

Experience that lasts a lifetime

SAM BARBEE FROM THE SIDELINES



The barrier between professional athletes and fans, though shrinking, still exists. Oftentimes the closest a fan can get to a player is on social media or after a game, and even then the interaction can be rushed and impersonal.

But when that interaction becomes something more, it can be a memory that lasts a lifetime.

Local children get that opportunity later this month, when the Tri-City Dust Devils host a clinic at Geza Field. They'll be taught baseball basics by the players, who might one day play for the San Diego Padres or another big league club. It won't matter to the kids that the players aren't yet in the big leagues. I know that because I was once a young guy receiving instruction from players older than me, and I was once an older player teaching kids.

Those experiences impact both sides.

When I was just a little guy, I took part in a camp at Lower Columbia College. It was the first time I set foot on the pristine turf at David Story Field, and I was mesmerized. The stands looked huge. The surface was perfect. And the players were right there. I could touch them.

I distinctly remember being in a gym, learning how to take ground balls. I also remember being in right field and watching as their great right fielder taught us how to find the wall and jump to rob a home run. It was like Superman right in front of me. All it did was make me want to grow and get good at baseball so I could do stuff like that.

Then in high school, I had the chance to help run a clinic. The first year, my junior year, I helped with pitchers. It was so much fun. Beforehand, the coaches told us that we would be looked up to, that the kids didn't care we were just high schoolers. We were older and giving them attention and instruction, and they would probably want our autographs afterwards.

We looked around at each other completely doubting the impact we would later have on these kids. After the three-hour clinic, we signed autographs for an hour. I signed so many my hand hurt. I didn't realize how much they looked up to me. I was just a lowly middle relief pitcher, and I was being approached like I was a big leaguer. It made me realize how far a little attention and encouragement can go in a little guy.

That's what these kids are going to experience in Pasco in a couple weeks. I strongly suggest you take your child and attend. It's only \$8 per ticket for good seats and a free clinic, and that free clinic is going to stay with your child forever. They probably won't know that the players aren't major leaguers, but I can guarantee they won't care.

All they need to do is break the barrier and get a pat on the back and smile. That worked for me. It'll work for them.

— Sam Barbee is a sports reporter for the Hermiston Herald and East Oregonian based in Hermiston. He can be reached by phone at 541-564-4542 or by email at sbarbee@hermistonherald.com. Follow him on Twitter @SamBarbee1 and follow Herald Sports @HHeraldSports.

Devil of a baseball clinic

Tri-City Dust Devils players to host baseball clinic for young athletes

BY SAM BARBEE STAFF WRITER

Hermiston Parks and Recreation is offering local youth baseball players an opportunity to take part in a clinic conducted by professional players and coaches.

The Tri-City Dust Devils, a Short-Season Class A affiliate of the San Diego Padres, is hosting a pre-game clinic followed by a home game against the Salem-Keizer Volcanoes on July 19.

"With any of our programs, our goal in parks and recreation is to promote health, promote activity — just having fun, family activities," Hermiston Recreation Supervisor Dan Earp said. "This just fits right into that. And it's an opportunity to support baseball, which we're not involved in. Little League runs baseball in Hermiston, so we don't have any baseball programs for youth. So it's kind of something that we could offer for the population that is interested in baseball."

Though this will be the first year Hermiston is directly involved, the Dust Devils have been running a clinic since 2005. The organization, which is partially owned by baseball legend George Brett, wanted to get the younger fans more intimately involved with the game.

"We just wanted a way of getting the kids out on the field with the players and coaches," Assistant General



PHOTO COURTESY TRI-CITY DUST DEVILS

With the help of a Dust Devil, a camper learns how to swing a bat at last year's Dust Devils Youth Baseball clinic at Geza Stadium in Pasco.

Manager Dan O'Neill said. "We decided to make it a yearly thing."

This year is the first that the city of Hermiston became aware of the promotion when a sales representative contacted the Parks and Recreation Department with an inquiry. Immediately, the city was interested because it, too, was looking to branch out and find other fresh opportunities for summer activities.

Plus, Hermiston is already involved with the Tri-City Americans, a minor league hockey team, with group nights at discounted prices, as well as a private basketball clinic at the Moda

Center, home of the Portland Trail Blazers.

So when Earp became aware of the Dust Devils' clinic, he jumped at the chance because of how successful those other partnerships have been, especially the agreement with the Blazers.

Though the Dust Devils clinic is not privately for Hermiston, as the Blazers clinic is, Earp said it's still a good opportunity to receive hitting, fielding, base-running, pitching and sportsmanship instruction from professional athletes.

But just because there isn't an exclusive Hermiston night now, that doesn't mean

it's been ruled out in the future.

"I'd say potentially," O'Neill said. "Any time something goes well the first time, you always want to see where it could go in the future. That's never out of the question, that's for sure."

O'Neill didn't have any solid enrollment figures yet, but he said usually about 100 children partake in the clinic. That number, though, could be higher this year if Hermiston sends a large contingent. In addition to Hermiston, the Dust Devils have formed other partnerships that they hope will bring in even more participants.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Tri-City Dust Devils Youth Baseball Clinic
WHEN: July 19, 7:15 p.m., Geza Stadium, Pasco, Washington
HOW: Purchase tickets to July 19 game (\$8), clinic is free
OTHER INFO: Phone: 509-544-8789. Address: 6200 Burden Blvd, Pasco, WA 99301.



TRI-CITY DUST DEVILS

A Tri-City Dust Devils player fist bumps and high-fives a couple campers at last year's Dust Devils Youth Baseball clinic at Geza Stadium in Pasco.

"It's gonna be a memorable experience that's very unique," Earp said. "It's a very rare opportunity for a child to be able to get on the actual field, to interact with the players even if they aren't major league players. It's gonna be something that — if these kids are interested in baseball, which a lot of them are with baseball cards and stuff like that — then it's gonna be something that they remember forever, something they got to go do. 'Do you remember that night we got to go and go on the field and play with the players and watch the game?' It's that — for the experience. And it's baseball, right? America's pastime. So it's an opportunity to go out on a summer night, enjoy the game, have the hot dogs and everything else. It's gonna be a family experience, too."

Hermiston loses district title by one run

STAFF REPORT

The Hermiston 11-12-year-olds let a lead slip away and fell to Pendleton, 10-9, in the League District 3 softball tournament championship in Irrigon.

Hermiston led 7-5 going into the bottom of the sixth inning.

Pendleton pieced together its second four-run rally of the game in the sixth, and Jordan Jones started things with a hard line drive single before Hermiston pitcher Brecella

Nash got a strikeout for the first out of the inning. A passed ball allowed Jones to move to second, and a throwing error on Jordyn Murphy's grounder allowed Jones to score.

Katie Kline then put down a perfect bunt and beat the throw to first, and Murphy came all the way from second to slide in ahead of the throw back to the plate and tie the score at 7-7.

A pop-out got Hermiston its second out, but Delaney Duchek reignited the rally with a single to left field. A passed ball advanced Kline and Duchek into scoring position,

and Brynn Cody brought them both home after fouling off several pitches in a long at-bat.

Cody looped a single to left, but Hermiston stopped the bleeding when it got the next batter to ground out.

Hermiston, which hadn't failed to answer a Pendleton run yet, got its spark in the bottom of the sixth when Grace Studer smashed a one-out triple to the wall in right field. Samantha Atilano followed with a walk and took second base uncontested.

Marti Plum then connected on a grounder to the right side that scored Studer but put Pendleton one out from victory.

Laikyn Fields laced a single to left field that scored Atilano and tied the game at 9-all.

Pendleton pitcher Celia Farrow struck out the next batter to force an extra inning.

Hermiston quickly recorded two outs in the seventh, but Alexia Laib legged out an infield single to keep them alive, and then stole second uncontested. That brought up Murphy, who caught just enough of Nash's



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Pendleton 11-12 Allstars catcher Natalie Neveau makes the tag against a Hermiston runner Thursday in Irrigon. The lead see-sawed back and forth until Pendleton finally won in extra innings.

offering to put the ball in fair territory and then forced a bad throw to first with her speed down the line.

Laib scored all the way from second and Murphy would replace her, but a ground out on the next at-bat ended the threat.

Hermiston put the ball in play

three consecutive times in the bottom of the seventh, but flawless fielding earned Pendleton the title and a berth in the state tournament, which begins July 11 in Gresham.

Field led Hermiston going 2 for 3 at the plate and Atilano scored a team-high three runs.

GO SEE IT

Wednesday, July 8

MEN'S SOFTBALL

C&C Construction @ Elite, North softball field, Theater Sports Park, 6 p.m.

MRT @ Preferred Realty, South softball field, Theater Sports Park, 6 p.m.

Elite @ C&C Construction, North softball field, Theater Sports Park, 7:30 p.m.

Preferred Realty @ MRT, North

softball field, Theater Sports Park, 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, July 9

No events scheduled

Friday, July 10

COED RECREATIONAL SOFTBALL

Regency Hermiston @ Nookies, North softball field, Theater Sports Park, 6 p.m.

SAGE Center @ Java Junkies, South softball field, Theater

Sports Park, 6 p.m.

H and M Photography @ New Hope, North softball field, Theater Sports Park, 7:30 p.m.

M2Machmedia @ 11th Market, South softball field, Theater Sports Park, 7:30 p.m.

GOLF

Jack and Jill Couples League, Big River Golf Course, 6 p.m.

Saturday, July 11

No events scheduled

Sunday, July 12

No events scheduled

Monday, July 13

COED COMPETITIVE SOFTBALL

Riverside Sports Bar @ Purosho, North softball field, Theater Sports Park, 6 p.m.

Untouchables @ TRCI/Java Junkies, South softball field, Theater Sports Park, 6 p.m.

Purosho @ Riverside Sports Bar, North softball field, Theater

Sports Park, 7:30 p.m.

TRCI/Java Junkies @ Untouchables, South softball field, Theater Sports Park, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, July 14

No events scheduled

If you have any events you would like to see on the schedule, email submissions to sports reporter Sam Barbee at sbarbee@hermistonherald.com.

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