

Mavericks League manager's roundtable

Part 1



By **JOSHUA MANES**
Of the *Keizertimes*

With opening day for the second season of the Mavericks League less than three weeks away, the KeizerTimes sat down with the managers from all four teams to discuss independent league baseball and the Mavericks League.

What is it about independent league baseball that's different or that draws you to it?

Dave Wong (Salem Senators): It's baseball. I don't think there's anything different whether it's minor league, independent league, little league or college. It's baseball and that's what we love to do and that's why we're here. We're looking forward to kicking off the season again, season number two, hopefully making this league as good as it can get.

Tony Torcato (Salem-Keizer Volcanoes): I feel you, Dave, on that one. It's a good place to play, a great stadium. It's basically a chance for these guys to get a second look, get some exposure. Because that's our goal to get these guys into affiliated ball or a higher independent league. Last year was a success, it was fun.

Alex Alvarado (Campeños de Salem-Keizer): There was really good turnover last year from guys that moved on after this league that went on to some affiliated leagues. So I think if we just continue to provide the opportunity for them to do so. We've got good coaching staffs, this'll be a fun year.

Scott Binder (Portland Mavericks): I think everybody has a goal of winning and continuing to play the game they love. Some of the guys aren't ready to hang up the spikes and some of the guys want to continue playing at a high level so I think it's a great opportunity.

I wish this opportunity was around

when I was their age. We went straight to mens league. It was fun, but it wasn't getting me to where I needed to be growing up, and that was playing professional baseball. So having these guys in an environment where they can continue playing a game they love until somebody tells them it's time to hang it up they should continue playing the game they love and reach the highest level they can achieve.

Do your season goals lean towards player development or wins?

DW: Obviously everybody here is competitive so everybody wants to win. But I've got players ranging from 40 to 18. Those older guys are here because they love to play and they have an opportunity to play at a high level.

The younger guys obviously want to develop and hopefully get a chance to move to another independent league or get picked up by an affiliated team, and that's the ultimate goal.

But our goal is to just make the baseball as high quality as possible here and draw some people and put on some entertainment and hopefully these young guys can move on.

TT: My goal is to put a quality product on the field for the fans. Obviously we all want to win, but I want these guys to have fun and live out their dream that they want to keep playing ball. That's basically what I'm here for.

Like Dave said, we had eight to 10 guys get picked up so that's a good chance for them to get exposure. We're just here to help them.

AA: The age difference between the players is going to be good for both sides, younger and older. The older guys can pass down some things and the young guys can learn from the older guys.

As far as development, we're going

to provide them with opportunities to practice to get better and hopefully the older guys take it upon themselves to help out the younger guys. And hopefully the younger guys are open minded enough to listen to the older guys that have been there and seen it and been through it.

SB: All the managers so far have said they want to have a competitive team and I'm right there with them. Last year when we would bring in a player I would ask them what are their goals, what are their expectations, what do they want to see happen at the end of their summer? And I'd try to help them through that process.

If somebody tells me they want to play the highest level of baseball they can then I'm going to try and work with them on the mental side of the game. A lot of these guys at this level aren't going to have too many physical issues in the sense of flaws or mechanical issues. So a lot of it can be on the mental side of the game and playing the game the right way and being in the right mind space and thinking a pitch ahead or a play ahead. If it helps them enjoy the game more, that's great. If it helps them sign on like some of the guys did last year then that's great too.

What struggles do you encounter building a roster?

DW: The biggest problem is getting high quality talent. When you're playing in a league that's not going to pay you and they're charging you a registration fee and an equipment fee and obviously there's some other out-of-pocket costs where these guys may not have jobs, it's tough to find enough quality players.

There's only so many people, and so many leagues, and so many players. There's lots of guys that can play the game but only so many leagues to fit into so we'll get the guys, it's just a matter of time.

It's like coaching at the Division I level or the NAIA, which I coached at both. I can't go recruit a guy that's going to go to Oregon State or a guy that's going to go to Texas. But I can recruit a guy that's a really good high school player that's going to be a good college player, he just can't play at that level.

TT: That pretty much nailed it. We're just trying to find the best talent. There's other tryouts for other leagues so after they get done trying out there and don't make a squad they'll hopefully try out here for our league and we

can pick them up.

But I recruit guys too, word of mouth from guys who have buddies that played. So we do it like that also through our contacts. I know some scouts. I know other coaches too, so I pick their brain and go that route also. By opening night we'll have a hell of a squad out there.

AA: I have four or five guys that I coached when they were younger. Local guys, guys that are in college that are coming back. Yes, it is very hard to get a guy that is a very high quality player to come out and play for us here with everything. But if you can get a guy here and he can perform, that's all we need is for someone to come out and perform.

I think whether we're paying them or not that we're providing them an opportunity to continue to play. I've never been to a mens league game where they announce your name before your at-bat, you have your own walk up music. So that feeling of still being in an environment where you're appreciated as a ball player I think is important.

SB: The toughest part for me is maybe separating my expectations from what their expectations are. Because they're not getting paid I try to put myself in their shoes and take a look at what other opportunities are out there and players that are getting paid.

I've had pretty good success I think when I've come across somebody, whether it's somebody that I personally talked to or somebody that's referred to me, being able to lay out the process of what this league is about, what we want to do for them during the season.

The money, I think, has been a little bit of a struggle for some of the players as far as coming up with the deposit on the uniform right now. We're helping with host families. They're going to have to have some money while they're out here or be working a part-time job. It's unknown for them too. A lot of them haven't been to this area. I have quite a few players coming in from Venezuela so there's a lot of unknowns for them.

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