

## Chapter 9

### Interview With Mike Gray

It's 2007 and I am in the back of the Singer Sewing Centre with Mike Gray. Mike is a member of the Whitby Sports Hall of Fame. He's also a member of the Canadian Lacrosse Hall of Fame as a player with the 1963 Oshawa Green Gaels, and as a manager of the Brooklin Redmen for their seven-year run. Brooklin won the east division for seven straight years from 1985 to 1991.

Larry: *Mike, how old were you and what year did you see your first game of lacrosse played?*

Mike: *I was six years old in 1948 and I watched the old Senior B team in Oshawa play at the Hamby Arena.*

Larry: *And who did they play against? Do you remember?*

Mike: *Off-hand, I don't remember. They played in a league with Peterborough, and I don't remember the other teams at the time. I was just as a little kid. During that time, I lived on Westmoreland Street in North Oshawa. I lived there for a year and went to school at North Simcoe Public School. All my uncles were playing lacrosse for the Oshawa Senior B team so I went to the games.*

Larry: *And that would be the Viponds?*

Mike: *I think Luther, Bill and Tim.*

Larry: *At what age did you first start to play lacrosse? And what year was that and who did you play for and can you remember any of your teammates of that first team?*

Mike: *I started playing minor lacrosse in Brooklin in 1951. I would have been 9 years old. It was just a house league of local guys ranging in age of 8 or 9 years old to 14 or 15 years old. We would play some of the Oshawa Community Recreational Association (C.R.A.) teams. From these teams, an all-star peewee team would be picked to go to play in the Ontario minor league and lacrosse championships. That first year, we might have gone to Burlington to play. Most of the people I played with in the first few years were just school mates and local Brooklin kids. By 1952, it had expanded into a real peewee house league. Many rural kids joined and we had enough to make four teams in Brooklin. We played twice a week; Tuesday nights and Thursday nights. I would have been 10 years old at the time and that league continued on for a couple of years until we went to bantam. In bantam, a Lakeshore Minor Lacrosse league was formed that included teams from Peterborough, Long Branch, Alderwood and Brampton and Brooklin. The bantam league went for two years and I played in that when I was 13 and 14. Most of the kids from that league I eventually ended up playing with in junior. Some of the players from our own house league also played for Whitby in junior. The second year, some players like Elmer Tran had come in from the country, his brother George from Ashburn and others from Raglan, Columbus; Charlie Ross and his brother Murray, Gary Hayes and others. At that time, we would have probably been one of the best peewee teams around from '52 to '54 in the province of Ontario. The bantam league that we played in we used to play in Peterborough. They would have a real good team and we would play up there before the old Peterborough senior A lacrosse teams in the Miller Bowl. It was quite historic at that time to play in Peterborough.*

Larry: *So you and Elmer Tran have known each other since age 10?*

Mike: *We played hockey and lacrosse together back since the age of 10.*

Larry: *You're related to the most prestigious lacrosse playing family in Brooklin – the Vipond family. Six of the boys made it to Senior B lacrosse. What can you remember about Lewis, Luther, Bill, Tim, Doug and Don playing lacrosse?*

Mike: *Well, I can remember as a kid going to see Luther, Bill, and Tim play lacrosse and in later years I played on the same team with my uncles Doug and Don and Bill Vipond coached that Intermediate team.*

Larry: *What's that? His mom (Mike Gray's) was a Vipond?*

Mike: *I would have been 17 in 1958. The league was called the Senior B Intermediate league. I came right out of bantam to the team in 1958. We actually won the Ontario Intermediate B Championship and that was a big thing to play with your relatives. I can think you know the thrill of playing with your uncles. My uncles were 5 and 7 years older than me but being on the same team with them was quite a thrill for a 14-15 year old kid.*

Larry: *This next question is pretty well tied in to what we were talking about. Most of your young days watching lacrosse would have been watching the old Brooklin Senior B and intermediate playing in Brooklin. Tell us a bit about the structure of Senior B and Senior A, intermediate back then.*

Mike: *Back in the '50s, lacrosse was played in a lot of small communities and they didn't have a way of classifying the teams in the way that they stand in the league. We would all play in the same league. I was 17 at the time and we played in a Whitby league. Whitby was our greatest rival. Owen Sound, Fergus, Brantford and Alliston also played. They were all men. The placing of the teams was determined at the end of the season. The top 4 teams would be Senior B, then the next two teams would be Intermediate A, the next two teams would be Intermediate B, and the next two teams would be Intermediate C. This gave everybody a chance to play for some kind of championship. No matter how big or small your community was, you would get to play in a league. Those days we would play Whitby and a home game in Brooklin. The arena was always sold out, especially on Fair Night in Brooklin. On the night of the Brooklin Fair, the arena would be packed to the rafters. Brooklin would come down and play in Whitby, which would be a bitter war and we would pack their arena. All that ended in 1957, and in 1958 Whitby joined the O.L.A. as a Junior A team.*

*They disbanded their intermediate team and most of the intermediate players went to the old Scarborough Maitlands. Scarborough joined our league in 1958, and they became our bitter rivals. All the teams were in one league and each team was categorized as A depending on how you finished and where you went into the playoffs. The only real league was the O.L.A. Junior A league, that was structured similar to how it is today.*

Larry: *Did you play many games for the old Brooklin Senior B/Intermediate As back in the '50s? How old were you and what can you remember about those years and some of the players, Mike?*

Mike: *It's a long time ago. Now we're talking 50 years ago. I mean I can sit down and look at the old pictures. I can remember all the players. I started playing when I was 14 or 15 years old in 1957. The reason I was playing was because it was a team in Brooklin and there weren't a lot of players around. You had to use everybody in town you could possibly get to play to fill up the team. In '58 when the Whitby team folded, they figured a lot of the players would come back to Brooklin. Players like Donnie Craggs, Bob and Jim Cherry, and other players went to play in Scarborough for Red Crawford. I can remember when most of these lacrosse players at that period of time were buddies that I went to school with. Ken Ross, Bill Biggs and local players that went on to play for Whitby in 1958. In '59, I played some Senior B with the team, and it was the same. They ended up in first place in the league, or second place against Cornwall. I think it was '59. Most of the basic core players are the people I grew up with in 1957. A lot of those players continued playing until they formed the Senior A team in Brooklin in 1961. That team was formed at that time, because the O.L.A. were in dire straits. Chuck Rowan and Gene Dopp were running the O.L.A. The Senior A league had folded down to three teams. Brooklin came into the league to have a fourth team.*

*Peterborough had folded because of money problems. They had been paying players, and had run into financial problems. Port Credit, St. Catherines, and Brampton were left after the 1960 Senior A season.*

Larry: *Did Oshawa have an intermediate or senior team in the '50s?*

Mike: *No, not in the '50s that I can remember. In the late '40s and early '50s after Senior B, all the Oshawa people came to Brooklin to play. Guys like Robbie Robinson and Rusty and Donnie Craggs came up to Brooklin to play around 1952. Gerry Ravary, Larry Hutchinson, Gerry Burrows; there were quite a few of them from Oshawa. Brooklin played in the early '50s, and then some of those players went to Whitby when they split the two teams up around 1956. A lot of the Oshawa players played for Whitby and the local players stayed in Brooklin.*

Larry: *Okay, I've come to this. You and Elmer, who you played with since you were ten, have been together for a long time. Why is it that in 1960 Elmer was playing in the Minto Cup with Whitby Red Wing Orchards, and you weren't? What did you do during the 1960 season?*

Mike: *In 1959, we played for my uncles' juvenile team. My uncles started a juvenile team in Whitby and Elmer and I played on that team in 1959. We got beat out by Huntsville in the Ontario Juvenile Championship. In 1960, at the training camp before the season started, there was an exhibition game played in Brooklin. It was Whitby Junior A against Brooklin Intermediates. At that time, since I was from Brooklin, played for Brooklin. Bev Groves, who had played for Brooklin and had been an old Peterborough Timbermen or senior player, played for the juniors. During that game he slashed me and broke my hand so that finished that year off. I never was able to start playing again until late August and went back out for the juvenile team instead of going back out with the juniors.*

Larry: *OK, now we're coming up to senior and we're getting to the point where its Brooklin's first year in Senior A competition. In 1961, you were up with the Whitby Red Wing Orchards. How did you end up playing for Etobicoke Junior A in 1962?*

Mike: *After the 1961 season, the Whitby team folded. The players that were members of the '61 team, which actually ended up winning the Ontario Junior B championship, were disbursed in a draft and Etobicoke drafted me so that's where I had to go.*

Larry: *In 1963, you played for the expansion Oshawa Green Gaels which ended up the season in third spot but going all the way to winning the Minto Cup. Where were the Mann Cup finals played, and what can you tell me about that team that began the first of seven straight Minto Cup championship teams?*

Mike: *The Minto Cup was played in Whitby. The Green Gaels played their home games at the Oshawa Children's Arena that year. The arena however, was too small for the Minto Cup. They played the Minto Cup in Whitby against Victoria. I never actually got an invite out with that team. My brother Tim did. I ended up making the team later. Bishop was having a lot of trouble with his players. He had been in Junior A lacrosse before but had never been able to win. His teams would always choke. He lost championships in Newmarket, Mimico, and Oakville. He would always be ranting and raving at his players. They started quitting on him. I was able to get Elmer to come out and play for him because we just didn't seem to have enough players. We seemed to pick up momentum as the year went on and ended up in third place. When we played off against Brampton, Tom Conlin and Dave Lough who had played for Brampton earlier, seemed to get the intensity up with the rest of us and we just pulled a couple of upsets. Bishop himself had a breakdown partly through the season and left the team. Fred Whalley did a lot of managing and coaching with the team. By the time we got into the playoffs, Bishop was back behind the bench with the team. That year, he was a little different than the Jim Bishop people knew before 1963. He became a little different kind of a coach as he more or less let us do our own thing in. We were able to show him how to win. He learned how to win from players who had played on winning teams. He did not choke up. Sometimes, he was a bit too fanatical and his players became too uneasy and they made big mistakes because they were trying too hard.*

Larry: *In 1964 you moved up to Senior A with the Brooklin Redmen. What was it like playing alongside some of those veterans like Pat Baker, Donnie Craggs, Red Crawford, Bob Hanna, Glen Lotton, Ken Ruttan, and your old friend Elmer who was on that team? You lost to Vancouver Carlings in the Mann Cup final. Where was that Mann Cup played and what do you remember about it?*

Mike: *The Mann Cup was played in Whitby again. We played all our regular home games in Brooklin, but that rink was too small. The C.L.A. at that time ran the Mann Cup. The C.L.A. had made money with the Minto Cup in Whitby so they hosted the Mann Cup in Whitby. I knew a lot of the players that I played with on that team because I had played with and against them in intermediate or junior. I played with Glenn Lotton in Whitby. I played against Kenny Ruttan. I knew Pat Baker. I had played against Donnie Craggs when he played in Whitby and in Scarborough and I knew him in Brooklin when he played before in '61. I played against Bob Hanna. I played against Red Crawford. I knew Kenny Lotton. That was Glen's brother. Most of these players I knew from playing against them so I felt right at home when I stepped in with that team.*

Larry: *The 1965 season saw Brooklin Redmen finish first again (two years in a row), during the regular season, and again defeated for the second year in a row in seven games; this time to the New Westminster O'Keefes. This time, the series would be played on the west coast. What do you remember about that series and any shenanigans that happened while you were out there?*

Mike: *It was actually a big deal. '64 was the first time Brooklin had ever made it into a Mann Cup and '65 was the first time they had ever gone west for a National Championship.. Most of the players were quite psyched up. Now at that time the Mann Cup was run by the C.L.A. The east was considered the weaker league than the west. Since the C.L.A. ran it, they insisted that the east could acquire players to go out west because they did in the early '60s. This made it seem like you were actually a bit of an all-star team that represented the east. The most exciting thing about playing was the big crowds. We weren't used to that. They were drawing anywhere from 2 500 to 4 000 people at Queen's Park arena to the game at the time. The big thing that happened? A big rhu barb happened and Donnie Craggs got suspended for a year for punching a referee. Donnie had a bad case of hemorrhoids and wasn't in the best temper frame. During the game, he got into a fight with the referee, I think it was Whitey Severnson that he decked and he was suspended for a year. That was the big rhu barb.*

Larry: *1966 saw the Redmen lose in the playoffs 4 games to 3 to Brampton. That must have been disappointing not making it to the Mann Cup. You had quite a bit of firepower with Terry Davis (42 goals), Grant Heffernan (29), Elmer Tran (28), Ken Lotton (29). I notice Donnie Craggs was not on that club. Could that have been a lot of the reason your club never made it to the Mann Cup that year?*

Mike: *It could have been part of the reason, but like I said before, Donnie Craggs was under a year's suspension and couldn't play. We did have a good team but the league at that time was very competitive. Donnie probably would have given us that one player to get through in '66. We were surprised in the first round of playoffs and were beat out. It was a hard fought year. That year, Peterborough ended up in first place and we ended up in fourth place. We probably had as good a chance in the first round against Brampton as anybody but we went down in seven games. In '65, we beat Brampton out in seven games to go to the Mann Cup, so now it was their chance. It had been a close year. It was a letdown. As I said, the league at that time was very competitive at the senior level. A guy like Donnie Craggs who gets one or two goals a game probably would have put us over the top.*

Larry: *Donnie Craggs was back in 1967 and contributed 33 regular season goals and the Redmen made it back to the Mann Cup only to lose to the Vancouver Carlings again. In my years of following the Redmen, I always felt as a fan that Donnie Craggs and Johnny Fusco were the two greatest leaders in the club's history. Both were captains and both wore number 15. As a player, coach, manager from the inside of the club, would you agree with that statement? How would you compare the two players?*

Mike: *Well, they were both true heart and soulers. They both were very rugged individuals and they definitely both were true blue captains of the team, doing anything for the team. Talent? Johnny Fusco probably was the more natural lacrosse player than Donnie, who was sheer guts and desire. Johnny Fusco in his peak had the hardest shot of anybody who was playing at the time and he was probably a little more skilled individual. They were both great team leaders and great team people. It's hard really to pick which one would have been the greatest. Donnie Craggs was one of the people on your team who led by actions.*



*If Donnie thought a fight was needed to get the team riled, he'd be the guy who would start it. If you needed one goal with a few seconds to go in the game, he was the guy who would score for you. He was one of those players who would come up with a lot of key goals; only because of his desire and the need to score a goal. He wasn't a great shot but his best move was his inside move on the crease when he would jump over and shoot over the other side of the goaltender. He had that down pat and scored most of his key goals that way.*

Larry: *In 1968, the Brooklin Redmen finally won the Mann Cup. Donnie Craggs scored 35 goals, but there was a large turnover of players from the previous year due to expansion of the professional league. How did it feel to finally taste champagne from the Mann Cup after four visits in five years?*

Mike: *It was a sweet thing to win the Mann Cup but '67 and '68 were the years of the two biggest changes in lacrosse. 1967 was the last year lacrosse was played without the 30 second rule. The change occurred because of what happened at the Mann Cup in Vancouver. Fred Whalley, who was the coach of the Brooklin lacrosse team, implemented the old basketball zone defense and when the games were played in '67 in Vancouver, the teams didn't have to take a shot in 30 seconds. In the whole second period, the western team held onto the ball and never took any shots on net. The crowd stood and booed for the whole 20 minutes of that period and they booed again in the third period when they played the same way. The score was very low in that game; I think it was a 6-4. Most of the goals were scored in the first period. That changed the game. In '68, a pro lacrosse league was formed that took the best players from the Senior A league in Ontario to form a four team pro league. We were actually able to win the Mann Cup because we had a better team than the other teams. As a whole, the whole league was a little weaker than the teams from 1964 to 1967. By 1969, that league had more or less folded. Basically, all the better players from that league were all back into the senior league by '69. It was a much bigger deal to win the Mann Cup in '69.*

Larry: *1969 saw the return of Elmer Tran with his 45 goals and league leading 144 points. Neil Armstrong had a career year with 54 goals and the old warhorse Donnie Craggs had 44 more. Where was that Mann Cup won and did it feel that much better with your old buddy Elmer on the team?*

Mike: *That Mann Cup was won in New Westminster. We played off against the New Westminster Blues. It was very sweet because we had an extremely powerful team because most of our players from the east that played pro in '68 had come back. Merv Marshall was playing goal for us. Elmer had come back. Most of the other top players from the teams had come back. Players from the team that had played for Bishop in Detroit had more or less disbursed. Some of them had left to play pro in Kitchener but most of them were back in our league. It was a good feeling. A good league but out west, most of their teams in the pro league stayed intact. The New Westminster Blues, were an extremely weak team. We had very little problem with them. We were in a class of our own. Neil Armstrong had just come out of junior. He had a crackerjack year. It was his big year. Craggsy (Donnie Craggs) was by now quite a veteran lacrosse player and could score anytime he wanted to really, by this desire thing. He was the player-coach of that team. It was a fun group of guys. They were a lot of fun.*

Larry: *1970 saw the folding of the two year pro league and the return of all the stars. Redmen had eight 20-goal scorers including some new guns like Larry Lloyd, Chuck Li, Ross Jones, Charlie Marlowe and Mike Lewis. You only played six games that year as the Brooklin Redmen moved their home games to Oshawa Civic Auditorium. Why did you only play six games that season and what can you remember about that year?*

Mike: *I can remember why I only played six games. In the sixth game of the season, I was running on a breakaway taking a shot on net. Gordie Thompson hit me from behind and I smashed my knee into the back boards at the Civic and that and buggered my knee up. I couldn't play for the rest of the year because of a bad knee. The Redmen moved down to Oshawa because they figured they could draw more people at the Civic and make more money than they could in Brooklin.*

*At the time, about 1 100 people were coming out to watch and the fire department was starting to give us a hassle. They were trying to restrict the number of people we could get in the building so we moved to Oshawa. It seemed to be good. We started off with reasonably good crowds because we had a lot of ex-Green Gael stars from the Bishop late '60s team; Chuck Li, Larry Lloyd, and Charlie Marlowe. That core of players attracted more people to come out and watch. The biggest problem was that they didn't change the name to Oshawa. They kept the Brooklin name which hurt them a bit on the attendance. That was one of the reasons we ended up moving back to Brooklin because the attendance dropped off. It wasn't feasible to operate out of that rink.*

Larry: *1971 was your last season to play lacrosse. Why did you retire so young? You were only 29. Red Crawford and Elmer were still with the team and Glen Lotton played a handful of games.*

Mike: *My injury from 1970 hurt me and by 1971, I couldn't run very well. I had a bad knee and also I started to put on weight. I was best when I played at 165-170 pounds. Now at 180 pounds, I was a little slow to play my game which was a defensive game, getting loose balls and normally checking the top player on the opposing team. I became too slow and I couldn't play my game. I had achieved every possible thing you could do, a Minto Cup and two Mann Cups. There was nothing left to accomplish so I decided to pack it in rather than still play and hurt the team. On the 1971, team Aurora was in our league. They didn't win a game all year. I could play very easily against that type of team. I couldn't play against a team like Peterborough. I was just too slow to play against the good players that Peterborough had at that time.*

Larry: *Your playing career with Brooklin lasted eight seasons and included two Mann Cups. With 181 games played as a Brooklin Redmen, you still stand 19<sup>th</sup> all-time on the Redmen top games played list. You played three years of Junior A including a Minto Cup winner. What would you say your highlight of playing was, and do you have any regrets?*

Mike: *I have no regrets. I had a lot of fun playing all the years of lacrosse I played. I made a lot of great friends through the lacrosse community, which I still have today. I've always enjoyed myself. Probably one of the greatest thrills occurred when I was a kid playing on the same team as my two uncles, and my other uncle was the coach. The other great thrill was playing for the Green Gaels and winning the Minto Cup. That was the first time I had ever been on a Canadian championship team.*

Larry: *With a fairly long playing career Mike, you are still remembered for the work you did as a builder in the game. It was you that got me following lacrosse, not so much as from a fan's perspective. Back in 1986, you suggested I should take over the job of O.L.A. statistician. Since we don't keep records of builders, can you try to remember the steps you took starting in 1972? I know you were a coach, general manager, secretary, president, trainer, and water boy for the Brooklin Redmen. For a great number of years, you were the commissioner of the O.L.A. major series. Try to run down those years if you can.*

Mike: *Well, I came to senior lacrosse with the Brooklin Redmen. Actually, it was the Brooklin Senior A lacrosse club and they used different nicknames during that period of time. I think it was around 1969. I was the player rep on the executive in '69, '70 and '71. In 1972, the team decided that they were moving back to Brooklin and by the end of the year, they had. There was a bit of a fight going on. Morley Kells in Brantford and the Peterborough group were running the Senior A league. They all hated Brooklin and said Brooklin shouldn't be in major lacrosse because the rink wasn't up to par compared to other teams' rinks. They formed the major series, and the Senior As at that time had an eastern branch and a western branch. At that time, Brooklin and Brampton decided to stay with Senior A. Because I had been with the team at the executive level before and I was not playing anymore, they asked me if I'd take the job as general manager and coach. It was a tough go that year because Bishop was coaching the team down in Windsor and he had taken a lot of our better players from 1971. We were however, able to make it through and actually made it to the Ontario finals. We were up 3 games to 2 in the playoffs and my two best players, Elmer Tran and Donnie Craggs, went out west because their kids were playing in the National PeeWee championship. We ended up losing.*

*In '73, I was vice president of the team. I had taken the job on as vice president, Bob Hanna was the coach, and Frank Wilbur was the manager. We figured we would be able to get in as a major team in Brooklin as their little experiment had failed. We figured Frank Wilbur could entice a lot of ex-Green Gaels to come on board and play in Brooklin. Hanna, who had been Bishop's buddy and played with us, would be the coach but we just weren't able to trace the players down and we folded half way through the year. That was the end of Brooklin Senior A lacrosse as it had existed since 1961. That was the last year of it. There was no lacrosse. In 1976, Charlie Ross and I decided that we would form a team again and now we would be a major team. We had been a Senior A lacrosse team up until we folded in '73. Now we formed a new team in 1976 and called it the Brooklin Redmen. The old team was always known as Senior A lacrosse team using different nicknames like Hillcrests, Merchants, Redmen, Meadowcrests, or whatever name they wanted to use. We wanted to go with local players on the '76 team and we did just that. The basic nucleus was a group of overage Junior B players who had played for Whitby B&R Junior B team. We started that first year and were very surprised at how well we drew. Our home games we were sold out. We were packing the rink. We ended in last place but we had a very respectable finish off in the league. We were quite happy and by 1977, we were now starting to attract better quality players. By 1978, we were a third place team in an eight team league.*

Larry: *What was your position?*

Mike: *I was general manager. After we formed the team in '76, I took the job as general manager to build the team up. We were using a different approach to the game. We weren't going to be paying players. We were going to try to be operating with the use of local players as much as we possibly could. We were going to try to be competitive and we were. Every year we got better. In '79 we finished in second place. In 1980, we actually ended in first place and went to represent eastern Canada in the First Nations Cup which was held in the west. It was a tournament between Australia, the U.S., an Iroquois Native team, and an east/west Canadian team. This was the first international type of major box lacrosse to be played. We got snowballed out there badly by the referees. We had lost one of our players, Jim Branton, at that time.*

*He was suspended for his involvement in a series of penalties that probably is a record in lacrosse. We played a game against the Iroquois and we had something like 28 straight penalties called against us. They had none, which didn't seem to be quite right. How could one team get 28 straight penalties over one period of a game and the other team get none? That's the way it happened. It caused a lot of frustration but at that point, we had accomplished what we wanted to be. We were a legitimate top contending lacrosse team by 1980. I remained on as general manager right through to 1986. 1985 was our big year. This was probably one of the greatest lacrosse teams in Brooklin. That was the year that we went to the Mann Cup. Brooklin had been in the Mann Cup in other years. In '64 and '65 we were up three games to one but lost in seven. This time, we go out west and I'm the general manager. Actually, I started out as coach and general manager that year. I brought Peter Vipond in as an assistant coach and I elevated him up to run the bench in the middle of the season. He had been doing a good job with the players and they actually related well to him. We lost the first three games but won the next four. Jim Bishop once told me that this was the greatest accomplishment of any lacrosse team in a national championship. It's the only time that a team had been down the first three games and come back to win the next four. And to do it while you're on the road, that's what makes it one of the greatest accomplishments in lacrosse. It was a great thrill to do that kind of thing. By then, we had become a powerhouse. In 1985, we had a seven team league. Brooklin and Peterborough were so much more powerful than the other teams that everyone was threatening to quit. By the end of '86, we were now down to a three team league.*

Larry: *Was that the year you were commissioner?*

Mike: *No, 1986 I was still general manager of the Redmen. In '86, the C.L.A. had gone bankrupt, while in the west, the W.L.A. had a well structured league. The Mann Cup was fast approaching and we were supposed to have a league meeting in Brampton and the commissioner of our league didn't show up. So the other teams didn't want to get involved in the Mann Cup. In 1984, we had the Mann Cup in Peterborough and an effort was made to work as a group. In 1985, we went out west on our own because the C.L.A. was bankrupt. We had to pay our own bills. We did get some money back from the W.L.A.*

*Brooklin taking on the Mann Cup in '86 was probably the biggest thing we ever did. We took on the running of the Mann Cup because none of the other clubs wanted to be involved in it. At the meeting, it was decided that whatever profit we made we'd keep. In '86 we did very well at Iroquois Park. At that time, the Brooklin team was making more money than they ever had. At the end of that year, Brooklin had nearly \$60 000 in the bank. We were a very well-to-do operation but lacrosse was in rough shape at the major league level because we were down to only three teams. That was my last year. The next year, I took the job on as commissioner of the league. Brampton had folded and we were down to two teams; Brooklin and Peterborough. We had to do something at the time. We found in the constitution that if there were not enough teams to have a major league, the O.L.A. had to put us in a senior league, and they did. There was a lot of in-fighting in lacrosse but we joined up in the senior league with Fergus, Owen Sound, Orangeville, Scarborough, Sarnia, and Mississauga. They didn't like us being in their league. We requested whoever was the top team would have to play us in the playoffs so we'd have some legitimate type of playoffs. They did not like that idea. They were playing for the President's Cup and they didn't want to have their top team battered up. That happened to be Fergus. I said "Give us a chance. Let me do my job done as commissioner and a chance to get organized. We will build this thing back up." In 1988, I approached Everett Coates and Bob Sanderson and we got the Brampton team back in business again. We slowly picked away at that until we had a legitimate league running again. It was probably about 1993 when we got a legitimate major league going with five teams. That was probably one of the toughest times for major lacrosse in Ontario because when we were down to two teams it looked like it was dead, done. That would have been the end of senior/major lacrosse. Over the next period of years from '86 to '93 we slowly built it back up until we had a five team league. At that time, we were trying to get people more interested in major lacrosse than senior lacrosse. We thought that maybe we were playing in the wrong season. The Americans were doing this Major Indoor Lacrosse League (M.I.L.L). They were playing in the winter so we tried it in '91. We formed a league with Guelph (the Peterborough bunch), Brantford (the Brampton bunch) and Whitby (the Brooklin group) and invited a new team out of Buffalo, which was basically the CAN/AM all-stars. That was just to see.*

*It was an experimental stage at that time to try to develop major lacrosse back in Ontario. We eventually did that.*

Larry: *Were you the commissioner of that league?*

Mike: *No, originally I was the owner of the Whitby Steel Hawks. I had bought that team for \$5 000. I was also the treasurer of the league and Dave Thomas from Peterborough was the commissioner. I sold the team before we ever played a game to Paul Cotton. He put up the franchise fee of \$15 000. He paid the \$5,000 I had paid, and he put in the extra \$10,000. He asked me to come on board as his assistant general manager. I had learned a lot with the Whitby Steel Hawks, but we really only had one good arena to play out of. That was in Brantford, but it did not really have a good floor. The Whitby Steel Hawks never played a home game. They played all their games on the road. The Peterborough group made the mistake of playing in Guelph and not in Peterborough. They had that good carpet in Peterborough at the time. They should have stayed there but they didn't. They thought they could draw better in Guelph and at the end of the year we disbanded the league because we couldn't get arena commitments to make it operate. At the same time, I was still doing the job of commissioner of the major league. I remained on as commissioner until the end of '95. Bruce Hood replaced me as commissioner but I stayed on as assistant commissioner for two years. At that time, I thought the best thing for the league was to get a notable person who could get corporate sponsorship. I had been able to get the Mann Cup on national television because of the baseball strike. If we could now go one step further and get some major corporate league money, then we could promote the game more with greater exposure through ongoing television coverage. At the time, we weren't drawing bad crowds in the league. Six Nations was drawing good crowds and Brooklin was packing their rink. Peterborough was drawing good crowds but to get over the top, we needed to get some major corporate money. I thought Bruce Hood could do that but he wasn't able to. Shortly thereafter, I decided to resign. That's when Jim Brady took over as major commissioner. I did help out in '98. Brampton was hosting the Mann Cup and had a brand new arena and I was asked to take on the job of running the Mann Cup. I did so, and we made a substantial amount of money for all the different league teams.*



*After Brooklin won the Mann Cup in 1986, other teams had recognized how much money could be made. When I became commissioner, I had said that if we all cooperate, we could all make money in lacrosse as long as teams don't go nutty paying players. This has always been the main downfall that appears to be the root that hurts the game. When that starts up, it just becomes a war where teams are paying out more than they are taking in. Eventually, it's going to serve it's time on the people, and the game. I took on that job in '98 and it made money. All the teams made money. They split the Mann Cup up after 1988. All the teams made money. In 1990, '92, '94, '96, and '98, all the teams made money. I took that job just so they could all make money again and they all did. By getting in that new Brampton arena, we had good crowds. The arena was new and it was good exposure for the Brampton team. That was probably their best year for attendance, right into the Mann Cup. That year, I was the colour man with Roger Lajoie for Roger's TV for the 1999 season. I came out of retirement in 2000 when Peter Vipond and Bob Vesey asked me if I would take on the job of general manager of the Redmen again. They had been involved with the team during the Paul Cotton era. I did not want to, but I would take on the job as co-manager with Bob Vesey. My job was to attend all league meetings, evaluate players, and do the draft. When we got around to having our meetings, I ended up being the assistant general manager and Vesey took on the title job. While doing that, I also did the colour for Brooklin on the radio, doing all the games and the Mann Cup that year. After the 2001 season, Barry Johnston and Calvin Curtis fired me. They said I didn't have enough background.*

Larry: *Didn't you come onboard with the Brooklin Merchants?*

Mike: *I went on as the general manager of the Brooklin Merchants in 2002.*

Larry: *What have you done since then?*

Mike: *I did that for a couple of years. Last year, I was on the Redmen executive and I actually quit half way through the year because it seemed whenever I suggested something, they didn't like it and I was always doing a different job each week. When I started off...*