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Emeralds

Continued from Page 5A

shot that cleared The Register-Guard sign in straight-away center field, farther than the 400-foot mark on the base of the wall.

"It felt pretty good," Gripp said. "I just tried to get a ball I could drive. I must say, it feels better than a metal bat [used in college play] does."

Including the home run, Gripp was two for six last weekend, also reaching base twice with walks and three times after getting hit by pitches.

Tony Gsell, another first-year pro, also experienced Timberjacks' pitchers control problems. He tied a league record by being hit three times in Saturday's game.

Although the Ems put the ball in play, collecting 27 hits in three games, they could improve defensively.

Eugene made nine errors during the homestand, including costly ones that led to a five-run inning in the top of the 11th inning of Saturday's game.

"I don't know anybody's defensive capabilities," first-year coach Danny Sheaffer said. "I'm gonna wait a week to make any calls."

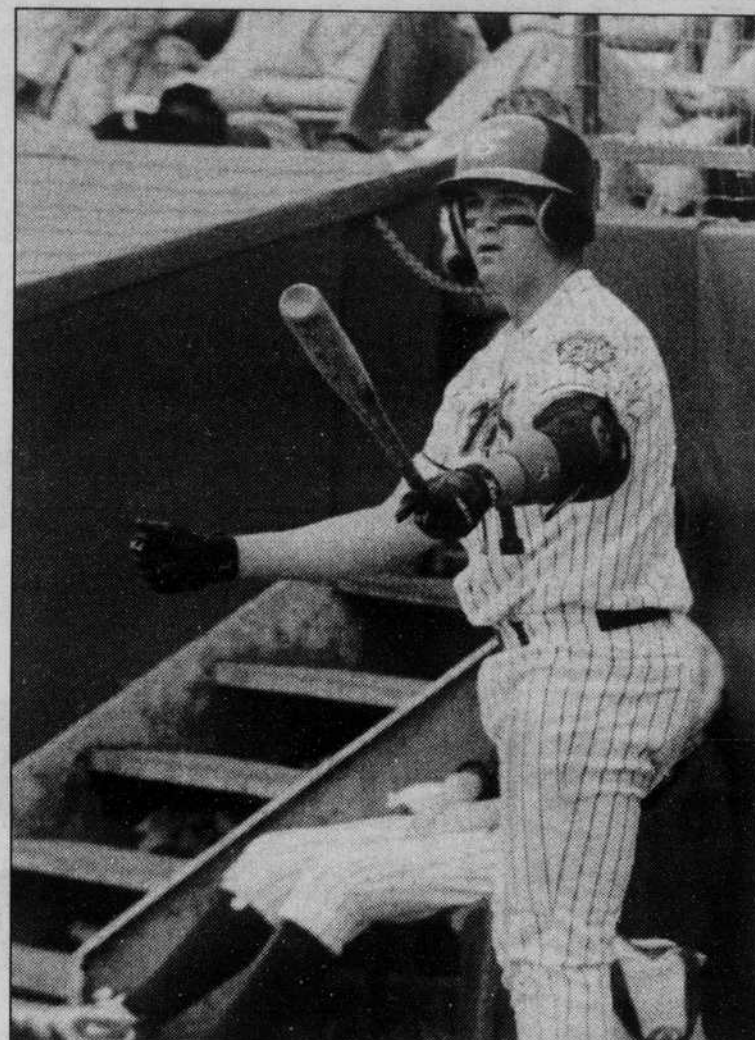
They improved Sunday, only committing one error and looking more comfortable fielding the ball.

"We're starting to get acclimated with ourselves and also with the field," outfielder Ed Marquez said.

While his players — who hail from places as diverse as Venezuela, Texas and California — get accustomed to their new surroundings, Sheaffer is getting used to a new job.

The Ems new manager has more than 17 years of professional experience, including stints with major-league teams in St. Louis and Colorado. He tried out for the Cubs this season, but didn't make the opening day roster. Instead, they offered him a job managing their short-season, Class-A team.

The new position will take adjusting, said Sheaffer, a former



Catharine Kendall/Emerald

Ryan Gripp, one of the Ems' top prospects, was two for four with a home run Sunday.

utility player.

"I'm in a learning experience, too," he said after his first coaching performance. "I caught myself wanting to do more than manage."

And Ems fans found themselves whooping and heckling.

Eugene averaged the fourth-largest crowds of the 10 Northwest League franchises last season, despite its dismal record.

The new Ems players discovered immediately how much they enjoy the fans.

"I love the crowd support," Marquez said Sunday. "Really,

the fact that they stayed out after the last two games is great."

On Saturday night, the Ems drew 3,134. And on Sunday they had a Father's crowd of 4,963.

"I really like the crowd," Juan Cruz, a pitcher from the Dominican Republic, said through a translator. "I felt so good [Friday] when I saw the full house. I hope they keep coming."

They probably will. If not out of habit, then for the type of games that these young never-say-die Ems have provided so far: back-and-forth affairs in which anything can happen.

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