

Tommie sports memories kept alive

BY JORDAN OSTERMAN
STAFF WRITER

In every great organization there is someone behind the scenes that makes everything work. For St. Thomas athletics, that someone is Gene McGivern, the sports information director.

Starting his 15th season as the St. Thomas SID, McGivern has been present for most of the great Tommie moments over the last decade and a half. But long before his time as a Tommie, McGivern was raised in the Hawkeye territory of Iowa.

McGivern decided against becoming a Hawkeye and instead narrowed his college choices to Iowa State and St. Thomas. In the fall of 1976, the long distance runner in him guided his choice to become a Cyclone after winning the Iowa state championship and earning a scholarship to the school. Ironically, it would be St. Thomas, the school he neglected to make his alma mater, that 18 years later would offer him the position he holds today.

Between those times, McGivern worked a variety of jobs in journalism, which he studied at Iowa State. After working for a few different newspapers throughout the Midwest, McGivern followed his dream of writing for a big city paper to the Twin Cities 20 years ago. Once in the cities, McGivern took on a proofreading position at Galaxy Studios and also did some work for the new basketball franchise, the Minnesota Timberwolves.

McGivern's first taste of the MIAC conference was with Augsburg, when he was chosen out of 80 applicants to take on a part-time position as sports information director there. McGivern continued to work his day job downtown, and on nights and weekends worked for Augsburg. In 1991, Augsburg took McGivern on full time. Three years later McGivern crossed the river and took on the same position at St. Thomas, where he has been ever since.

"Time flies," he said.

When McGivern first started as the sports information director for St. Thomas in 1994, the makeup of the job was a lot different than what it is today.

"The model of this job in the past was to push stories to outside media like the Pioneer Press and the Star Tribune," McGivern said. "Too often those stories just didn't get told because they don't have the time or space to cover all the stories."

That problem changed with the Internet.

McGivern said that initially, sports in-

formation directors were wary of the new technology.

"We were still busy putting out publications and keeping statistics and pushing stories; we just thought of the Internet as this monster that's going to take over everything," McGivern said. "What you have to do is look at it as a great opportunity."

McGivern has taken advantage of that opportunity more than ever this year with the start of his online column, "Gene's Blog." Writing about all kinds of Tommie sports topics, McGivern has been able to use the blog, "to tell those stories about the outstanding people in the athletic department that represent St. Thomas." McGivern has posted regularly on the blog, and said he hopes it can continue to be a means of telling St. Thomas stories into the future.

Behind writing those stories is another aspect of being the SID that McGivern exemplifies, being a historian.

"It's a fun opportunity and privilege to be the one that documents history, so someday people can look and have the same curiosity that I look back on history with now," McGivern said.

A self-described "nostalgic kind of guy," McGivern is not limited to telling about current St. Thomas tales, but takes great pleasure in digging into untold stories of Tommie past.

"You feel like there's this attic in this old house and you want to go through all the boxes and find those great stories," McGivern said. A collection of those stories was put together in 2003 in St. Thomas' magazine to commemorate St. Thomas' 100th anniversary of varsity athletics.

In looking through 100 years of sports memories, McGivern was able to see what is so special about Division III athletics.

"The biggest thing [that makes DIII sports so enjoyable] is that 99 percent of the people are here because they just plain love the sport," McGivern said. "You do it because you love the competition and teamwork and camaraderie."

Within D-III sports, McGivern insists that the MIAC has a special "charm" to it as well, which is part of the reason he enjoys being at St. Thomas so much.

"Part of the beauty of the MIAC is that we make each other better," McGivern said. "I've been in the MIAC 20 years, and it makes you realize we are good for each other."

Part of McGivern's duty as sports information director is to help foster positive relationships between the athletic programs of the MIAC schools.

"You try to be a good ambassador for



JOSH KLEVEN/THE AQUIN

Gene McGivern is a Tommie sports story gold mine after 15 years as the SID.

your school," McGivern said. "I want their fans to respect St. Thomas, and this office gives us a chance to be a good ambassador and be able to say something positive about the opponent."

In anything from game programs to posts on his blog, McGivern utilizes all the formats that an SID has to help maintain those positive relationships.

Now into his 15th season, McGivern has had time to reflect on the path his career has taken. Although he didn't end up at the big city paper he initially set out for from Iowa State, McGivern is quick to point to the things that he has been able to do over the course of his career.

"The older you get, the more you realize the dream is what you make it," McGivern said.

Settled in at St. Thomas, McGivern is happy with where he ended up.

"St. Thomas is a place that has such a great past, the present is very dynamic, and the future is looking really good," he said. "It's a great place to be, and I feel lucky I'm here."

With everything McGivern does to make St. Thomas athletics go, it's safe to say that the feeling is reciprocal.

Jordan Osterman can be reached at jrosterman@stthomas.edu

Gene McGivern's top five St. Thomas sports memories

1. Riding the bus home from Appleton with the baseball team after it won the 2001 NCAA title... cruising home along Cretin Avenue with players singing Queen's "We Are The Champions."

The team, coached by Dennis Denning, beat Marietta (Ohio) 8-4 in the championship game of the College Baseball World Series. A St. Thomas jersey hangs in Cooperstown at the Baseball Hall of Fame recognizing the team's national title.

2. Tommie-Johnnie games in basketball, hockey, baseball, football and soccer.

The Tommie-Johnnie rivalry goes back for more than a century, with competitions taking place even before St. Thomas had varsity athletics.

3. The Tommies making the DIII Final Fours in the same weekend in 2000 in men's hockey and women's basketball.

The men's hockey team went on to take second place in the national tournament, and the women's basketball team took third.

4. The softball team winning back-to-back NCAA championships in 2004 and 2005.

The Tommies went 20-0 in the postseason over those two seasons.

5. The first St. Thomas athletic Web page in 1999 and the creation of Tommiesports.com in 2007.

McGivern updates the site on a daily basis with game results and stats. This year he also began writing his own blog for the site as well.

Spiritual strikes, home runs for Molitor

By HEATHER RULE
SPORTS EDITOR

Former Minnesota Twins and Milwaukee Brewers player Paul Molitor has ridden the Christian-life roller coaster.

Molitor, 52, gave his testimony at a Fellowship of Christian Athletes meeting Nov. 25 in the O'Shaughnessy Educational Center auditorium.

The Cretin High School graduate said he wanted to instill in student athletes the idea of having a bigger perspective on their lives and on the field. Athletes face a lot of peer pressures and it is important to not get caught up trying to please everyone, he said.

"There's a lot of challenges out there," he said. "Do it God's way, it's a lot easier."

Molitor played with the Brewers in 1978, and then went to the Toronto Blue Jays from 1993 to 1995 before returning home to play for the Twins from 1996 to 1998.

"It was special for me to kind of come full circle... growing up here in St. Paul and then having the chance to come back and play for the Twins," he said.

Throughout his 21-year career, the infielder and designated hitter was one of four players to reach at least 3,000 hits, have a .300 or better batting average

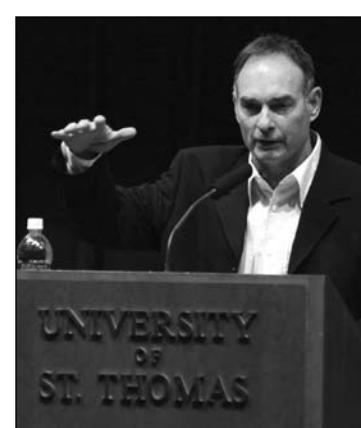
and steal 500 or more bases. The seven-time All Star won the World Series with Toronto in 1993 and was named the series MVP. He was the only player to ever hit two doubles, two triples and two home runs in one World Series.

He also spoke about his 39-game hitting streak in 1987, which he called "one of his best personal highlights." Molitor was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2004.

Molitor spent 18 years in the big leagues before having the opportunity to finish his career in his home state. He said it was special for him to be able to play with Kirby Puckett, and referred to him as "probably the most popular athlete in the history of our state." Unfortunately, their playing time together was cut short when Puckett developed glaucoma in the spring of 1996, ending his career.

"You know, when you play major league baseball you see certain players that you kind of imagine what it would be like to be their teammates, and Kirby Puckett was one of those guys for me," Molitor said.

After talking baseball, Molitor took the audience through his "roller coaster" testimony. He attended church when he was young, but said it was not until 1977 that his journey as a Chris-



CHRIS ANTONELLI/THE AQUIN
Paul Molitor describes his struggle with faith at a FCA event.

tian began.

"I finally made that commitment on a night back in 1977 when I got down on my knees and I admitted to God that 'Hey, I can't do this on my own... and I believe that you sent your son to die for me, and for my forgiveness that you rose him from the dead so that I could have eternal life,'" Molitor said.

He struggled in college with drinking and drugs, but some of his teammates brought him to FCA meetings. Things improved, but he hit another rough patch early in his major league days and cocaine became his "drug of choice." He said he was lucky he did not lose his career

or his life.

Molitor moved forward as he married and had a daughter. But soon he began to slide down the coaster again, this time, into infidelity.

"I was kind of living a double life in a lot of ways during that period," he said. "I didn't like what I was doing. I can't tell you how many times I got down on my knees before God and just asked him to forgive me."

He impregnated a woman in another city and eventually became divorced from his wife.

"That's a tough thing," Molitor said. "One of the hardest days of my life was the day that I had to tell my wife and my then 16-year-old daughter their father and their husband had gotten another woman pregnant."

He is now remarried with a 5-year-old daughter and a 2-year-old son and is a minor league instructor for the Twins.

"It's amazing that God's given me another chance at family," he said.

Molitor's University of Minnesota teammate and FCA adviser Lindsay Hoyer introduced Molitor at the meeting. Sophomore Daniel Carr is a member of the FCA leadership team and said the group wanted to "broaden its reach" by bringing Molitor in to speak.

"I thought the speech was ex-

tremely powerful," Carr said. "It showed... that we all need Christ no matter our situation."

Junior seminarian Paul Shovelain said he learned a lot about Molitor's life and he enjoyed hearing how important scripture was to the ball player. He said the verses Molitor read (Galatians 2:20 and Romans 12:2) "really just touched [his] heart."

"It was great to hear a professional athlete speak about his faith," Shovelain said. "He was one of my heroes [growing up]."

Senior Amy Olson said she liked that Molitor was very honest and spoke about the importance of having Christ in his life.

"I really liked it because he could've stood up there and just talked about baseball," Olson said. "He didn't hold anything back."

Molitor said he has been through a lot, but remembering to focus on what is eternal is key.

"Despite everything that happened, the most important day of my life was when I acknowledged that I needed Christ in my life," Molitor said. "I've been through a lot, but that is a decision that changed my destiny forever, and that's what really matters."

Heather Rule can be reached at hrule@stthomas.edu