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Clark C. Griffith

A man beyond sport.

BY STEVEN SCHUSSLER

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO live in Minnesota and not know the Griffith name, which is synonymous with baseball. In interviewing Clark C. Griffith, formerly a part-owner, treasurer and executive with the Minnesota Twins, I was fascinated to learn that at age 40, he left his career in baseball to attend law school and today is a successful business attorney, arbitrator and commissioner of independent baseball's Northern League.

SS: You were part of lobbying the bill to authorize the construction of the Metrodome and now you're looking to be part of building a baseball stadium in Burnsville. Talk about that. **GRIFFITH:** Actually, they are totally different programs. One involves state financing and the other is privately financed, so they really are not connected. The Metrodome was one of my favorite projects, that took a lot of time and a lot of work and we accomplished it and I was very happy.

SS: How do you feel about baseball moving out of the Metrodome? **GRIFFITH:** The concept of the Metrodome was absolutely solid but the design and execution were badly handled at the time. [There were] huge errors. I've toured the new stadium and it's absolutely perfect in both design and execution.

SS: What do you think of the rapidly evolving baseball landscape? **GRIFFITH:** There really haven't been many changes in the way the game is played—if Ty Cobb came along today and was asked to play, he'd go out in the field and play the game exactly the same way as he played it 100 years ago. The changes in the game are strictly from the way media has exposed the game's glory. When cable television really got rolling, you had multiple outlets and channels like ESPN—and that really promoted baseball's image, that's why the attendance has soared.

SS: In addition to being an entrepreneur and attorney you are a former president of the Boys and Girls Club of Minneapolis? **GRIFFITH:** When I was growing up, I was a member of the Boys Club. I played baseball there, I hung out there. I even learned how to play ping pong there; so when I had the opportunity to help I was very pleased to do it.

SS: What has been your biggest sacrifice, personal or professional? **GRIFFITH:** In the early '80s, at age 40, I

decided that I needed to go back to school in order to move ahead. I chucked it all and went to law school. My career with baseball was about to end and I had to start all over again. I attended William Mitchell and now I am an adjunct professor there.

SS: What's the most outrageous business deal you've brought to life? **GRIFFITH:** I was known in the baseball business for having some outrageous ideas. I approached the commissioner [of MLB] in the early '70s, and I suggested we collect all our logos and create a company to market them. I was named vice chair of Major League Baseball Promotion Corporation (now called Major League Baseball Properties) and led the company into licensing, publishing and broadcast production. I essentially started that company with three people; now it's a multi-billion-dollar business.

SS: What wild things are you up to now? **GRIFFITH:** I'm working on creating a Northern League of 12 teams. We're going to add Burnsville and three other teams by 2012. From there, my goal is to create the Independent Professional Baseball Federation, and merge that somehow with MLB operations.

SS: Are you living your dream? **GRIFFITH:** My dream when I went to law school was to combine the law and sports. I am doing that as the Northern League Commissioner and teaching sports law. However, I enjoy legal work immensely and I have found that completing a deal is as rewarding as winning a game.

SS: What words of advice or inspiration do you have? **GRIFFITH:** The old Churchill mantra, "Never, never, never give up." When you're on the 10-yard line trying to score, that's when it gets hard, and that's when we really have to redouble our efforts.

SS: Who's the most memorable character you've worked with? **GRIFFITH:** Ellis Clary played for my father in Charlotte in the 1930s. [After that] he was a noted scout for years and he was one of the most unusual fellows I've ever known. While scouting, he had a heart attack and was put in an ambulance. They had to resuscitate him three times. Well, scouts live on expense accounts and Ellis had enough wit about him to get up and ask the driver to record the mileage so he could expense it.



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