the baseball equivalent of a rink rat) hanging around while the legendary Lumberkings practiced. Pumping my glove, waiting to chase a stray ball and the chance to prove my arm was as powerful as the adults on the field.

Eventually, they let me catch batting practice and before you know it I was in the lineup as a summer replacement for the real catcher. I wanted that summer to last forever.

And it did.

Just before the playoffs began, the coach let me know that Ray wanted me to be his catcher. The other guy would play first base. Even if you could have wiped the smile off my face you couldn't have plugged the deep well it gushed



from. Ray Lafleur had confidence in me. Ray Lafleur trusted me. Ray Lafleur saw me.

Here's my reason for indulging in nostalgia with you. The great gift I caught that glorious Saturday evening April 28th, 1965 was being noticed and appreciated. That was the unseen destiny written on Ray's pitches. A destiny I now know is more precious than ability or achievement. One that costs nothing to bestow. And that lasts a lifetime.

Postscript:

Ray and I spoke by phone recently. He remembers every pitch from that game, as well he should. It ranks at the top of any amateur sports achievement. All I remember is his kindness, which is still more powerful than his right arm.

"Les Lumberkings sont la."

4 Comments

1. Rick Lafleur

August 27, 2015

ΑI

I was a 10 year old kid but I will never forget you catching the last pitch. I was sitting in the

stands along the 1st base line. You were standing straight up and your catching arm was fully extended. Ray's upshoot was unbelievable that night. So were you.

Rick Lafleur (Ray's younger brother)

Reply

2. Al Etmanski

August 28, 2015

thank you Rick - you've made a precious memory even more precious

Reply

3. Al Etmanski

August 28, 2015

Also glad to read the word 'upshoot' again. Folks out here call it a 'riser' so I chose that word. Ray will always be associated with 'upshoot' so I retired the word in his honour.

ΑI

4. Alan Jansson

August 28, 2015

I remember being at that game and those many other play-off series that graced our ball field almost each and every late September and October during the 1960s. In those good old days weather seemed to factor into many of those games and with the full cooperation of the town, town graders and other forms of equipment needed to be used in order to get the field in playable shape....it was rain, sleet, and snow, but nothing could deter from playing the game or the series. I even remember spraying the field with oil and burning it for drying purposes.....not sure how effective it really was. Again, the good old days.

Al, I remember you quite well from High School and going to catch for Ray, and at the time, and I couldn't remember why you went in to catch, but for one with little experience you did a darn good job. Who was the regular catcher at the time...was it Barry Fraser (the same Barry Fraser who did time with the Edmonton Oilers management team) or Roger Comeau. And yes, Ray was the best through his assortment of pitches and his record speaks for itself.........

Louis Corbeil documented the 50th anniversary of Ray's perfect game in le journal Le Nord, on September 10, 2015.

Le 28 août 2015 était le cinquantième anniversaire de la victoire de l'équipe de balle rapide les Lumberkings de Hearst contre Les Braves de Matagami, au Québec, dans la Northern Fastball Association. « Raymond Lafeur avait lancé une partie parfaite, retirant 24 des 27 frappeurs qui se sont présentés au bâton de l'équipe adverse, » a écrit Allen Etmanski, qui était le receveur lors de cette joute. « Hearst l'a remporté un à zéro. Tout un exploit pour une équipe amateure d'une petite ville du nord Ontario. » Pour lui, ce fut un moment qui l'a marqué pour la vie. C'est sur son blogue qu'Allen a écrit au sujet de cet anniversaire. Il est un auteur célèbre dans le domaine de l'organisation communautaire. Il se dit entrepreneur social intéressé par les effets de la collaboration pour résoudre les grands défs de la société. Son dernier livre, « Impact : Six Patterns to Spread Your Social Innovation, » a été publié en mars 2015. Il est cofondateur de Social Innovation Generation et du réseau Social Impact, leader dans l'innovation sociale en ColombieBritannique. Il a reçu l'ordre du Canada en mai dernier. Mais pourquoi est-ce qu'un célèbre intellectuel de la Colombie-Britannique prendrait la peine de se remémorer une partie de balle jouée en août 1965 à Hearst? Allen a vécu à Hearst pendant les années 60. Son père était chef de police à Hearst. Il était étudiant à l'École secondaire de Hearst. « Pour moi, l'été 1965 fut une saison de balle rapide dont je ne voulais pas voir la fn, » écrit-il. Il écrit qu'il était un peu jeune pour faire partie de l'équipe de balle des Lumberking, mais qu'il voulait absolument y arriver. Il était receveur lors des pratiques de l'équipe. Éventuellement, il est devenu receveur de relève et fnalement, l'entraîneur lui a demandé d'être receveur lors de cette partie mémorable. Il estime que cette partie a été un grand moment pour plusieurs, mais tout spécialement pour luimême. Il explique que « lorsque l'entraîneur m'a demandé d'être receveur dans une partie de la série, j'ai réalisé que Raymond Lafeur, l'étoile de l'équipe, m'avait remarqué et qu'il me faisait confance ». Il souligne que c'était la première fois qu'il était sur la sellette, devant le public. Cette confance et cette reconnaissance et le fait d'avoir participé à cette victoire d'équipe est pour Allen « un cadeau que j'ai attrapé, et qui est plus précieux aujourd'hui que mes habilités et mes réalisations. Faire confance et reconnaître quelqu'un ne coûte rien et peut avoir un effet sur toute une vie ». Allen termine en disant : « J'ai appelé Raymond récemment. Il se souvient de chacun des lancers de cette partie. Je crois que l'exploit qu'il a réalisé ce samedi soir 28 août 1965, est parmi les plus remarquables du sport amateur ». Il signe « Les Lumberkings sont là ». lcorbeil@lejournallenord.ca

Ray was born in Timmins in 1943, grew up in Cochrane and came to Hearst as the station agent with CNR in 1962. Hearst had switched over to fastball the year before and with Ray's "Iron" arm they won 7 Northland Fastball Association championships between 1961 and 1979 with several trips to the Ontario finals.

In 1967 the Lumberkings hosted the All-Ontario Provincial Championship and the pitcher of the opposing team from Newmarket was Dale Pegg, the son in law of Bill and Margaret Arkinstall. The senior Arkinstalls also lived in Newmarket and they accompanied the team and threw out the first pitch. Game one ended with a 1-

0 Newmarket victory even though Hearst loaded the bases with no one out in first inning but did not score. Newmarket won the second game 2-1 taking the series.

Barry Fraser, originally from Kirkland Lake, was the Lumber King catcher in the early 60s and went on to be Chief Scout (Director of Player Personnel) with the Edmonton Oilers winning 5 Stanley Cups.

Sadly, many of the Hearst Lumberkings of old, such as; Roger "Pit" Hébert, Ray Roy, Ted Wilson, Rene Fontaine, Jean Gagne, Albert "Snuffy" Wills and Aldé Collin, have all passed away.

Here are some photos and clippings of the Hearst fastball teams through the ages that I borrowed from Allan Jansson's Facebook page "Old Hearst".



The 1962 Hearst Lumberking NFC "C" championship fastball team. Pictured in back from L-R: Roger Hébert, Jean Gagné, Ray Lafleur, Bob Labrosse, Jean Doré, Barry Fraser & King Begin.front row L-R: Yvon Brochu, Marcel Brochu, Albert "Snuffy" Wills, Aldé Collin, Ted Wilson, Rene Fontaine, Roger Paquin and Raymond Roy. Photo obtained via David Fontaine.

Matagami Braves Knocked Off By Hearst's Lumber Kings

HEARST (Special) - Behind the sterling pitching efforts of Ray Lafleur, the Hearst Lumber Kings won their N.F.A. intermediate "B" semi final against the visiting Matagomi Braves last weekend. All the games of the best-of-three set were played here in Hearst.

The Lumber Kings had their hands full with a solid Matagami club and the series went the three game limit before they edged the Braves in a 13-inning thriller Sunday night.

Laffeur hurled a neat two-hitter in the series opener Saturday as the Kings came up with a 40 shutout. While Laffeur went all the way. Matagami's Doug McArthur was relieved by Paul Bolduc. Each Matagami pitcher gave up two runs with McArthur being the losing pitcher. They gave up a total of four hits to the winners.

With their backs to the wall

Matagami squared the series at a game apiece as they took a 5-2 decision on Sunday afternoon. Rolling to a 50 lead, the Braves gave up two runs in the late innings to the Kinga. Jim McIsaac chipped in with the big blow for the visitors as he socked a tremendous home run with one mate on base in the seventh inning. McArthur was credited with the victory while Lafleur took the loss.

Deciding Game

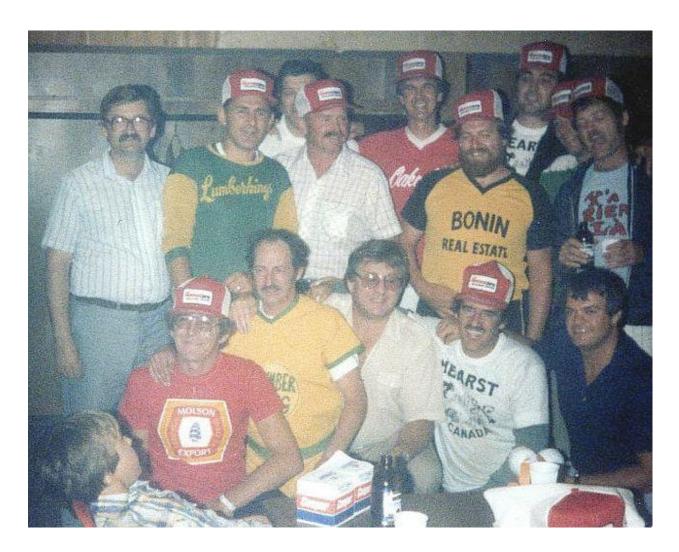
The third and deciding game was played that evening with the 'Kings winning the contest and the series in the 13th Iraning. It was a pitching duel between Lafleur and Matagami's Bolduc. Both pitchers went the entire game with each club picking up three hits.

Hearst now meets Sturgeon Falls in the Northland Fastbail League finats for the intermediate "B" crown. News clipping from the Val D'Or Star dated Sept. 3. 1964



Hearst Lumberkings are ready to meet representatives from the south in the All -Ontario Intermetate "B" fastball finals Thanksgiving weekend. The team is shown after their victory over Garson in earst Sunday. Front; Alde Collin, left, and coach Rene Fontaine. Second row; Ray Comeau, Roger Hebert, Etmansky, Ray Lafleur, Ray Roy, John Gagne and Roger Comeau. Back row; Gaetan Simard, Albert Wills, eve Matko, Gaston Grondin, G. Bray and Gilles Archambeault

Newspaper clipping on the left dated September 28/66 courtesy of Roger "Pit" Hébert. The Lumberkings advanced to the All-Ontario Intermediate `B`Fastball Finals by defeating Garson: Pictured in the clipping above: front row: Aldé Collin & Rene Fontaine.second row: L-R Ray Comeau, Pit Hébert, Al Etmanski, Ray Lafleur, Ray Roy, Jean Gagné & Roger Comeau.back row: L-R Gaetan Simard, Albert "Snuffy" Wills, Steve Matko, Gaston Grondin, Gilles Archambeault, & Gilles Bray



Lumberking fastball players photo circa 1976/77. Back Row: L-R Ray Lafleur, King Begin, Gaston Grondin (behind) Albert Wills, Pete Pomfrett, Gil Archambeault, Gaston Gamache, Aldé Collin, & Fern Grondin..Front Row: Steve Matko, Pit Hébert, Rene Fontaine, Jean Gagné, & Roger Comeau. Photo courtesy of Roger Hébert.



More fastball history, photo courtesy of Ray Vermette.....NFA Champs Hearst Lumberkings in 1977 with deciding games won in Blind River...pictured from L-R back row: Ray Vermette, unnamed NFA convener, J.C. Chouinard, Gilles Bureau, Marcel Marchand, Ray Lafleur, Mario Guerin, Simon Duchesneau, Vic Hébert, Romeo Laflamme..front row: L-R: Luc Dupuis, Reg Vaillancourt, Omer Cantin, & Yves Picard



Hearst Lumberking fastball players reunion circa 1979/80 and photo courtesy of Roger Hébert....pictured back row L-R Gilles Gagnon, Marcel Leger, Ray Vermette, Fern Grondin, Albert Wills, Gaston Gamache, Claude Larose, Pete Pomfrett, Gilles Bray, Barry Fraser, unknown ??, Ray Comeau, Marcel Marchand, Gaston Grondin, Claude Gagnon, Romeo Laflamme, Don Banks, Maurice Bray, Gaetan Defosses, front row L-R Omer Cantin, Gerry Defosses, Roger Comeau, Yves Picard, Ray Lafleur, Marc Gagnon, Rene Fontaine, Gilles St. Pierre, Jean Gagné, Don Roger, Aldé Collin, Jean Doré, King Begin, Steve Matko, and Roger Hébert.



1979 - NSA Softball Champs

Back L-R/Arrière de gauche à droite: Romeo Laflamme, Gilles Bray, Roger Comeau, Ray Lafleur, Dan Conway, Silvio "Toyo" Hebert, Maurice Bray, Michel Hebert, Gilles Bureau (coach)..front L-R/avant de gauche à droite: Marc Gagnon, Claude Gagnon, Gilles St. Pierre, Nick Fasano, Yves Picard, Marc Girouard (Batboy) & Omer Cantin. Cette photo est un don de Raymond Lafleur.

Beyond his baseball career Ray is remembered for his many contributions to the town of Hearst, serving for many years as the Director of the hospital, community service and in his final years as the number one fan of the Hearst Lumberjacks Junior A hockey team which is coached by his son Marc.

The clipping below is from CBC's le matin du Nord, by Matine Laberge, dated September 22, 2017. Hommage à Raymond Lafleur dans le cadre du Gala de la francophonie de Hearst

Un ancien directeur général de l'Hôpital Notre-Dame de Hearst, Raymond Lafleur, est honoré dans le cadre du 6e Gala de la francophonie de Hearst.

Lors de ce gala qui se déroule vendredi à la Place des Arts de Hearst, le groupe *Les ami-es de la francophonie de Hearst* va remettre à M. Lafleur le prix Mariette Carrier-Fraser pour sa contribution à la francophonie, notamment dans le domaine de la santé.

Plusieurs personnes vont rendre hommage à M. Lafleur lors du gala qui comprend aussi un spectacle du groupe Improtéine.

M. Lafleur est né à Timmins en 1943 et a grandi à Cochrane. Il est arrivé à Hearst en 1962 comme agent de station pour le Canadien National.

C'est en 1970 qu'il a commencé sa carrière à l'Hôpital Notre-Dame qui a duré 35 ans, jusqu'à sa retraite en 2005. Il a d'abord occupé le poste de directeur du personnel avant de devenir administrateur et directeur général.

Sous la direction de M. Lafleur, l'Hôpital Notre-Dame est devenu, à la fin des années 1980, le premier hôpital désigné bilingue sous la Loi 8, la loi sur les services en français. Cette désignation assurait aux francophones l'accès à des services de santé dans leur langue.

Nous étions un hôpital francophone du commencement. C'était vraiment naturel pour nous.

M. Lafleur est aussi fier de ces accomplissements dans le monde sportif.

Comme lanceur vedette à la balle-molle, il a aidé une équipe de Hearst à se qualifier pour un championnat provincial à sept occasions.

M. Lafleur a aussi été entraîneur de jeunes joueurs de hockey pendant plusieurs années. « Ils sont devenus nos leaders dans plusieurs secteurs », dit-il.

Raymond Lafleur a aussi été un membre fondateur du Club Rotary de Hearst.

Récipiendaires du prix Mariette Carrier-Fraser

- 2017 Raymond Lafleur
- 2014 Doric Germain
- 2013 Donald Poliquin
- 2012 Raymond Tremblay
- 2011 René Fontaine

Ray was predeceased by his wife Clemence Ruel Lafleur in January, 2016.

Décès de Raymond Lafleur : la francophonie perd un pilier

Publié aujourd'hui à 8 h 41 Mis à jour aujourd'hui à 8 h 46



Raymond Lafleur Photo: Les amies de la francophonie de Hearst

Radio-Canada

L'ancien directeur général de l'hôpital Notre-Dame de Hearst, Raymond Lafleur, est décédé. Il est tombé victime d'une crise cardiaque à London en Ontario, à l'âgé de 75 ans.

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M. Lafleur avait été <u>honoré en 2017</u> lors du Gala de la francophonie de Hearst pour sa contribution à la francophonie, notamment dans le domaine de la santé. Les Lumberjacks de Hearst ont dédié leur match de hockey du 3 avril à cet homme qui était aussi un grand sportif.

L'entraîneur Marc Lafleur, le fils du défunt, n'était pas derrière le banc.