



## PINGREE PARK

Pingree Park was a large neighborhood recreational park located three blocks from our home, bordered by E. Canfield, Iroquois, Forest, and Burns. Back in those days, kids, when not performing house chores and doing homework, stayed outdoors and ripped and ran until the streetlights came on. Barbour Junior High was right across the street (south) as was Hillger Elementary (north). Pingree Park had four softball fields, a large ice/roller rink, a bathroom house, water fountains, and, later on, a full-court basketball court.

A particular strip of grass between the ice rink and E. Canfield served as the unofficial football field. Simultaneously, you'd have four softball/hardball baseball games, two half-court basketball games, 'tackle' football, and roller skating all going on, not counting the folks watching, families barbecuing, and young kids running wild. Many organized neighborhood leagues played baseball there: Little League, Pony League, Police Athletic League (PAL), company, church, etc., as well as pick-up games among friends. Most of the teenage boys in the neighborhood played on some type of organized baseball team.

The first time I ever pitched on a Little League team, I pitched a no-hitter at Pingree Park in relief, striking out 15 of the 16 batters I faced, while the 16th batted popped out to me. Boy, I was well on my way to the big leagues!!!

One of the indelible memories that I have is of the ageless umpire "Ray," who had his own style and always had snuff in his mouth

(and his snuff can)!

Another favorite activity that my friends and I partook in at Pingree Park between the sidewalk on Iroquois and the bathroom building at Seneca is “500,” where a batter would hit high fly balls (or ground ball) to others in the outfield. A caught fly ball was worth 100 points and a grounder was worth 50 points. The first one in the outfield to reach 500 points would then takes his turn as batter. As batter, you’d tried to hit the bathroom building wall. Most of us rarely, if ever, achieved this feat, but we tried our best.

This same bathroom wall was also used for “Strikeout,” where one would pitch (usually a rubber ball) to a batter and try to strike him out. The pitcher would try his best stuff. Friends would be in the outfield with their backs facing Iroquois shagging the flies or grounders. With houses on Iroquois and car traffic as well, outfielders had to make sure balls never reach that far!

Speaking of tackle football, back in those days, with no pads, helmets, facemasks, or mouthpieces, we all threw caution to the wind! To this day, we’ll never know how many of us suffered undiagnosed minor concussions, brain damage, sore ribs, hairline fractures, etc. I only have one question: “What’s your name again???” :v)

When someone was hurt, got injured, or was shaken up, lying on the ground in pain, everyone else would stand around or see if he was okay. After a few minutes, once the guy was okay, got back up, and shook it off, everyone would break out laughing... No harm, no foul, nothing broken, no blood, then no problem!!!

That was the fun of it all. Blocks, streets, neighborhoods, or just pick-up teams would all play against other.

The same would go for basketball and baseball. Back then, most

guys could play any sport proficiently: basketball, hardball, softball, tackle football, touch football, four square, roller skate/ice skate. You had to, or else you'd never get chosen for pick-up games, you had no street 'cred,' and MOST importantly, the girls wouldn't notice you or talk about you. Of course, fellas, that's what it's all about... Some things never change.

Looking back, because we were so active outdoors physically, we were probably much healthier as youth compared to nowadays when kids stay indoors playing videos games (e.g., gaming), physical education (phys ed) has been removed from public school curriculum, there are fewer public parks, you have smaller families, and families are more spread out and isolated in the suburbs.

Yes, Pingree Park was the bomb for many of us kids in the neighborhood and brought many of us together!