

# WILLIAM J. SMITH 1888-1973



Toronto Star, May 6, 1918

Toronto World, May 6, 1918

**FIVE YEARS' WORK RE  
O.B.A.A. FINALLY**

**ONTARIO BASEBALL  
ASSOCIATION HE**

J. Smith of Toronto First President of the New  
ball Body—Only Original Member of C  
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and Will Cont  
Amateur Game

for five years' untiring work  
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- I. K. Webber, C. H. Keith.
- Toronto—Ald. J. J. Kelly, W.
- W. Holtater, W. F. Simm.
- E. F. Hartley, W. Hey.
- Perjee—O. Toltani.
- Paris—J. Mitchell and J.
- Hamilton Association—Ere.
- Ald. Secretary F. B. R.
- Ayder, J. Campbell, W.
- Ard.

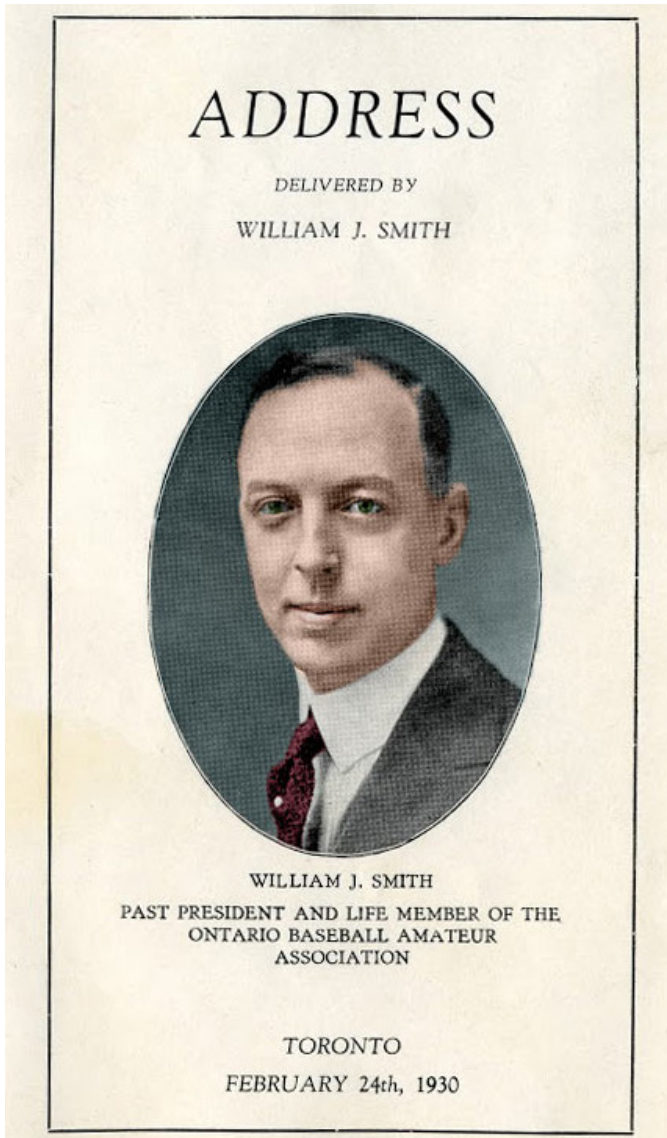
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**TBA**  
SINCE 1913



**This commemorative booklet is published by  
the Toronto Baseball Association to mark its founder's  
induction into the OBA Hall of Fame at the 100th AGM,  
Nov. 18, 2017.  
(Printed by the Durham College print shop)**

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*From the published speech given by Smith to the Danforth Branch, Native Sons of Canada. It was the first radio speech about amateur baseball broadcast in the Dominion, on Feb. 24, 1930 on Toronto Star Radio CFCA.*

# Mr. Baseball

**W**illiam Alfred James Smith – “Bill” to everyone who knew him – was born on Oct. 31, 1888 in Toronto. His father Alfred, true to his surname, worked as a blacksmith in the east end after emigrating from England as a toddler in 1869. His mother Sarah, arrived the following year.



**Bill Smith** was a sportsman who played baseball and soccer, captaining the All Saints Club junior soccer team to a championship in 1909. It was also at this time that the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada, Ontario Branch was formed,

an organization that would have a great influence on Smith and baseball in Ontario. In his career, Smith proved himself a fierce defendant of the principal of amateurism and a tireless administrator responsible for the success of many sports organizations in a career spanning more than 50 years.

As a time-keeper at the T. Eaton Company in 1910, Smith became secretary of various sports leagues within the Eaton Athletic Association, an organization founded by the Toronto retailer to promote sports – and sell sporting goods. At this time, Smith, along with his brother Bert, also organized baseball leagues in the Danforth and Greenwood area of Toronto. Bert Smith became president of the TBA in 1934 and was also a proponent of amateur sports, serving in several posts in the same organizations.

In 1912, Smith was chosen to lead the Eaton's Athletic Association as secretary-treasurer and was also appointed by the AAU of C, Ontario branch, to lead the Ontario Baseball Commission, tasked with reforming the sport along purely amateur lines. Baseball at the time was rife with gambling, prize money and semi-pros brought in to bolster the rosters of senior teams, which drew large crowds to city parks where admission was charged. It was said at the time

that the game was at risk of being banned because of the bad influence it had on the youth of the province.

The commission realized forming a province-wide association would take time and face some resistance, so they set upon the idea of forming a new association in Toronto to serve as a model for other towns to emulate. In April 1913, the commission – which often was just Smith himself – succeeded in forming the Toronto Amateur Baseball Association with Smith as its first president. The key innovation he introduced was to assure local leagues autonomy in how they ran their affairs, as long as they subscribed to a provincial system of championships and maintained amateur standing. Once the TBA was formed, Smith turned over the president's chair to Norm Brydon and set about touring the province, working with other cities and towns to persuade them to throw their lot in with the TABA and form a provincial association.

In 1915, TBA men Smith, Athol P. Gow and George Walker met with the baseball men of Hamilton to agree on a format for an inter-city championship and the *Toronto Star* reported in March of that year that numerous Ontario leagues are falling in line, and a provincial organization was “only a matter of time.”

For the next three years, Smith, as the baseball commissioner and secretary of the AAU of C, Ontario,

travelled the province, promoting the benefits of amateur baseball and the new organization being formed.

On May 4, 1918, at a meeting in the Hamilton YMCA on James Street, the Ontario Baseball Amateur Association was formed and the future of amateur baseball in Ontario was set upon a course that it follows to this day – of promoting the sport at the amateur level as a positive influence on the youth of Ontario. Smith was its first president.

“WJ”, as he was frequently identified in the newspapers, stepped aside from the president's role in 1919 in favour of Hamilton's Frank E. Robbins, but continued his sports administration efforts with the AAU for several years, and retained a position on the OBAA as a member of the executive.

In 1924, Smith retired from the OBAA and was presented with a diamond ring in appreciation of his tireless efforts in founding and supporting the organization. He was made a Life Member in 1925.

On Feb. 24, 1930, on the *Toronto Star* radio station CFCA, Smith, gave the first radio speech about amateur baseball to a group in Toronto's Danforth community, where he lived. He continued to fight for amateur sports in the province and was prominent in the battle against professionalism in many sports, including lacrosse, boxing, cycling, rowing and track



& field. In 1938, two years after the death of his father, Smith donated the A.J. Smith Memorial Trophy (right) to be given to the winner of the OBA Midget Series.

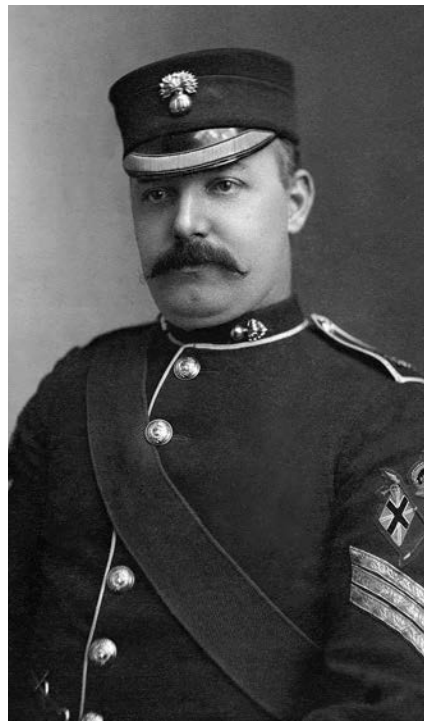
Smith was also active in softball and helped found the Toronto Amateur Softball Association, which named him a Life Member in 1941. He returned to assist the Toronto Baseball Association in 1956 and set up a new council of local executives to put the organization “back on the right track” after the war years took a toll on its membership and organization.

In 1960, at age 71, Smith was one of four men given a Life Member medal at the AGM in Sarnia, but was unable to attend. In 1964, he attended an awards dinner for the Metropolitan Toronto Baseball Association and helped hand out awards. Throughout all his years he was continually referred to as “Mr. Baseball” in Ontario.

Bill Smith spent his last years in Campbellville with his son Fred’s family and died in Burlington on Oct. 2, 1973 at age 84. He is buried in Pine Hills Cemetery, Scarborough, along with his wife Isobel Ainslie Lang, who died in 1953.

With us tonight to honour him are his grandchildren: Lynda (Smith) Mitic and her husband Sig, and Greg Smith and his son Tyler.

*(Right) Alfred J. Smith, 10th Battalion Royal Grenadiers, Toronto (circa 1910)*



# Amateur Baseball Association Formed

Many Delegates Present at  
Organization Meeting Here

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*Hamilton Spectator* - May 6, 1918  
(With annotations)

The thorough organization of amateur baseball throughout Ontario received a decided stimulus in Hamilton on Saturday<sup>1</sup>, when at a well attended meeting at the Y.M.C.A.<sup>2</sup>, a body governing the sport in the province was brought into being and given the name of the Ontario Baseball Amateur Association. The meeting was called at the instance of the Ontario [B]aseball [C]ommission<sup>3</sup>, and the baseball interests of the towns and cities of the district were looked after by the following representatives:

Toronto - W[illiam] J. Smith,  
A.J[oe] Walsh, P[atrick] M. Kennedy,  
S[i].H. Armstrong<sup>4</sup>, R[obert]  
Hewitson and George Walker<sup>5</sup>.  
Hamilton - A.J. Waite, Wm. Snyder<sup>6</sup>,  
Frank Robbins, G.L. Campbell and  
Fred Howard.  
Brantford - Ald. [J.J.] Kelly and  
Messrs. [W.] Scruton, Davidson,  
Hartley, [Samuel G.] Lee and  
Kratzman, [W. Hollister].

Kitchener - Messrs. [I.K.] Webber  
and [W.] Redding.  
Preston - Messrs. [J.] Mitchell and  
[J.] O'Neill.  
Oshawa - C.W. Farr  
Dundas - Mr. [J.R.] Murray

The gathering convened at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, after the visiting delegates had been conveyed to the Victoria<sup>7</sup> and North End parks to give the local ball-tossers the once over in the inaugural games of the season. The role of chairman was unanimously allocated to W.J. Smith<sup>8</sup>, of Toronto, to whose indefatigable work on behalf of amateur sport may be attributed much of the credit for the good foundation upon which baseball is being placed in this province.

The extension of a civic welcome was admirably looked after by Controller T.M. Wright, whose remarks made a decided hit with the moguls present. The genial controller laid special stress on the advisability of training up the younger generation in a manner that would lead to the highest standard of citizenship for the future. In no way, the controller said, could this attainment be better achieved than in the inculcation of true, sincere and untrammelled sportsmanship into the lives of young boys. The present war had provided an acid test for Canadian athletes and one in which the sporting blood of the Dominion had proven itself unsurpassed by that of the any country in the world.

Controller Wright wished the sitting delegates every success in their de-

liberations, and expressed the pride that Hamilton would feel in having been favored as the meeting place of the inaugural convention of the O.B.A.A.

Chairman Smith voiced the thanks of the gathering to the controller for his words of welcome and good wishes and then proceeded to delineate the objects of the gathering. For many years other lines of amateur sports had been well organized and controlled in Ontario, but it had until recently been thought impossible to have amateur baseball played upon a similar basis. The importance and popularity of baseball were so marked that the playing of the amateur brand under highly-organized auspices was a goal greatly to be desired. The Ontario baseball commission had for the past few years looked after Ontario baseball in the interests of the A.A.U. of C<sup>9</sup>. Toronto was the first city organized and in that [illegible...] the project had resulted in the game there being placed on a highly-satisfactory basis. Hamilton was the next territory worked, and there too, excellent results had been attained. Mr. Smith thought the time now opportune for the further extension of the organization, and the presence of so many delegates from out-of-town points verified his belief. The primary objects of the new body would be the development of the younger ball players along the lines of purely amateur diamond sport, and the consequent heightening of the standing of citizenship that would with no doubt ensue. The idea was to have the province div-

ided into several districts, each of which would play a regular summer schedule of games. The winners of each section would then compete in semi-final and final series for the purpose of determining the amateur championship of the province.

Mr. Smith then asked for an expression of opinion from the representatives of the different places in attendance. Each speaker was in hearty accord as to the advisability of the formation of the new body. S.H. Armstrong, superintendent of playgrounds for Toronto, gave the delegates much good advice in regard to local organization. Ald. Kelly reported favorably for Brantford, and the willingness of the several other delegates to line up their respective localities behind the new project was voiced, not a note of dissent being evident.

The immediate organization of the new body was then decided upon, and it was the unanimous opinion of those present that it should be known as the Ontario Baseball Amateur Association.

The crafting of a constitution<sup>10</sup> was then proceeded with, and a comprehensive list of rules and regulations governing the conduct of the executive business and the playing of the different series was adopted.

Semi-annual meetings will be held, the chief of which will take place on the last Saturday in April of each year. The other gathering will convene at the place and on the date of the provincial final senior cham-

*Baseball at Willowvale Park (Christie Pits), Toronto, 1922*







pionship game, at which meeting the place of the succeeding April meeting will be decided upon. The annual membership fee was placed at \$10.

One of the salient features of the constitution is a clause prohibiting any gambling or improper conduct by players or officials at league games, and the provision of penalties for violations of this rule. The rules of the National League will govern all contests under the jurisdiction of the O.B.A.A. and all semi-final and final games will be under the direct control of the provincial body.

P.M. Kennedy<sup>11</sup>, the veteran amateur sport enthusiast of Toronto, sent a flood of enjoyment over the gathering when he announced that he had received a donation of a trophy from Mr. Norris, of the *Toronto News*. The trophy, a drawing of which Mr. Kennedy produced, will take the form of a handsome challenge cup, three feet six inches in height, and valued at \$300. Besides this trophy the News will provide each year twelve miniatures of the big cup, which will become the permanent property of the championship club.

The election of officers for the ensuing year resulted as follows:

Honorary president – James A.

Norris<sup>12</sup>, *Toronto News*.

President – W.J. Smith<sup>13</sup>, Toronto.

First vice-president – Frank Robbins<sup>14</sup>, Hamilton.

Second vice-president – Ald. J.J.

Kelly<sup>15</sup>, Brantford.

Secretary-treasurer – A.J. Walsh<sup>16</sup>, Toronto.

As an executive committee, representatives from each league or association...[illegible]. The proceedings of the convention were dispensed with at the supper hour, and adjournment was made to the banquet room of the Y.M.C.A. where a substantial repast was partaken of.

The evening session was of short duration, and at the time of adjournment the delegates departed, each avowing his willingness to act as a booster for the O.B.A.A. in his locality.

## Sporting Comment

If the enthusiasm displayed at Saturday's meeting here is any criterion, the Ontario Amateur Baseball association will soon be a strong rival of the O.H.A. in the matter of prestige. Western Ontario was fairly well represented and not a dissenting voice was heard when the aims of the new association were outlined by W.J. Smith, the Toronto man who has worked so hard to place amateur baseball on an organized basis. With Hamilton and Toronto already in line, there should be no trouble in arranging six sections and have the winners meet at the close of the season to decide the provincial championship. The association is off to a good start, and just as many clubs under its jurisdiction as the O.H.A.<sup>17</sup>, which at present is Canada's premier amateur organization.

## Endnotes

- 1 Saturday, May 4, 1918
- 2 79 James St. at Jackson Ave.
- 3 Formed March 26, 1913 in Toronto, it was a committee set up by the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada, Ontario Branch, to organize amateur baseball.
- 4 Si Armstrong, Superintendent of Playgrounds for the City of Toronto, became TMBA president in 1948.
- 5 George Cross Walker, 1888-?, Secretary TBA and OBA.
- 6 William J. Snider, OBA president 1925-1927, 1945, Life Member 1934
- 7 <https://goo.gl/maps/2BvMERX-G5HA2>
- 8 Smith founded the Toronto Baseball Association in 1913 and toured the province trying to organize the OBA. Hamilton became the first organization to agree to an organizational scheme for the senior championship in 1915.
- 9 Amateur Athletic Union of Canada, Ontario Branch
- 10 The constitution was largely copied from the Toronto Baseball Association, formed in April 1913, and both adopted language from the constitutions of the AAU in the US and Canada regarding amateur status.
- 11 Patrick Michael Kennedy, 1867-1949, became OBA president in 1922
- 12 Norris was president of the Conservative Association in Toronto.
- 13 William James Smith, 1888-1973, President OBA 1918, TBA 1913 (briefly), OBA Life Member 1925
- 14 Frank Edward Robbins I, 1876-1934, OBA president 1919-1921 (Frank E. Robbins V, and VI live in St. Louis, MO.)
- 15 Alderman John Joseph Kelly, 1878-1944
- 16 Arthur Joseph Walsh, 1884-1941, OBA treasurer for many years, president in 1936, secretary-treasurer of TBA for many years.
- 17 The Ontario Hockey Association was formed Nov. 27, 1890, in Toronto.



# OBAA Founding Executive

The founding executive of the original Ontario Baseball Amateur Association was headed by Honorary

President James A. Norris, of the *Toronto News* who was an avid sportsman and president of the Conservative Association in Toronto.

William J. 'Bill' Smith, who worked for the T. Eaton C. and had done so much to bring about both the Toronto Baseball Association and the provincial organization, was named the first president, a position he held for a year before stepping aside for F.E. Robbins of Hamilton, who became president in 1919. Smith served on the executive many years, becoming a life member in 1925, and was awarded a life member medal at the 1960 AGM in Sarnia (although he couldn't attend). He died in Burlington Oct. 2, 1973.

John Joseph Kelly, an alderman for the Town of Brantford, was originally a lacrosse player from Newmarket and moved to Brantford to play there.

Frank Edward Robbins of Hamilton was the OBA's founding first vice-president and the first in a line of namesakes: Frank E. Robbins the V and VI now live in St. Louis.



Arthur Joseph Walsh was manager of a postal station in Toronto, and was a member of the

founding executive of the TBA, serving as secretary-treasurer for both organizations at various times, until his death in 1941. He became OBA president in 1936.

Little is known at this time about the executive committee members pictured right, who were named to the first board at the annual general meeting, other than they represented the original leagues who joined the association. H. C. Maguire was from St. Catharines and G.S. Martin was from London.

## Charter Members of the OBAA 1918

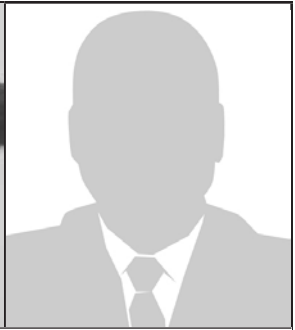
- \* Brantford City League
- \* Dundas Town League
- \* Hamilton Amateur Baseball Association
- \* Kitchener City League
- \* Oshawa Town League
- \* Peterborough Senior League
- \* Preston Town League
- \* Toronto Amateur Baseball Association



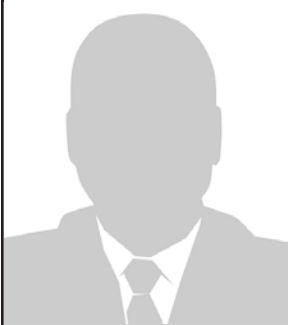
James A. Norris



W. J. Smith



J.J. Kelly



F. E. Robbins



A.J. Walsh



J.C. Burns



W.H. Farrell



A. Grimes



H.C. Maguire



G.S. Martin



C.R. Penfold

Toronto World, May 6, 1918

## ONTARIO BASEBALL ASSOCIATION HERE

Organization Completed at Hamilton and Will Control Provincial Amateur Games.





*Above: The former Carls-Rite Hotel (later Barclays Hotel), Toronto, where many baseball meetings were held. Below: 22 College Street, longtime home of the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada, Ontario Branch, and the Ontario Baseball Commission.*





*Above: The Hamilton YMCA at Jackson and James Street, as it was in 1918 when the OBA was formed, superimposed on the current Y building.  
Below: OBA crest from the 1970s.*







*From Left: Patrick M. Kennedy, Arthur Joseph Walsh, William J. Smith and George C. Walker. All four men served on the executive of the OBA and TBA, and all but Walker became OBA president. Walker, a salesman with Spalding, moved to the US to work at the sporting goods maker's head office.*