

## Fan excitement sparks Grasshopper comeback

By Pete Kostin  
STAFF WRITER

It was the top of the seventh and the Greensboro Grasshoppers trailed 5-2 against the Drive from Greenville-Good 'ole single-A baseball.

Outfielder Kevin Mattison was up to bat, but the lefty kept pulling foul balls into right field.

"Dude quit shankin' them balls man!" complained the fan behind me wearing cut-off sleeved tie-dye.

Next pitch - CRACK- he slugged it. The noise level approached sonic-boom, outfielders scrambled.

"Awh s---, oh no," said the tie-dye fan, who seemed to foresee the pickle.

Mattison rounded first, but glanced at the throw from the outfield (something a runner should never do). He ignored the first-base coach. Halfway to second he turned around.

Fan volume fluctuated. They sounded like cross-town traffic mixed with whining didgeridoos.

"AAAAHhooohhh..." - they wove suspense and confusion into one breath.

Mattison was trapped between first and second base, pivoting, sliding, juking the approaching fielder. In desperation, Mattison in the middle dove nearly 15 feet early from the second base bag. The Greenville Drive pitcher tagged him softly.

-OUT-

But the pickle was sweet. It marked the beginning of the Grasshoppers' seventh-inning comeback.

I was sitting in the front row of the NewBridge Bank Park, downtown Greensboro, spilling dollar Bucks

all over my shorts. Mattison was brushing the dirt off his jersey while the jumbotron read 5-3.

The panorama on opening night was a mass of 9,322 fans - the highest attendance in NewBridge's short four-year history. Its seating capacity is only 7,499, and many of the nearly two thousand extra fans poured over onto the lawn behind the outfield.

The inexpensive \$6-dollar lawn tickets put you behind the outfield in front of a beer tent, which was selling Natty Greene's Guilford Buckshots: the dollar beverage of the night looked like old engine oil.

Opening night was also cleverly "Thirsty Thursday," which may have accounted for a huge number of college students in attendance, including some of Guilford's own.

"Honestly this is the first time I've been able to drink at a game, and it has made it a lot better," said junior Jason Straus.

Students clotted the 15-minute-long beer lines, missing huge portions of the game. It seemed like most fans

were there for the beer, not the baseball.

"I think

they're here for both," said longtime Grasshopper fan and mother of two Joanna McDylan. "It's just part of the experience of the ball game. It's pretty family oriented at the same time too."

-Thwack- my interview with McDylan was interrupted. Paul Gran hit the Grasshopper's second RBI of the inning. Grasshoppers notched another run to cut the lead to 5-4.

My attention swung to a fervent fan shouting his two cents to Gran, stuck at first.

"Take a lead, blockhead!" he screamed from the deck.

I squeezed between fans and the random mascots: Droopy Dog, a Roman Centurion, and a four-foot bottle of shampoo, for an interview with this somewhat unprofessional first-base coach. It turns out he was visiting from Scottsdale, Ariz.

"I consider myself a big fan," said Terry Sehwee, the insurance salesman accompanying six half-empty cups of Bucks. "Baseball seems alive and well in Greensboro."

Sehwee seemed to appreciate three things: baseball, beer, and chat.

"During all

this economic s---, people need a release - and people love baseball," he commented.

Considering the soaring amounts of alcohol, the behavior was awesome: people were warm and open with fellow park-goers. Only a couple of minor instances had the mark of college males waiting above it.

"He (a random guy) was laughing out loud with his pants all the way down...just peeing all over the place," Straus mentioned about his visit to the men's room.

Minutes later, the Greensboro right-hander Jason Synan cracked another RBI to tie the game at 5-5, sending it into extra innings.

"I got a fever, and the only prescription is more WOOP-WOOP," yelled the announcer.

"WOOP-WOOP!" responded the crowd.

"Woop-woop" had a consistently enthusiastic fan reaction five times per inning.

Maybe 12 woop-woops later it was the bottom of the 10th and Ben Lasater fired a jarring 350-foot walk-off home run past the beer tents.

The crowd remained standing in ovation long after the ball had dropped. I was running to my friend's car thinking "traffic," but really, there was no need to hurry.

From the parking lot, I barely caught fireworks, which threw much needed watercolor on the faces of fans.

The night was not something that would make it to ESPN, but it was definitely a great stitch in the huge beer-soaked American fan blanket.

NEWBRIDGE BANK PARK

## Softball commemorates seniors and pursues ODAC tournament

By Abbey Dean  
STAFF WRITER

At the transition of each inning, a conglomeration of Flo Rida, Lady Gaga, and Lil Wayne blasted as one team scurried off to bat and the other to field. No one ever walked, or even jogged, but always sprinted, even if to get a foul ball that an excited fan had fetched.

The high energy radiating from the Guilford softball team was furthered by the cacophony of clapping and the consistent pops, cracks, and thuds of the softball to a player's bat or glove.

To add to the energy surrounding the duo of games, both were commemorated by "Senior Day." Arrays of neon green and pink posters and banners were sprinkled along the outskirts of the field, proudly displaying the names of the four seniors: Kelly Hale, Amber Stapler, Kelly Guarnieri, and Taryn Pulvermuller.

Needless to say, there was never a dull or a quiet moment amidst the clamor of the crowd and the catchy cheers emanating from each



Senior Kelly Hale watches first-year Julie Langseth's at-bat from the on-deck circle. Langseth had an RBI in the first game, and Hale went 3-6 on the day.

dugout.

This Old Dominion Athletic Conference (ODAC) doubleheader was a match between two competitive teams. Currently sixth in the ODAC, the Virginia Wesleyan Marlins' defense this year had earned them an ERA of 2.35, which made the Quakers work for each run. Virginia Wesleyan's pitcher Brittany Brown, who pitched both

games, has played a decisive role in the team's defense record.

Senior Kelly Hale commented on how crucial this double-header was for the Quakers, presently ranked third in the ODAC.

"We only have a few games left, so we need to hold our defense and keep swinging to get to the level we want in the conference," said first baseman Hale.

In this regard, Senior Taryn Pulvermuller did not disappoint. Pulvermuller pitched the entirety of the first game and only allowed one run on two hits, striking out four Marlins. Sophomore Ami Hutchinson didn't let Pulvermuller's effort go to waste and ran safely home off of first-year Julie Langseth's bunt to propel the Quakers ahead with a 2-1 score.

In the next four innings the Quakers owned the field. The Marlins consistently hit the ball well but were unable to score due to the Quaker's concise throws and tight defense. With right fielder Morgan Freyer's two lurching fly ball catches at the top of the sixth, the Quakers went on to outmaneuver the Marlins and win the game 2-1.

To start the second game, the Quakers scored two runs in the first inning to take an early lead.

Pitcher Jessica Burcham held the Marlins at a halt in the first five innings and ended the game with 11 total strikeouts.

Despite their strong defense, the

Quakers lost their lead in the seventh inning when the Marlins batted in two runs, making the final score 3-2.

With a win and a loss, the Quakers remain third in the ODAC with a 9-5 record.

"I've basically been crying off and on all day," said Pulvermuller.

"The team is so tight and confident this year, and I think that really came through in the first game."

Pulvermuller and her senior teammates have made their marks in Guilford softball throughout the past four years.

Hale has the highest on-base and fielding percentage in Guilford history, while Stapler has acquired the most at bats for 2008 and the most career runs scored.

Moreover, Guarnieri has the second highest base percentage, and pitcher Pulvermuller has the second most wins in Quaker history.

"It is bittersweet," said Hale. "This isn't the end though; we still have more games and a tournament to look forward to. I have full faith that this team can and will go far."

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