

Legends Tourney Recognizes Three

By John Thompson, Diamond Dirt

In the classy style that has become the tradition for the Legends Fastball Tournament in Kitchener, two local fastball luminaries and a “local hero” were recognized in a ceremony at the 7th annual event on Saturday June 26.

George Ryder and the late **Bob “Bongo” Baird** became the newest inducted fastball legends in a brief, well-organized ceremony at Peter Hallman Ball Yard.

Ryder, a passionate supporter of the game, had family in attendance to share in the honour, including his octogenarian parents. Baird, the long-time trainer icon for so many great fastball champions who lost his battle with cancer last October, was represented by his wife Sandy and son Colin.

Appropriately recognizing that the great game of fastball is enjoyed by so many from the safe and secure environment in Canada, special recognition was provided to a “true hero” from the reality of life itself. **Chris Sherry**, son of long-time local fastball volunteer **Sue Sherry** and her late husband Ron, was acknowledged by Legends co-founder **Larry Lynch**. Lynch shared a timely and moving tribute to Chris who has recently returned following a tour of duty with the Canadian Armed Forces in Afghanistan.



Trooper **Chris Sherry** and mom **Sue** at Legends ceremony – Sat. June 26, 2010



Class of 2010 Honorees were appreciated and recognized during ceremony at the 7th annual Legends of Fastball Tournament in Kitchener on Saturday June 26. Posing, (l-r) Legends co-founder **Larry Lynch** (Legend 2007); honoree **George Ryder** and presenter **Pete Landers** (Legend 2004); Trooper **Chris Sherry**; **Colin and Sandy Baird** in front of presenter **Dan Donahue** (Legend 2008)

CLASS OF 2010 Legends Inductees Bios

GEORGE RYDER

Player provides payback

Born – July 22, 1960

Hometown – Delhi, ON

George Ryder has been involved with fastball for 44 of his 50 years – passion for the game is an understatement. For a quarter century, George Ryder toed the rubber in intermediate/senior softball ranks and led his teams to four Ontario titles, seven ISC State qualifier championships and competed with New Martinsville, WV in three ISC World Tournaments.

However, his mark on the game may best be remembered for his enthusiastic contribution back to the sport.

George's coaching roles have included stints with Waterford Midgets and Jarvis Junior and Senior fastball teams, including a pair of Canadian Canada National Junior Championship titles (2002-03). Most recently he served as an assistant coach with the Team Ontario 19 and under squad that captured the gold medal at the North American Championships.

Through the National Coaching Certification Program, as a Level 3 softball coach, George has focused his attention on pitching, charting and scouting. His strong interest in these varied aspects of the game has resulted in his developing into one of the most technically sound fastball coaches in the area. In the OASA, George currently serves as a Vice-President, former chair of the Men's Committee, and is a valued contributor to clinics and symposiums both provincially and nationally.

His personal commitment is to youth and peers, supporting softball in his local Haldimand - Norfolk area and across the province, encouraging participation, conducting clinics and presenting at workshops on pitching skills and team preparedness.

It's said that "Those that can, do.... and those that can't, teach." However, George Ryder doesn't fit that mould. Not only could he play the game, but is now selflessly sharing his collective experiences and knowledge in a teaching role in a huge payback to the sport.

BOB "Bongo" BAIRD

Trainer for Champs

May 25, 1949 – October 6, 2009

Hometown – Burlington, ON

If there ever was a man for all seasons, it must have been Bob "Bongo" Baird. In a sports career that spanned four decades, Bongo was the omnipresent fixture at major softball and hockey events.

In softball, he competed at the senior level with various Ontario squads, including the Grimsby Peach Kings and Burlington Cougars in the 1970s-80s. After his playing days he honed a new set of skills to become a valued and respected trainer.

When fastball diamonds became covered with the winter's white fluff, it was an easy transition for Bongo. Strapping on snow tires to battle Ontario's ever-changing environment, he provided medical training support to various hockey teams including Flamborough Juniors, Rockton Real McCoys & Brantford senior teams, and Oakville Blades Jr. "A" squad. For his efforts he was acknowledged as the Ontario Hockey Association 2007-08 "Trainer of the Year".

It was on the fastball diamonds of North America, and indeed the world, that Bongo enjoyed his finest hours. Top teams valued his services, and as champions rise and fall, Bongo seemed to catch the up-swing with the best of teams. For the past two decades, softball's elite Championship Sundays usually involved Bongo scuttling about in preparation for the "title event". His alumni associations include Owen Sound Tiremen, Midland Explorers, Toronto Gators, Tampa Bay Smokers, Broken Bow Spirit, Orillia Riversharks, and the pinnacle – Team Canada - for ISF championships in Michigan, South Africa and New Zealand.

Bongo's career, rubbing shoulders with and providing service to the best, probably earned him more championship rings than anyone in the game. He was a pro in his endeavors, and with his untimely passing on October 6, 2009, the fastball family lost one of its icons.

Bob was devoted to his wife Sandy and son Colin, and they and his extended sports families are familiar with his loyalty and dedication.