

NEWS AND UPDATES

WHAT BASEBALL HAS MEANT TO MY FAMILY A Look Back at 20 Years in HFL-Mendon Baseball

I have written many of the articles you may have read in the annual HFL Mendon Youth Baseball Newsletter. Regular readers have probably noticed a certain regularity to the articles – field improvements, chow hut news, scholarship recipients, volunteer opportunities, the ever-changing bat rules to name a few. All are meant to keep league participants up to date and help the league continue to operate as effectively as possible.

For the last few years I have been thinking beyond the details of league operations. As someone who has been involved in the league for 20+ years two thoughts come to mind – I'm getting older and baseball has had a big impact on everyone in my family. Perhaps the first thought is part of the reason for the second.

While I never really played baseball competitively as a child I was big fan. The Giants – Mays, Marichal, McCovey, Cepeda. That was my team and those were my favorite players. I know this doesn't "fit" but I was a great fan of Sandy Koufax, a Dodger, too. I still have baseball cards of all of them and pictures of "The Catch" by Mays in the '54 Series, the Marichal high kick and the strained image of Koufax giving his all firing another unhittable fastball. But somewhere in my early teens basketball took over and baseball was mostly forgotten.

Like all of you my life changed a lot when children arrived. For my wife and me two boys came four years apart. We moved to Mendon in 1994 when our boys were "almost" 5 and 2. I don't remember exactly how it happened but one year later we registered our first for T-Ball. Back then T Ball was for 6-7 year olds, Intermediate didn't exist, Minors was 8-10 and Majors was 11 and 12. In the early "spring" (Read "cold, rain, mud and occasional snow") of 1996 we began with our first T Ball game which had to be moved to the fire hall grounds due to conditions at the league field. That launched our family on a 15 year odyssey in HFM (pre Red Willison merger) baseball.

The trip was fantastic. My boys took to playing baseball like I never did. We all get caught up in our children's lives. I did too. First, watching game after game, later, timidly agreeing to be an assistant coach, then becoming a head coach for my younger son and finally serving on the league board of directors, my involvement with baseball and HFM just seemed to naturally progress. My boys loved baseball and, again, so did I. My wife was a full participant – team mom, chow hut, shagging balls and generally putting up with it all. We still have a sign hanging above the entry to our kitchen "We interrupt this family for baseball season." A truer statement was never uttered. Schedules rearranged, time spent planning and attending practice and

games, vacations always planned for August when the league finished its year – that was all happily part of the baseball “contract.”

Baseball created so many memories for my family and taught so many lessons to each of us that it’s impossible to do them justice in an article. I’m sure I could fill a book. The memories are, I’m sure, much like yours – Hits, catches, pitches – one play in particular – an unassisted triple play by the third baseman on my son’s team --- **IN T-BALL!!!** That third baseman is a Marine today. Trips for “away” games in Lima (they had dugouts!), new friends for our children and for us. Field cleanup, grilling burgers, hot dogs and chicken and manning the chow hut. Raking infields if you were lucky and pumping water, removing wet muck and hauling in dry infield material when you weren’t so lucky – all to get the game in. Watching and playing in searing heat and at other times in snow flurries, often in the same month (May!). I’ll never forget a game in Henrietta in late July when the fans were wrapped in blankets, another in Greece when it snowed in the middle of May and many at our complex with an army of parents transforming an unplayable field into “Yankee Stadium” yet again. Fundraisers to support various efforts. The most memorable?; my son being tasked with raising \$100 to support his travel team by collecting and returning empty bottles and cans. What started out as a difficult chore turned into a nightly crusade across the Mendon Golf Club course visiting every trash can. 2,000 bottles and cans later, it was accomplished; another great memory and a great lesson. Big wins, close calls both for you and against you, pennant races and inevitable losses - some snatched from the jaws of victory. Smiles and cheers, tears and silent rides home and everything in between were all part of the program.

The lessons were forged, not just learned. I am pretty sure I learned as many if not more lessons

than my boys. Respect yourself, respect your teammates, respect the other team, respect your coaches, respect the umpire and respect the game. You can’t win all the time. How you deal with defeat is more important than how you deal with success. Be prepared, give your best, don’t give up, play fair, lend support when others don’t succeed and keep your head high when you fail. Pitch in and help, many hands make any work much easier. And here is perhaps the hardest one – Winning isn’t everything.

As we know, the best lessons are learned the hard way. Success is easily accepted; failure hurts but can point the way to better actions in the future. I surely remember victories even being lucky enough to co-manage a championship team one year. It was the one year that the season didn’t end as most do – with a loss. But the losses and regrets as a coach are also memorable and probably more formative. While I know I made other mistakes, trying too hard to win rather than making sure all players had a chance to try every position is the one that I remember most and has taught me the best lesson about sport and life. Everyone has much to give; they just have to be allowed the opportunity.

The game skills learned in HFM provided my boys the opportunity to play baseball through most of their high school years. The life lessons they learned from their teammates, coaches, umpires and league families and the game itself served them well through high school, college and continue to serve them now in the work world. Thank you to everyone who has taught me and my family so much.

I hope your experience with baseball, America’s Game, provides for you all that it has for me and my family.

Happy New Year and **PLAY BALL!**

CHOOSING YOUR LEAGUE

The Decision to “Play Up”

HFL Mendon Youth baseball leagues include Drills and Skills for age 4; T Ball for ages 5-6; Intermediate for ages 7-8, Minors for ages 9-10 and Majors for ages 11-12. Age is determined based on a player’s age on April 30 of the year of play, e.g. a player who turns 8 on May 1, 2017 is league age 7 (the player’s age on April 30, 2017) for the 2017 season. After age 12 options at various levels of competition are offered up to age 18 depending on the number of players registered. League rules do allow players to try out to “play up” a league, e.g. an 8-year old trying out for Minors or a 10-year old trying out for Majors. This option has been a part of league rules for a long time and was included to accommodate the occasional player with unusual talent.

Requests to “play up” have increased in recent years for a variety of reasons and most requests to “play up” have been granted. One perhaps unforeseen impact of the increased prevalence of “playing up” has been the dilution of talent and degradation of the level of play in leagues below Majors. More players “playing up” in Majors means fewer players in Minors. This is often made up with

younger players “playing up” from Intermediate to Minors. A similar scenario occurs in Intermediate and to a lesser extent in T Ball. The degradation of play is a strong contributor to more players wanting to “play up”.

Another outcome has been that players “playing up” often struggle at the new level playing against older players rather than really learning the basics of fielding, throwing and hitting against their true age-based peers. A one year difference in age translates to a significant physical difference at these young ages.

Of course the choice of whether your child should try to “play up” is yours. Staying in the age appropriate league allows for better skills development which is a very good predictor of longevity playing youth baseball. It also raises the level of play in the various leagues, improving the experience for all. Please consider this decision carefully. The HFL Mendon Board of Directors will continue to judiciously review requests to play up with a goal of providing the best baseball experience possible for all league participants.

What’s Happening in HFL-Mendon Youth Baseball Now?

There’s always something happening in HFL Mendon Youth Baseball; even in the dead of winter. Here is a brief update on current and near future events-

- Registration is now in process. Register now as beginning 1/16/17 a \$20 late fee will apply. While we always try to register anyone that wants to play, after 1/31/17 registration is not guaranteed.
- Travel teams that have already been selected (Storm and MCBR teams) have started indoor practices or will be soon.
- The Travel Team Coach and Player Selection Policy has recently been reviewed and updated by the Board of Directors. The goal, as always, is to make the process fair and transparent. The updated

policy can be accessed on the league website under “Leagues” and then “Tournament Teams.” We always welcome your thoughts on these and all other league policies.

- As noted under “Key Dates”, league evaluation sessions and drafts will be held in late January/early February.
- The Summer Tournament committee is already working to plan the 2017 tournament. It is quite a process that takes a large volunteer effort. You may have noticed that the 2016 tournament was more compact. It ran smoothly and the new format was a hit with participants.
- MLB pitchers and catchers report to spring training in early February. That’s only a little more than a month away!

While it’s hard to imagine with snow on the ground and more on the way, before we know it our season will begin. Stay warm.

Key Dates to Remember

With baseball season coming there are many special dates on the horizon. Evaluation sessions and draft dates are the nearest (late January/early February) but they have not yet been determined. We will communicate those as soon as they are set. Likewise for post-season travel team tryouts. Here are a few dates that are set along with some interesting historical facts-

April 29 – Official Opening day at the Complex Also the date in 1990 that wrecking balls started to dismantle the Berlin Wall.

June 11 – HFL-M Red Wings Game Day \$7 Tickets Also the date in 1184 BC that Troy fell in the Trojan War

June 17 – Championship/Picnic Day Also the date in 1631 that the wife of India’s emperor Shah Jahan I died during childbirth. He spent the next 20 years building her tomb, the Taj Mahal.

All important dates are posted on the league calendar at www.hfmbaseball.org. Check there if you have questions.

Storm Team Thanks the Community

Our 2017 Mendon Storm team was selected through open tryouts in September 2016. Almost as important as getting ready to play is raising money to support the team’s operations centered on the week-long trip to Cooperstown Dreams Park.

The Storm players participate in the fundraising every year with their primary effort being a pie sale before Thanksgiving. The Storm team wishes to thank all who purchased pies in 2016. A record number of pies were sold with 100% of the proceeds funding team operations.

For the last few years the Storm has included on their order form an option to purchase pies to donate to St. Martin's. St. Martin's located, in the City of Rochester, provides daily meals, including at Thanksgiving for those in need. This year 20 pies were purchased by generous families and donated to St. Martin's. To make it simple and efficient the Joint family personally delivered the donated pies to St. Catherine's who then delivered them to St. Martin's. . What a wonderful idea and outcome. Congratulations Storm!

From personal experience I can tell you that the players will be wishing they could eat those tasty pies once they are in the barracks at Cooperstown. While the baseball is top notch, the "dining room" does not come close to matching "home cooking."

Thanks again for your continued support.

Bat Rules

The rules surrounding bats continue to change as various rule makers attempt to stay one step ahead of technology and keep the game safe playable on existing fields. Unlike golf, we can't move the plate back. The only significant change comes from Little League (LL). LL rules govern our junior and senior LL teams (not MCBR). These rule changes impact only the junior league and are not effective until **1/1/18** so you are safe this year (2017) following current LL rules. A recap of the various rules in effect for 2017 is as follows-

T Ball through Majors-

- Barrel diameter **not exceeding 2 ¼"** and bat length **not exceeding 33'**. **No Big Barrel bats in Majors and below.**
- Non-wood bats must be labeled with a BPF (bat performance factor) of 1.15 or less.
- Composite bats must be Little League approved. Please consult the FAQ at www.littleleague.org/learn/equipment/baseballbatinfo.htm

Junior & Senior leagues (Little League) – 13 and up

- You should ask the coach if your child will be in the Junior or Senior division. The bat rules differ for each as detailed below.
- All leagues follow Little League rules for Junior and Senior divisions.
- All bats must be BBCOR certified.
- Junior Division (12-14)-
 - Barrel diameter **not exceeding 2 5/8"**; length **not exceeding 34"**.
 - Composite bats must be BBCOR certified.
 - Metal and wood bats do not need BBCOR certification.
 - No weight vs. length restrictions.
- Senior Division (13-16)-
 - Barrel diameter **not exceeding 2 5/8"**; length **not exceeding 36"**.
 - Composite and metal bats must be BBCOR certified.
 - Wood bats do not need BBCOR certification.
 - Weight vs. length **no less than -3; i.e. -5 NOT allowed.**

MCBR-

- Please consult the MCBR website at www.mcbaseballregion.com and/or check with your team's coach for applicable requirements. Rules can differ between 12U, 13U and 15U.

The Mendon Storm 12U team also plays in another local league during the year (North Coast or MCBR) and at Dreams Park in Cooperstown. Players should consult with the team coach to understand bat rules in those leagues.

Bat Rule Changes For 2018

Not to confuse you but effective **1/1/18** players participating in the junior league (LL) will be required to use bats with a barrel diameter not exceeding 2 5/8" with a USABat stamp. **The USABat stamp is new so, effectively, any bat that was used in the junior league in 2016 will no longer be allowed. We suggest that you not buy a new bat for junior league in 2017 unless it has the USABat stamp. If you do it will only be useable in junior league in 2017. It is not known when bats with the USABat stamp will be available.**

Stay tuned for further updates.

Other News

Fields

Thankfully the summer of 2016 didn't include the torrential rain of 2015. As a result field quality was good for the large majority of games played. With cooperative weather and all the major project work completed in 2014 and 2015, work during the summer was of a maintenance variety. In 2016 we had to add water rather than subtract it; a much more manageable task. We did aerate every field surface in Fall 2016. This hasn't been done in recent memory and should promote improved turf quality in 2017. That was a lot of aerating!

One difference you will note when you visit the fields is that the chow hut and the equipment buildings nearby have been repaired and painted in HFL Cougar colors. Thanks go out Dave Engel and Pat Wall for dedicating many hours to exterior repairs and the great paint job.

Still in our sights for the future is drainage work along the 3rd base side of Field C, the walkway between the spectator benches on the 1st base side of Field 2 and the field itself and the deep outfield on Moffitt Field. Of course rebuilding infield cutout areas is a recurring project with Field A being at the top of the list currently. These and all other improvements can only be undertaken as funds are available. **Thank you for your continued support!**

HFL-Mendon Youth Baseball Scholarships

Each year, the league sponsors two \$200 scholarships in memory of David Coates and Michael Cole. David, who coached in HFMYB, and Michael, who coached in Red Willison, lost their lives in car accidents. Recipients are selected from HFL high school seniors by a school committee based on community contributions made "behind the scenes." In June 2016 the scholarships were awarded to **Alexandria Tompkins** (Coates Award) and **Ryan Shaw** (Cole Award). They join a long list of recipients, many of whom are now contributing adults in our community. If you see Alexandria or Ryan, please be sure to congratulate them on their achievement.

Supporting the League

We are blessed to live in a community of people who volunteer. HFL Mendon Youth baseball relies on and can always count on participating families and quite a few who no longer have children playing to help out. There are many opportunities and you can indicate your interest to volunteer when you register your sons/daughters for the upcoming season:

- **Coaching** – Indicate your interest when registering your child or contact a league coordinator.
- **Chow Hut** – This effort is very effectively led by Board member Brenda Lacey. With her children having “graduated” from HLF Mendon Youth Baseball years ago, **2017 will be Brenda’s last year heading that committee.** The committee is always looking for new members who can help with Chow Hut operations – **please let us know if you are willing/able to help.** The Chow Hut has kept us well fed and has generated the money to fund much of our capital improvement projects.
- **Field Maintenance** – Regular upkeep of a 7-field complex is a big task headed up by Pat Wall. Can you help? It’s a great way to give back.
- **Advertising and Sponsorships** – Each league team has a sponsor and advertising opportunities are available on the outfield fences of Fields 1 and 2 and the league website. Advertising and sponsorship funds are important contributors to overall league operations and highlight your business to over 300 area families.

Contact information for all league committees is on the league website at www.hfmbaseball.org. Take a look, make a call and pitch in. You will get back more than you give.