

SPORTS WEEK

JUNE 27, 2013

Gone Too Soon

Community mourns loss of 14-year-old b-ball phenom

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

The Carl Russell Sr. Community Recreation Center and the Hanes Hosiery Recreation Center families are mourning the loss of one of their own.



Celeste Burgess (center) poses with Ben Piggott (far left) and her family in May at the East Winston McDonald's.

Celeste Burgess, 14, a longtime standout on the basketball court, died over the weekend from injuries she suffered in a horrific automobile accident along an Alabama highway.

Celeste developed her stellar hoop skills in local rec center youth leagues. By the time she entered high school, she was a highly sought after talent. She initially played at Mount Tabor; Celeste was a student at Thomasville's New Hope Christian Academy at the time of her death.

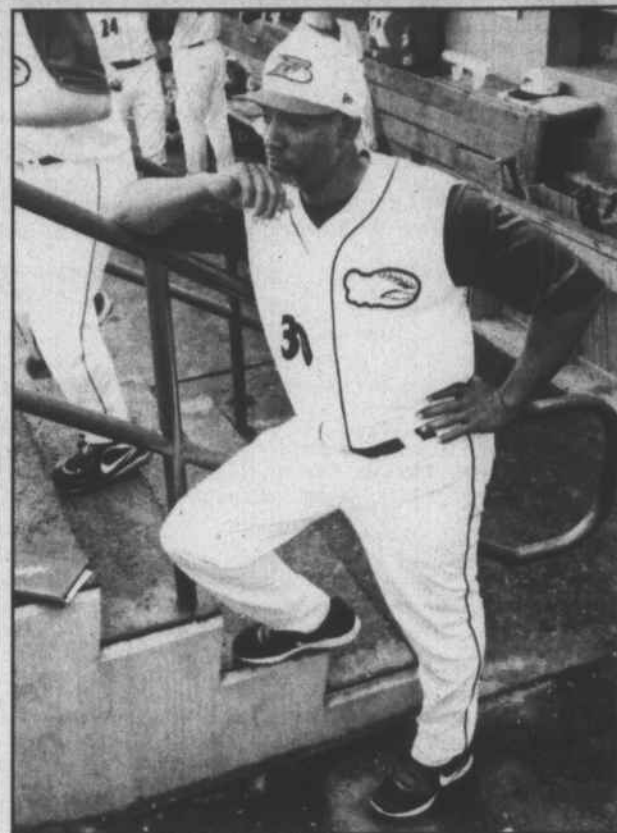
"Celeste was a great role model for girls last summer at the Carl H. Russell Sr. Community Center Basketball Camp," said Center Supervisor Ben Piggott. "She was a hard worker on the basketball court

and a very kind-hearted spirit when you talked with her."

Hanes Hosiery Director Art Blevins erected a tribute to Celeste at the rec center this week. She was one of the many youngsters who came through Blevins' youth basketball league. In league play, Celeste played alongside boys, often outscoring them.

Piggott said many hearts are going out to Celeste's family this week.

"Her parents raised Celeste and the rest of the family in a Christian home," he said. "Even though her life was taken by an accident, I feel that she is in Heaven with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."



Rob Sasser watches his players from the dugout.

Dash's Sasser helps players fulfill dreams

BY CRAIG T. GREENLEE
FOR THE CHRONICLE

Rob Sasser gets immense gratification from helping players in their quest to play in the Major Leagues one day. The veteran hitting coach for the Winston-Salem Dash has a lifelong passion for baseball, which explains why coaching the game at any level gives him a great sense of fulfillment.

"I've had great experiences playing pro ball and coaching pro ball," said Sasser, who played 13 seasons in the minors and hit .258 with 98 home runs and 543 RBIs. "When I'm no longer in pro ball, I want to keep coaching at one level or another until I can't do it any more. It doesn't matter whether it's the pros, college, high school or youth leagues. I've always enjoyed helping players develop to the best of their abilities."

As a minor-league coach in upper-level Class A, one of the major challenges for Sasser is to help players make the transition from the amateur ranks to the pros. Many players who start out in Class A are draft picks who were stars in high school and college. The transition isn't always smooth.

"You hear about how the game is more mental than physical when you get to the pros," he said. "When you reach that level, then you come to understand how true that is. It doesn't take long to discover that what worked in high school and/or college does not work at the pro level. There's so much that goes into preparation and developing an approach to playing the game that enables a player to be successful."

Tutoring young players about hitting is an ongoing process. During a game, Sasser closely observes what takes place with every hitter on every pitch with every at-bat. As hitters gain more experience, they develop a better feel for what to expect from opposing pitchers in different game situations.

"I get a lot of satisfaction when a kid can tell what he did wrong (at the plate) and knows what he needs to do to correct it," said Sasser, who was drafted by the Atlanta Braves in the 10th round of the 1993 amateur draft. "The emphasis is to dwell on the positive and focus on what they do when they're successful. It's about developing consistency. Whatever it is that they do that works, we want to develop an approach that will keep that going."

In his coaching role, Sasser, now in his seventh season as a hitting coach, explained that he isn't interested in accolades, applause and recognition. Coaching provides a vehicle for Sasser to contribute to a game that he has cherished since his high school days in Oakland, Calif.

"I don't look at what I do for the purpose of me getting the credit or the blame for how someone plays," he said. "I'm not here for the glory. I'm here to give back (to baseball) in any way I can."

Sasser did get one brief stint in the Majors, when he played in one game with the Texas Rangers in 1998. He knew that when he was called up from the minors that he wouldn't be there very long. Sasser was a temporary replacement for a player who had been acquired in a trade. In his only MLB appearance, Sasser fouled out in a game against the Chicago White Sox. It would be his first and last trip to the big leagues.

"I thought that I'd get another chance at it, but things just never happened," he said. "It was my childhood dream to play Major League Baseball and even though it was only one game, I accomplished that. Therefore, there are no regrets."



Justin Glover in action at this year's CIAA Tournament.

Glover named to NCCCSIA team

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

Winston-Salem State University baller Justin Glover has been selected for the North Carolina Collegiate Sports Information Association's 2012-13 College Division All-State Men's Basketball Team.

He is one of 10 players representing eight different North Carolina schools named to the team. In addition to Glover, the other First Team selections are Gerald Boston, Barton College; Antonio Stabler, Queens University of Charlotte; Shamel Brackett, UNC Pembroke; and George Blakeney, UNC Pembroke.

The Second Team is made up of Odell Turner, Wingate University; Damian Dixon, Greensboro College; Luqman Tijani, Greensboro College; Denzel Dillingham, Lenoir-Rhyne University; and Josh Pittman, Guilford College.

Glover, a native of Siler City, averaged 17.3 points per game in leading Winston-Salem State to a 21-7 record and its third-straight trip to the NCAA Tournament. Glover shot nearly 41 percent from the field, including a 33 percent success rate from 3-point territory, en route to being named first team All-Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA). A defensive stalwart as well, Glover turned in more than two steals per game, while also averaging a paltry 1.4 turnovers an outing as well.

Nominations for the team were submitted by North Carolina sports information professionals and voted on by the NCCCSIA members. Founded in 2002, The North Carolina Collegiate Sports Information Association (NCCCSIA) is comprised of sports information professionals from NCAA Division I, II, III, NAIA and independent institutions from the state of North Carolina.

MEAC player drafted by Angels

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Savannah State's Kyle McGowin was selected as the 157th pick in the fifth round of the recent 2013 Major League Baseball Draft by the Los Angeles Angels.

McGowin was the Angels' fourth pick in the draft and third right-handed pitcher (RHP). The Angels also picked up south paw and 17-year-old Hunter Green out of Kentucky in the first round. L.A. grabbed RHP Keynan Middleton and RHP Elliot Morris prior to drafting McGowin.

The 6-3, 180-pound, Sag Harbor, N.Y. native pitched the Tigers to their first MEAC Championship in May, and the program's first Division I NCAA Regional bid. McGowin was named the MEAC Pitcher of the Year after ending the regular season with an ERA of 1.49 in 96.1 innings pitched and a 12-1 record. He led the MEAC in strikeouts (111) and wins, and was ranked sixth nationally after the end of the regular season.

Most recently, McGowin was named one of 10 semifinalists for the National Pitcher of the Year Award, named by the College Baseball Hall of Fame. The award will be announced on June 29 in Lubbock, Texas.

McGowin was also one of 30 semifinalists for the Golden Spikes Award, announced by USA Baseball.



McGowin



Shaw ends baseball program

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Shaw University will no longer compete in baseball, the university announced June 21.

"This was a difficult decision to make," said Interim Athletic Director Marcus Clarke. "Shaw has a long tradition in baseball, however as we look to address the fiscal needs of the entire athletic program, it became apparent that reducing the number of sports was a tough, but necessary decision that had to be made at this point."

In 2013, the Bears were 8-26 and 1-17 in the CIAA. Shaw won CIAA championships in 1947, 1969, 1982, 1993, 2001, 2002 and 2006. Over the last three seasons, the Bears were 34-78, with a 16-48 mark in the conference.