



Eugene Emeralds first-year manager "Big" Jim Saul believes his squad of young talent will be very competitive in the Northwest League this year.

First-year manager on players' level

■ **PROFILE:** Baseball veteran manager is a hit with Eugene Emeralds players

By Mark McTyre
Sports Editor

A new man's in town and "Big" Jim is his name.

He's not eight feet tall, and he's not carrying extra luggage around the waist. He is simply a man with a packed stadium's wealth of knowledge at the helm of this season's single-A Eugene Emeralds squad.

After a third place, 37-39 season last year, the Atlanta Braves organization reassigned field manager Paul Runge to the single-A Macon Braves of the South Atlantic League and brought in 37-year baseball veteran Jim Saul. The 56-year-old managed the Gulf Coast League Braves, Atlanta's rookie league squad, for five years prior to moving to Eugene. Saul has also managed and/or coached in four different organizations since his playing days halted in 1972.

Saul's theory to becoming a better ball player is easy for his team to understand. Just play the game.

"I want them to be relaxed, I want to be relaxed, and I want to give them the opportunity to know that I'm with them," Saul said in the Ems dugout prior to the first pitch on the season's Opening Night. "If they make errors that's fine. We've all been there. Our staff just wants to pass on our knowledge and see them just play baseball."

With that attitude the Ems players

have taken a strong liking to Saul.

"Big Jim is a great man," pitcher Joe Nelson said. "He loves to be alive and he loves to live the game. Everyday he comes out here and gives it everything he's got. For me to get a coach like Jim in my first professional assignment is great. He made everyone really comfortable."

The biggest commonality Saul has with his players is that he has walked in their shoes before.

"I did the same thing at their age," Saul said. "It's one of the things that I've tried to stress as a manager. I was 18, I was 17, I was 16, I was 19, I was 20. I know what they're going through."

During Saul's playing days as a catcher, starting in 1959, he spent time in the St. Louis Cardinals, Chicago Cubs and Cincinnati Reds farm systems before retiring. His playing career also brought him through Eugene on occasion when he played with Hawaii and Tacoma in the Pacific Coast League.

Saul believes his team can and will be competitive this year in the Northwest League.

"Their attitudes are good," Saul said. "They go about their business in a good way, they work hard and their willing to give a little extra when asked to do so. I think they're ready to play and compete."

Although it's early in the season, it looks like his prediction may be on the money as the Ems are staying near the top of the standings in their first week of action.

Hines and DeRosa lead Ems to fast start in Northwest League

■ **BASEBALL:** First-year field manager Jim Saul has team playing together

By Chris Hansen
Sports Reporter

During the six games played through Monday afternoon, the players on the Eugene Emeralds have done everything necessary to show their Big League brethren that they belong in the Show.

Major League Baseball has seen a record setting pace for runs scored, with teams in the American League averaging nearly 10 runs a game.

So with that in mind, the Ems have come out swinging. Six games into the 1996 season, Eugene has batted itself to a 4-2 record and second place in the Northwest League's South Division while averaging seven runs a game. The Ems also lead the league in hitting with a .299 team average.

"I am glad to see them coming out in the early innings swinging the bats, being aggressive," said Ems first-year field manager Jim Saul. "We are getting two-out base hits. That is a big thing for a ball club."

Eugene opened its season with a 6-2 loss to the Portland Rockies on June 18, but rebounded to win the final two games of the homestand 12-11 and 7-4, respectively.

The two wins were highlighted by the play of second baseman Pooh Hines, who is one of five players that have returned from last year. After not playing in the opener, Hines, hitting in the lead-off spot, went 6-of-9 at the plate in games two and three and has been on a tear ever since going 6-of-11 in the first three games of a four game road trip to Spokane over the weekend. He leads the Northwest League with a .600 batting average.

Right below Hines is Ems shortstop Mark DeRosa. In his first year of professional baseball, DeRosa came into his own over the weekend with consecutive four-hit games on

Saturday and Sunday, guiding Eugene to victories over Spokane and raising his batting average to .520.

And while the Ems pitching staff earned run average is a high 4.58, it has produced some standouts also, including Michael Jones, Adam Milburn, Jimmy Osting and Bruce Chen.

The winning has lead to team cohesiveness, easing an early season worry of Saul's.

"The togetherness on this ball club I am very happy with," Saul said. "When we came out of extended spring training I didn't know who we were going to get and it takes a while for these kids to come together."

I hope the guys will play like this for the remainder of the year. It is going to be a team effort the whole way."

Eugene ended its trip to Spokane Monday night, and will begin a three-game homestand tonight at 7:05 p.m. against the Timberjacks of Southern Oregon.

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