

The rumble

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You might want to call Willis Gardner the Sultan of No Sweat.

Gardner fully expects to hit another home run when he returns following a five-year absence to reclaim his Babe Ruth Lookalike contest crown Sept. 24 at Gallagher's Steak House.

Gardner, who will be driving in from his Oberlin, Ohio, home with wife Cecile, was asked by the Rumble if he expects to win again.

"Hands down," he said.

The Bambino himself might as well have walked into Gallagher's in 2007.

"There were 10 other guys in there," Gardner recalls, "and they threw their hands up."

Gardner is 75, 5-foot-11, 260 pounds.

"I'm not as tall as he was," Gardner said. "My love of The Babe started in 1991 when I was an extra in a TV series called 'The Babe Ruth Story,' filmed here in Ohio," Gardner said. "I went to Cooperstown later that year, and as soon as I walked through the door, somebody shouted 'The Babe is back.'"

Gardner recently appeared before World War II veterans in Wisconsin. Asked what he did, he said: "Just looked like the Babe."

He will be sporting his old wool Babe Ruth uniform at Gallagher's.

"Some lady made it for me in Cooperstown," Gardner said.

The license plate on his wife's car reads B Ruth 2.

"I should have had 3 put on it," Gardner said. "I'm gonna change that next year if I can do it."

Gardner didn't play baseball as a youth growing up in nearby Spencer.

"I had to work on a farm, I started when I was 5 [or] 6 years old," he said. "I didn't have much time to do anything."

He has, of course, appeared at Babe Ruth League World Series events.

"I've been all over the country for that," Gardner said. Doing what? "Just looking like the Babe."

He recalls the first time Linda Ruth Tosetti, the Babe's granddaughter, stopped him on the street during one of his annual Cooperstown visits.

"She said, 'You are my grandfather I never met!'" Gardner said.

Gardner, a toe truck operator and mechanic since 1970 at Dunlap's Garage in Elyria, is a celebrity of sorts, graciously handing out autographed pictures of Willis Gardner, aka the Babe. "Everybody calls me the Babe around here," Gardner said.

The year was 1927 when the Bambino hit 60, and Gallagher's was born, thus the tie-in. A galaxy of to-be-announced prizes will be awarded to the winner, as selected by a blue ribbon panel. To enter, email johnnycigarpr@aol.com with photo attached or call (914) 260-7436. Entries must be submitted no later than Sept. 20.

Asked what it's like looking like Babe Ruth, Gardner said: "It's awesome. It's absolutely awesome."

Football fund started for New Hyde Park

The New Hyde Park Memorial High School football team received a pleasant surprise recently when Class of 1984 alum Rich "Big Daddy" Salgado informed head coach Frank Sonneberg he would be donating \$200 to start the funding of the Gladiator Football Fund with former teammate Tom DiGunski, whose son was the quarterback when New Hyde Park High opened the season against Garden City.

Salgado, in an email to the Rumble, said he made the donation "to wish the team good luck this year and to explain how rich the tradition at New Hyde Park is, that we never ever expected to lose when you played at New Hyde Park ... [and] to help raise money for a program that needs financial support.

"We need new uniforms, helmets, equipment, and many other things. The football field is terrible!!!!!!!"

New uniforms indeed. "Some kids were wearing pants I wore when I played," Salgado added over the phone.

Salgado, now insurance and disability agent at President of Coastal Advisors LLC, was a member of the 1984 Rutgers Cup Champions team that went 9-0 and gave up just 13 points. Salgado got a full scholarship from Maryland, where he played with Neil O'Donnell.

For more information, or to make a donation, contact Frank Sonneberg, Gladiator Football Fund, 15 South 10th St., New Hyde Park, NY 11042.

Golden U.S. rowers take NYC cycling class

Three members of the U.S. women's eight rowing team, which took home gold medals in London, decided to engage in a little friendly competition recently. Meghan Musnicki, Esther Lofgren and coxswain Mary Whipple met up for a Flywheel Sports indoor cycling class in NYC, along with Lindsey Shoop, a Beijing gold medalist in the same sport. All four ladies chose to put their names up on the Flywheel TorqBoards, flat screens at the front of the class displaying real time performance data, to see who the best indoor cyclist would be. In the end, Lofgren just edged out her teammate Musnicki to win the "Flywheel Gold." ... John Wall of the Washington Wizards celebrated his birthday this week at Jay-Z's 40/40 Club with a slew of family and friends. At midnight, he toasted to the upcoming season with a shot of D'Usse Cognac. ... Former NFL players Jevon "The Freak" Kearse, Fred Taylor and Keith Bulluck sighted at Bounce Sporting Club.

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