

# Legendary Comics Coach Turns 50



Milford, USA... On September 8, 2008 Gil Thorp, the ageless wonder of high school coaches, will celebrate his 50<sup>th</sup> year as the leading man in the nation's longest running sports serial comic strip. Since September 8, 1958, when he first turned up at Milford



High School, Coach Thorp has counseled and entertained a legion of fans from Connecticut to California with his down home, common sense approach to dealing with the daily trials and tribulations facing his teen charges.

Created by Brooklyn native Jack Berrill, *Gil Thorp*® is a marvelous blend of soap opera and sports action. When he originally conceived the idea for the strip Mr. Berrill, then an assistant on *Winnie Winkle*®, proposed to *The Chicago Tribune/New York News Syndicate* a sports oriented strip but the syndicate wanted a teenage character strip instead. The parties compromised and settled for a teen sports strip that is still going strong fifty years after its inception. Mr. Berrill named his main character after Brooklyn Dodger great Gil Hodges and Olympian Jim Thorpe. "I used Thorpe for the image of the all-around athlete and thought Gil Hodges personified the character I wanted" Berrill said in a 1984 *Sports Illustrated* interview. The quality and tone of the strip is neatly summed up by Gil Thorp himself in a conversation with future wife Mimi Clover in the panel at right...

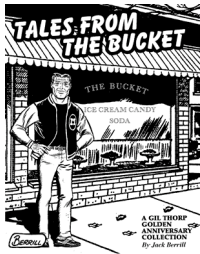
Mr. Berrill helmed the strip as author and illustrator for 35 years until glaucoma forced him to turn the artwork over to fellow Connecticut Cartoonist Association colleagues in October of 1993. He continued to write the strip until his passing on March 14, 1996. Over the course of his stellar career Mr. Berrill deftly explored topical social issues within the editorial constraints of the daily comic strip and was lauded by educators and



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coaches for his realistic portrayal of the challenges facing high school student athletes. From the initial concern of how to get upperclassmen to join a losing football team to issues like divorce, alcoholism, steroids, educable mental retards, and teen pregnancy, Mr. Berrill crafted believable stories supported by finely detailed artwork that brought his characters to life. The reason fans came back day after day was because they cared what happened to the characters in *Gil Thorp*®. Mr. Berrill was fond of saying: "... leave your message at Western Union. I try to entertain, not preach" Well, entertain he did but, like coach Thorp's young athletes, *Gil Thorp*® readers were happy to learn a little along the way as well.

That feeling is still evoked today as the team of author Neal Rubin and artist Rod Whigham successfully continue the *Gil Thorp*® legacy. Mr. Rubin has respectfully maintained the spirit of *Gil Thorp*® while developing his own distinct and creative voice whilst Mr. Whigham has incorporated a fluid illustrative style that effectively propels the action sequences. Recent storylines have focused on timely & varied issues such as illegal immigration, deportation, home schooling, homelessness, and athletic shoe company sponsorship. With the stewardship of *Gil Thorp*® in good hands, loyal fans can look forward to celebrating many future anniversaries with America's favorite coach.



Fans can celebrate the golden anniversary of *Gil Thorp*® with *Tales From the Bucket*. The 15 stories reprinted for the first time span Jack Berrill's tenure at the helm of the longest running sports serial strip in history. *Tales From the Bucket* is available exclusively via mail order from Take Five Productions. Inquiries can be made at [take\\_five@comcast.net](mailto:take_five@comcast.net).

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