

The Curious Case of Michael Martin



by Jeff McGaw

*If the bullet from the crazed gunman had actually hit bone, pitcher **Michael Martin** of the **St. Louis MSBL** might well have lost his arm.*

As it was, the bullet that ripped through his right shoulder removed a good chunk of flesh and muscle on the way out and should have signaled the end of Martin's amateur baseball career.



Mike Martin pitching at 2008 MSBL Fall Classic in Florida. Photo by Laurie Lackey

Tragedy in Maplewood

Michael Martin's story is a sub plot in one of the most tragic news stories of 2008.

It all began on July 21, 2008 in Maplewood, Missouri, when 22-year-old firefighter Ryan Hummert was shot to death by a sniper while attempting to douse a vehicle fire set by the shooter. The news story received national attention.

A police officer responding to the scene was shot in the chest by the deranged gunman. Next on the scene was police sergeant Martin, a 19-year veteran of the force. Within seconds, he too was shot. He described the sensation as feeling as if his arm was being ripped off. "The surgeon said if it [the bullet] would have hit my bone it would have taken my arm off," Martin recalled. "I'm very fortunate to be here. I didn't think that I would ever be able to play (baseball) again."

Amazing Recovery

Amazingly, Martin was able to resume pitching a mere four weeks later, but things felt different. "I was pitching, and it's almost like (the injury) did something to my arm that's weird: it doesn't hurt now when I throw."

Months later, at the MSBL Fall Classic in November 2008, Martin threw a complete game victory for the St. Louis Chiefs in the tournament's 35+ Central Division. The next morning, he threw nine innings of relief. "My arm feels good," he said at the time, as he iced the limb. Three days later, he threw six and two-thirds innings of relief in an 11-10 playoff loss to the Broadway Dodgers. "As crazy as it is," he said, "I pitched 24 innings in four days."

During the regular season, the 42-year-old Martin plays on and manages the St. Louis MSBL Perfectos. Prior to his injury, "I could maybe throw two games if they were apart by enough days," he said. "Really, I was good for about once a week."

Despite the fact that surgeons told Martin that his shoulder needed surgery and seven months of recovery, Martin was reluctant. "I don't know if I want to mess with it. I don't have full range of motion," he said, "but I'm almost to the point now where if I can throw the way I am I'd almost rather not have the surgery."

A Memorial to Hummert

All of this is overshadowed by the events of July 21—events never far from Martin's mind.

Hummert, just ten months out of the fire academy, was shot through the head and killed while answering his very first official fire call: a vehicle fire set by the gunman.

"You're close knit with these guys," said Martin. "Even though he's a fireman, we're a real close community." Hummert's death, he said, was "like somebody in your family being killed."

A park near the crime scene was renamed to honor Hummert, who was the son of the town's former mayor. Now Martin is among a group working to raise money to erect a bronze statue of Hummert in that park. He recently organized an auction of sports memorabilia donated by the likes of Albert Pujols and former major leaguer and St. Louis native Scott Cooper.

The effort raised \$30,000 toward the \$60,000 cost of the statue. "It's a great way to never forget (Hummert)" Martin said. "We wanted some-

thing so that when kids went out to the park they would see him and know about him."

For those interested in helping with the cost of the statue, checks should be made out to "Ryan Hummert Memorial Fund" and mailed care of: City of Maplewood, 7601 Manchester Rd., Maplewood, MO 63143.

For more information, visit their Web site at www.honoringhummert.com



Mike Martin in his "other" uniform. Martin has been a policeman for 19 years.

