

Take me out to the Ems game

Wide variety of Eugeneans watch all-American sport

No, I didn't want to go to the Emeralds game. I told a few friends Thursday evening. I actually would have rather stayed home to watch "Love Boat" reruns than sit in the rain and dodge foul balls.

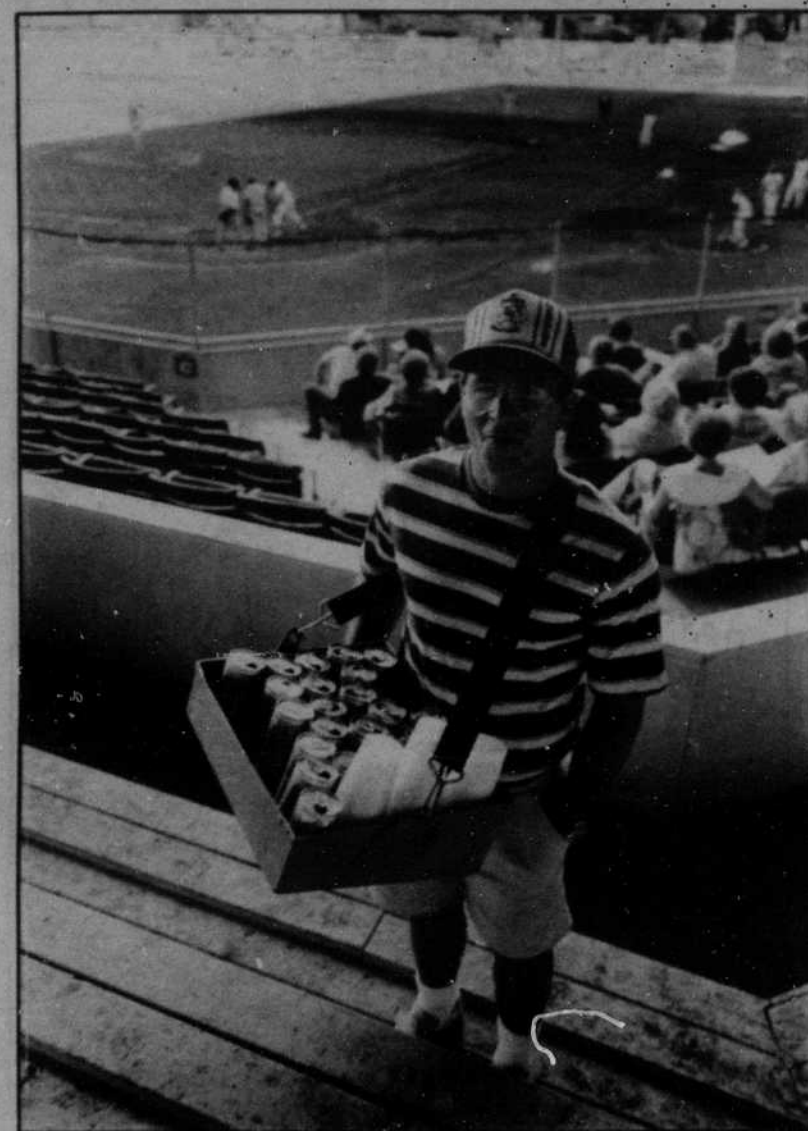
But baseball is America's national pastime, they told me. It represents all those principles America was founded on — motherhood, apple pie, hotdogs and capitalism, of course. And besides, they said, it's Beer Night.

Suddenly my aversion to baseball, even of the single A variety, seemed to be forgotten. I grabbed my ID, a rain jacket and enough cash to get in the door and buy as many beers as it would take to make the game enjoyable.

On the way to Civic Stadium, I actually started to anticipate the fun I could have at this game. I don't especially like baseball, but I like watching people and I know 50-cent beers can really bring out all kinds.

There is one thing I can say for baseball — it's not one of those events that audiences flock to an hour ahead of time in order to get a good seat. In fact, one good way to avoid standing in line is to get to Civic Stadium on time. That way spectators can avoid the crowds that start forming about half an hour after the first pitch.

As my friends and I went in search of the beer line we jaunted past several concession stands selling overpriced popcorn, and a souvenir stand where two women stood eager to sell an Emerald batting helmet to anyone who had a few bucks to spare. It was then I realized there is something more monotonous than sitting through a double-header. Staffing the souvenir stand pushing batting helmets at a double-header has got to be worse.



Rounding the bend with my eyes peeled for a large, red Budweiser sign, I began to wonder where all those thousands of fans that the Ems averaged each game were hiding. They certainly weren't in line for soda.

As I strolled along pondering that thought, I nearly ran smack into a burly man wearing a tattered Coors T-shirt balancing four beers in a cardboard Dairy Queen-style carrying tray. Ten feet behind him was a woman carrying three cups of beer in each hand. She didn't have much luck wrapping both hands around all six of the flexible cups, so she put her fingers inside and pinched the cups together. On the way back to her seat she spilled half the beer out of each cup, but at least she managed to get back without dropping any of them. Others weren't so lucky.

As we walked down an aisle between the bleachers looking for a place to sit, my friends and I witnessed an amazing feat that neither the Ems nor the visiting Salem Angels would surpass. A

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man carrying a beer in each hand slipped in a puddle of beer at the top of the stairs. His feet flew out in front of him, and he proceeded to bounce on his buttocks down about 10 steps. The fans in the near vicinity turned away from the game and applauded their hero who managed to spill a mere quarter of a cup from each beer. Realizing that more than a few people noticed his faux pas, he turned to the crowd, bowed and then ran red-faced back to his seat at the other end of the stadium.

As I scanned the stadium attempting to pinpoint the typical baseball fan, I came to the realization that baseball fans just cannot be stereotyped.

Just above us was a pack of teenage girls around 13-years-old, wearing identical hairstyles and clothing. They huddled together and giggled in unison as one brave girl called out to a familiar boy sitting 200 feet away. When they decided to throw ice at another boy sitting to the side of me, I wanted to shout something threatening such as, "Hey, knock it off or I'll get security." But knowing this would only cause them to squeal with delight, I refrained. How rude, I thought, to come to a baseball game and not watch the players.

The younger boys in the crowd weren't watching the game either, nor were they watching the girls. The little hellions were



running around chasing each other. This little game of theirs was made more challenging than usual, however. While they pursued one another up and down the grandstands, they had their hands full with hot dogs, soda pops and trays full of nachos.

I was having just too much fun at this game. The people, the atmosphere, the cheap beer (50 cents as opposed to \$1.25 usually), it was worth the \$2.50 admission. And I'm sure the man sitting to my right would agree. Maybe he was just a devoted fan. But more likely he was soused. The grubby, pony-tailed character arbitrarily cheered and heckled both teams. So much for Ems loyalty.

I was happy to discover that one aspect of the all-American sport has remained constant. Despite outrageous player salaries and labor disputes, baseball still is fun for the entire family.

Several enthusiastic parents with arms full of babies and diaper bags were followed by children with arms full of popcorn and candy bars. After several innings of subsequent trips to the snackbar and then to the bathroom, many of these couples, who started out with a determination to instill values such as a love of baseball and the importance of good sportsmanship looked ready to throw in the towel.

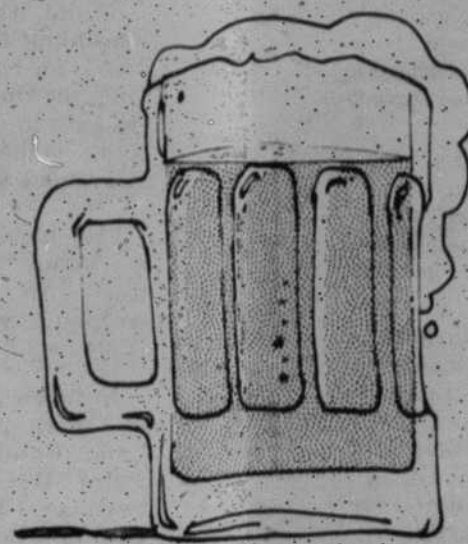
They didn't love baseball anymore, and their image of good sportsmanship was shattered during the second inning of the second game when Salem rightfielder Glenn Meyers was ejected for arguing a call. Then Angels' Manager Bruce Hines was kicked out of the game after a long and ridiculous argument with plate umpire Kerwin Danley.

The entire episode lasted about 10-15 minutes and could have been the first incident all night that caused every fan in Civic Stadium to watch the field at the same time. I guess if exaggerated antics work for the pros they can work for the minor leagues as well.

Leaving the stadium (admittedly a bit early in order to avoid the traffic) I was glad my friends talked me into an evening at the ballpark. I hadn't known about this mix of beer and baseball before. Was it new? To my amazement Beer Night is far from new. It was instituted in the 1950s and is common throughout all levels of baseball, except for little league, of course. And if the purpose is to up attendance, it's working. Average attendance at Civic Stadium for non-beer nights is 2,200, which increases to 3,500 on beer night. Maybe I'm not the only one who is singing, "Take me out to the beer game."

Story by Diana Elliott
Photos by Karen Stallwood

Clockwise from the top: There is nothing like chewing flavored ice and watching an Ems game; All ages are attracted to America's favorite pastime; Ems fans can choose between long beer lines or personal delivery of the ice-cold beverage.



Many players find Eugene one stop on long road to major leagues

If the names Paul Howarth, Julio Alcala, and Chris Jelic do not light up the competitive fires in the average major league baseball fan, don't be surprised.

Those names may be in the bright lights of the big leagues some day, but for now these prospective stars spend their time playing for the Eugene Emeralds in the depths of the Northwest League against the likes of the Salem Angels, Bend Phillies and Medford Athletics.

As the major leaguers are on the verge of a strike over millions of dollars and a pension plan that will keep them counting their money for the rest of their lives, 25 minor-league ballplayers toil at their trade in Eugene's Civic Stadium for \$700 a month.

The Emeralds are in the midst of the pennant race in the Northwest League with a middle-of-the-road 23-23 record with 28 games left. The Ems stand third in the four-team Oregon division, four games behind the Salem Angels.

Class A baseball is a starting point for most major-league ballplayers of today. Eugene has been the starting point, or at least a stop along the road, for several major-league players of recent memory.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Ems were the last stop on that road for the Philadelphia Phillies as the AAA affiliate in the Pacific Coast League. Mike Schmidt, an All-Star infielder, is probably the most notable of the former

Emeralds. He played for the Ems in 1972, hitting 26 home runs and driving in 90 runs.

The list does not stop with Schmidt, however. Current Chicago Cub shortstop Larry Bowa played for the Ems in 1969, hitting .287. Current California Angels catcher Bob Boone played with Schmidt in Eugene in 1972 and led the Pacific Coast League in putouts, assists and errors.

Sluggish Greg Luzinski also played in Eugene in 1971. Luzinski hit 36 home runs and added 114 runs batted in with the Ems on his way to the major leagues. Willie Montanez played for the Ems in 1970 and went on to enjoy 10 years in the majors with various clubs.

Luzinski, Schmidt, Bowa, and Boone all played integral parts on the Phillies World Championship team in 1980.

As the AAA affiliate for the Phillies, the Emerald players were only one step away from being major leaguers. In 1973 the Phillies left Eugene and the town was left without a major league affiliate for the 1974 season. In 1975 the Cincinnati Reds moved in their single A affiliate and the process of making it to the major leagues continued to flourish in Eugene.

Although the quality of baseball may have dropped, the list of former Emeralds making it to the major leagues continued to grow. Mario Soto, the current ace of the Reds pitching staff, heads

the list. Former Reds pitcher Paul Moskau was an All-Star in the Northwest League, but never did reach that status in the majors.

Eric Davis is also a former Emerald who has been toiling in the majors, but has not been consistent enough to land a full-time job there. He has been alternating between the Reds AAA farm club and the majors.

Pitcher Charlie Leibrandt played for the Ems and the Reds but now hurls for the Kansas City Royals. He might find a bit of irony in the fact that the Royals are now the major league affiliate of Eugene.

In 1983 the Emeralds dropped their affiliation with the Reds and the Royals moved in their single A team.

1984 was a trying year for the baseball fans of Eugene as the young Emeralds won only 19 of their 74 games to compile the worst winning percentage of any team in professional baseball. The Royals sent back eleven players for this year and the team has already won four more games than all of last year.

The current Emeralds may not be the best team that Eugene has ever seen, but the players can take heart in the fact that someday they may be able to say Eugene was just one stop on their path to the major leagues.

Story by Rob Collias

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