

BASEBALL PREVIEW

# Fundamentals, Defense To Steer Trojans Toward Improvement

BY JOHNNY CRAIG

The return of seven starters, including an unvaried infield, plus a physically stronger pitching staff have West Brunswick baseball coach Ron Simmons looking to overall improvement and a rise up the Waccamaw 2-A Conference ladder.

After a cellar finish two years ago, Simmons took over the West Brunswick baseball program last spring and guided the Trojans to a sixth-place WC standing (4-10 in the conference and 4-15 overall).

"We will be a much better team this time around," said Simmons. "We've got seven starters back and Dino Daniels, a strong junior, leads our pitching staff. We are fundamentally sound and are looking good defensively."

"A big asset has been placing our non-football players in the weight program. All the kids have worked hard and everyone is much stronger," added Simmons.

Leading the way for the Trojan infield is the return of shortstop Scottie Babson. The junior was third in batting a year ago with a .324 average.

Also back is senior second baseman Paul Jones. Jones hit at a .191 clip last season but was second in runs scored (11).

Senior Jeremy King returns at first base after hitting .114 a year ago.

Junior Eric Hardy is back at third base but will also see relief pitching duties. Hardy batted .118 last season.

Senior Jeff Mintz returns to left field and could possibly see spot duty on the mound if the pitching staff wears thin. Mintz hit at a .161 clip last season while also providing relief pitching help.

Junior Corey Hankins will start at centerfield after seeing limited action last season. Hankins had only 13 plate appearances a year ago.

Tommy Love will be the prime right fielder for the Trojans when not pitching. Love will be one of the Trojans top two starting pitchers but will also see plenty of action in the outfield.

Junior Kyle Jones will be behind the plate after starting at catcher on the junior varsity team last season.

Daniels and Love will take on most of the mound duty for the Trojans with Hardy and Billy Inman available for relief help.

Love led the team in innings pitched last year (55.1) and strike outs (47) despite a 2-7 record. Simmons expects Love to improve upon last year's 8.86 earned run average (ERA).

Love was also effective at the plate last year hitting at a .306 average with six runs batted in (RBIs).

Daniels was 2-3 last season in only 18.2 innings pitched. The junior left-hander is much stronger this year and Simmons figures him to be a more vital performer on the Trojan mound staff.

Daniels hit a strong .256 last year and was second in RBIs (11).

Inman will be one of the top reserves at third base while transfer Talbert Williams will be a new addition to the outfield.

First baseman/outfielder Ricky Smith and first baseman Garrett Gore are up from the junior varsity and will provide backup strength.

Gore is a good hitter but is struggling defensively according to Simmons.

Randy Daniels is also a new addition with excellent speed.

"Randy can really fly on the bases," said Simmons. "We hope to have Randy worked in by midseason and give us some speed on the bases."

While the Trojans have a strong starting nine players, depth could be a problem should injuries begin to crop up.

"We must stay healthy in order to compete this season. With only 14 players on the roster, we don't have any room to lose anybody."

The only key losses for the Trojans will be in replacing three-time all-county outfielder Chris Johnson and all-conference and all-county performer Donnie Vansteen.

Vansteen's .451 batting average and Johnson's .405 led the Trojans last year to a .248 team clip.

Last week the Trojans won their first preseason game in a 10-5 victory over Myrtle Beach, S.C. The Seahawks were ranked number one in the 3-A ranks in South Carolina and routed West Brunswick a week earlier in the Trojans exhibition opener.

"We felt really good with the win last Friday over Myrtle Beach," said Simmons. "The Seahawks are a tough team and really gave us a good workout."

Looking at the Waccamaw Con-

ference race, Simmons sees defending champions South Brunswick, Whiteville and East Bladen as the teams to beat.

"South Brunswick is loaded with talent and coach Paul Faulk has done a very good job with the Cougars."

"Whiteville has some good pitchers returning but they are not as strong a hitting team as they were a year ago."

"East Bladen is also lacking some power hitting but will have the pitching, led by the return of John Schultz, to be in the conference race."

"South Robeson lost a lot of seniors from last year's team and we beat both Fairmont and West Columbus twice last season. We certainly hope to move up within the conference."

The top three finishers in the Waccamaw Conference regular season advance to the state playoffs. No conference tournament will be held with the state qualifiers moving straight into the playoffs.

Helping Simmons with coaching duties this season is junior varsity coach Fred Brantley and varsity assistant Danny Gore.

"The addition of Fred and Danny have enabled me to spend more time with the varsity while at the same time the junior varsity is getting much more coaching," said Simmons.

The largest physical improvement of the Trojan baseball program has been the field renovation of the

Brunswick County Parks and Recreation Department.

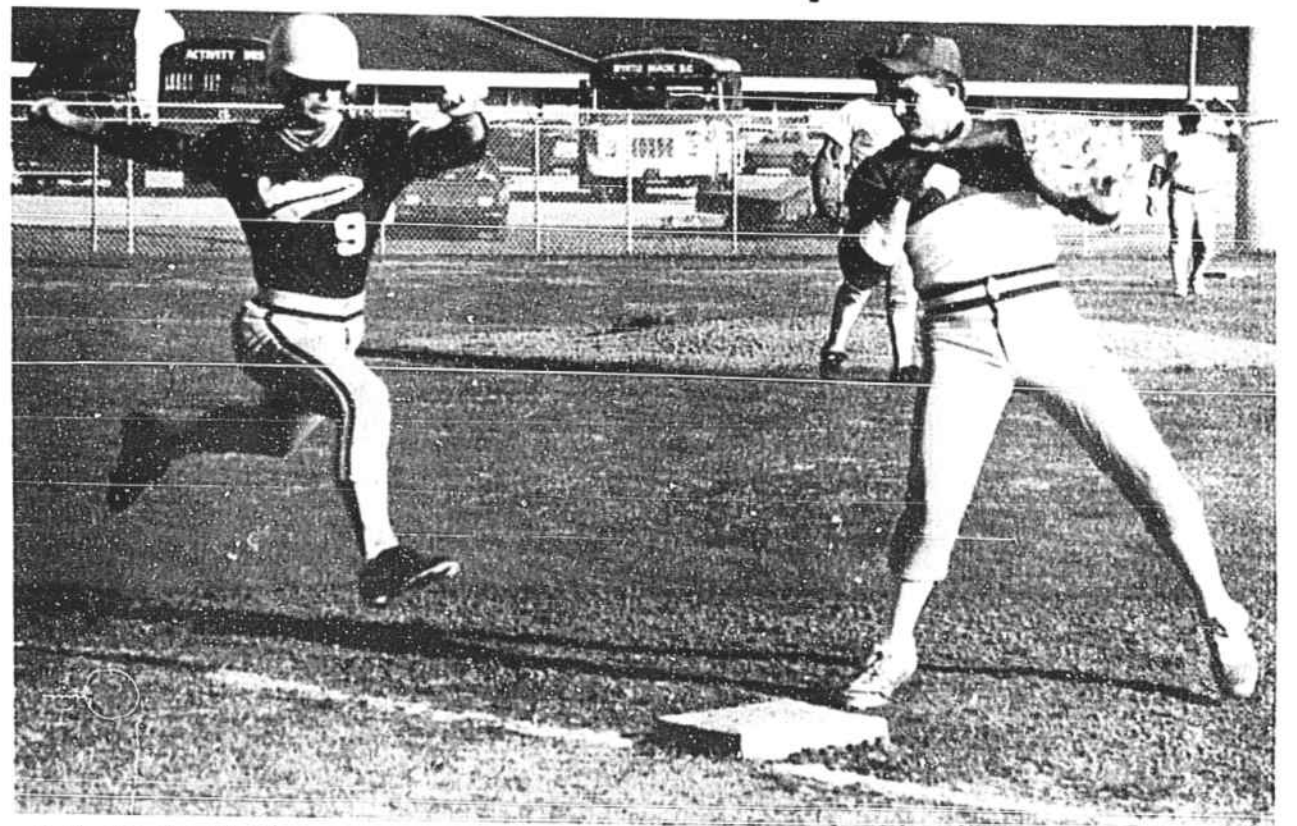
Additions include new turf (all-grass infield) and sprinkler system, new fencing plus the outfield fence has been moved back to 350 feet.

"Our facilities are among the best in the state," said Simmons. "I owe a lot of thanks to the county commissioners for the funds and the recreation department for the work that has gone into this facility. The Trojan Booster Club has also worked very, very hard in getting these improvements."

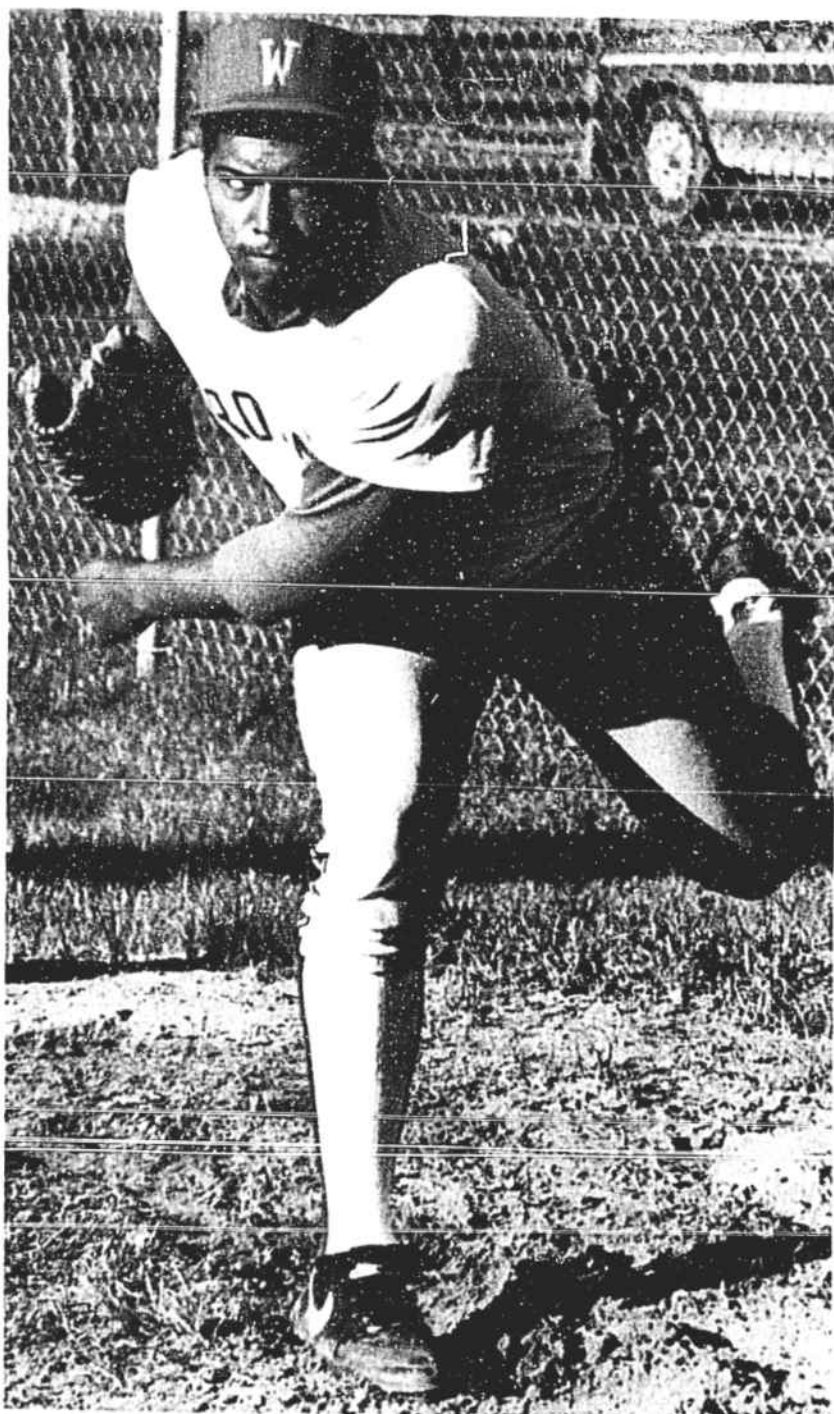
West Brunswick Trojans  
1988 Baseball Schedule

Date	Opponent
Mar. 17	Loris, S.C.
Mar. 18	at Acme-Delco
Mar. 21	at Nakina
Mar. 23	Acme-Delco
Mar. 25	at East Bladen*
Mar. 29	Whiteville*
Mar. 31	at Fairmont*
Apr. 12	South Robeson*
Apr. 15	at North Brunswick*
Apr. 19	at West Columbus*
Apr. 20	at Loris, S.C.
Apr. 22	South Brunswick*
Apr. 26	East Bladen*
Apr. 28	at Whiteville*
May 3	Fairmont*
May 6	at South Robeson*
May 10	North Brunswick*
May 13	West Columbus*
May 17	at South Brunswick*

\*denotes Waccamaw 2-A Conference games.



OUT AT FIRST—West Brunswick first baseman Jeremy King (right) makes a play at the bag while a Myrtle Beach runner is thrown out. The Trojans defeated Myrtle Beach 10-5 last Friday in their final preseason game before opening this week with two home contests.



LEADING PITCHER—Left-hander Dino Daniels is the top West Brunswick pitcher on the Trojan baseball team this season. Daniels went 2-3 last year with limited pitching performances but will be a key for the Trojan mound staff this spring. The Trojans host Loris, S.C., today (Thursday) in a non-conference matchup.

## This Week In Brunswick Sports

Thursday, Mar. 17  
Loris, S.C., at West Brunswick (baseball); Laney at West Brunswick (tennis); South Brunswick at Hoggard (softball); Hoggard, New Hanover at South Brunswick (track); New Hanover at South Brunswick (tennis).

Friday, Mar. 18  
West Brunswick at Acme-Delco (baseball); Hoggard at South Brunswick (baseball); West Brunswick at Hoggard (softball); Laney at South Brunswick (softball).

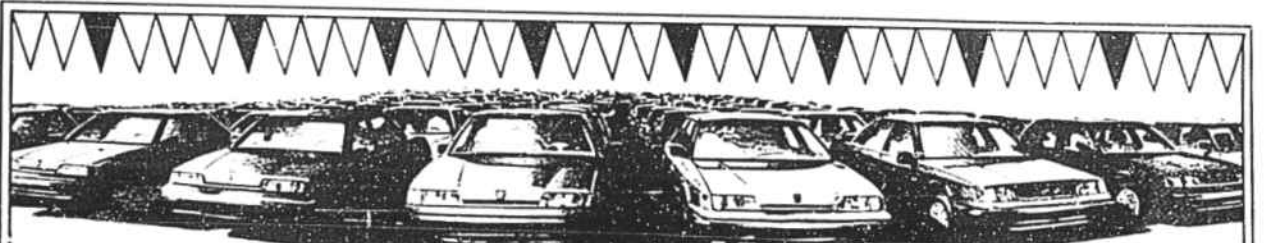
Saturday, Mar. 19  
Williams Township at South Brunswick (baseball).

Monday, Mar. 21  
West Brunswick at Nakina (baseball); West Brunswick at East Bladen (tennis); Fairmont at West Brunswick (golf); Hoggard at South Brunswick (JV baseball); Laney at South Brunswick (track); South Brunswick at Fairmont (golf); West Columbus at South Brunswick (tennis).

Tuesday, Mar. 22  
South Brunswick at Hoggard (baseball); Hoggard at West Brunswick (softball); South Brunswick at Acme-Delco (softball).

Wednesday, Mar. 23  
Acme-Delco at West Brunswick (baseball); Whiteville at West Brunswick (tennis); South Brunswick at Hoggard (JV baseball); Cape Fear Academy at South Brunswick (golf); and South Brunswick at Cape Fear Academy (tennis).

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'85 Ford F150	\$10,550	<b>\$8,556</b>
'86 Mustang GT	\$13,200	<b>\$10,929</b>
'88 Ford Ranger	\$10,300	<b>\$8,300</b>
'86 Dodge Ram 50	\$8,695	<b>\$6,380</b>
'87 Chevrolet Camaro	\$12,995	<b>\$10,900</b>
'87 Chevrolet Camaro	\$13,150	<b>\$11,409</b>

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