



A SEAT BEHIND HOME PLATE is the best place to catch all the wild action of a T-Ball game.

Play T-Ball!

BY DOUG RUTTER

The big talk around Major League Baseball these days is about salary caps and a possible strike before the end of the season. So what else is new?

The almighty dollar may have ruined Major League Baseball long ago, but they still play the game the way it was meant to be played at places like Waccamaw Park.

Thursday night is "T-Ball Night" at Waccamaw Park, a place where you can grab a hot dog (with mustard, chili and onions) for 75 cents or a slice of homemade pizza for 10 cents more.

The Gators and Eagles took the T-Ball field last Thursday night, and what a game it was. More runs, hits and errors than you can imagine.

There was no debate over a salary cap, no mention of a players' strike, no talk about contract negotiations.

Best of all, there were no losers. When time on the clock expired, the Gators won and the Eagles won. Everybody wins in T-Ball.

The little tykes, ages 5 to 7, don't play three outs per inning like the big kids. That just wouldn't work because nobody ever makes an out in T-Ball. Each inning lasts as long as it takes for

every player to hit.

Waccamaw's public address announcer for the night, CeCe Gore, calls out the next batter for the Gators: Number 8, April Simmons.

"C'mon April!" a youngster yells from the field. "She's in my class," he explains.

Never mind that April is on the other team. There are no enemies in T-Ball, just classmates and neighbors learning what must seem like a complicated game for a 5-year-old.

T-Ball is often a comedy of errors. Sometimes, in the heat of competition, a little boy will hit the ball, run to first base and keep on trucking into right field. He won't stop until a coach catches up and leads him back to the bag.

The bat is too big for some kids, so they choke up real far and wrap their tiny fingers around the middle of the bat. They grip it like you would hold an oar on a one-man kayak.

When somebody hits the spongy-safe ball, the look on their face is incredulous—a cross between immense pride and utter astonishment. The crowd goes crazy, another base hit.

T-Ball is often a comedy of errors. But as lifelong Waccamaw resident Thomas Simmons points out, "Those little fellers, I de-

clare. They surprise you sometimes."

Simmons is one of the people who helps run the two-year-old Waccamaw Athletic Association, the organization that oversees the T-Ball and Little League programs in the Ash community.

The association caters to about 120 boys and girls between the ages of 5 and 12.

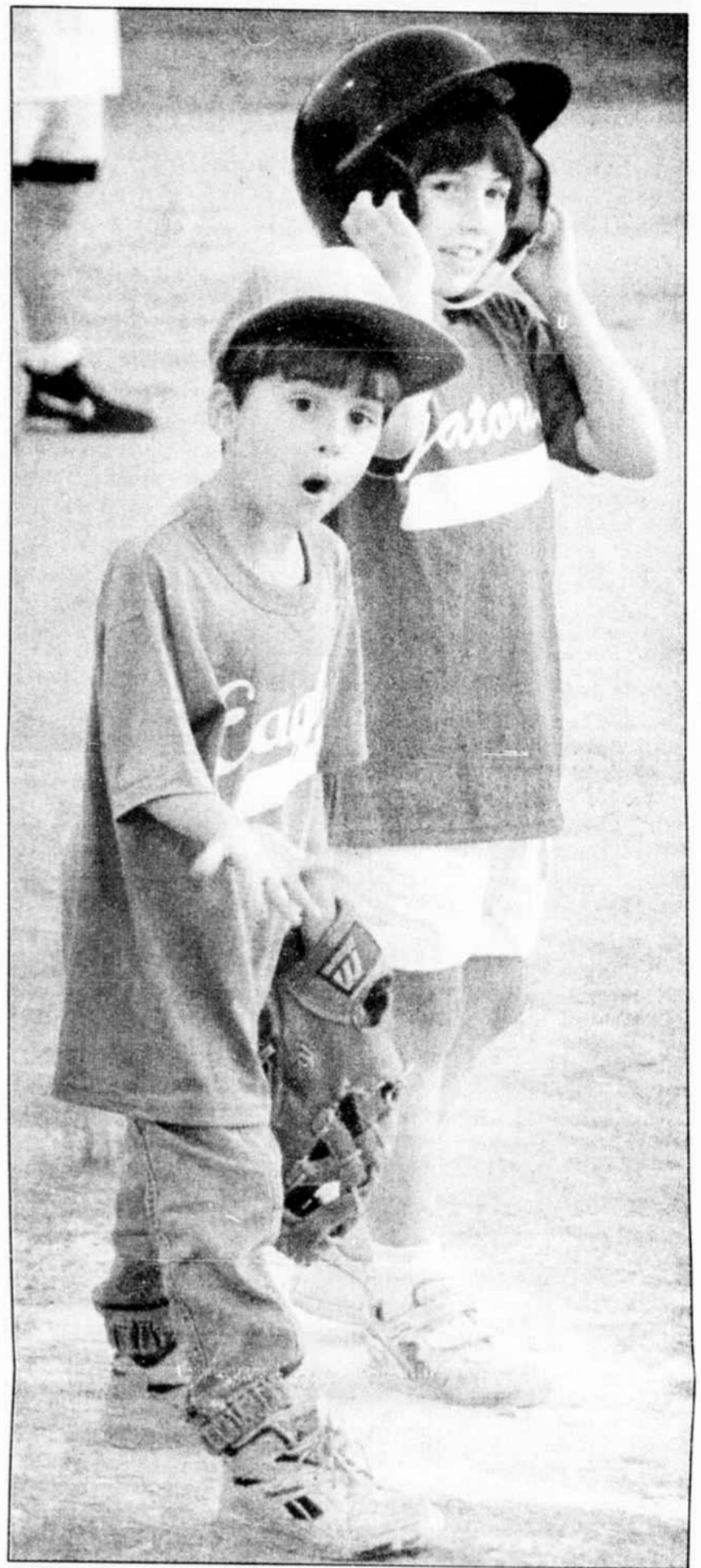
"This is something we should have had a long time ago," Simmons says, looking around the park. "I'm 74 years old and when I came up at the school we didn't have any ball fields."

One hour into the game, as the last bit of daylight fades away and the glow of the ball park lights becomes apparent, some of the Eagles and some of the Gators are losing interest.

They're focus shifts from what is taking place in the field to everything but the game. They do jumping jacks on the outfield grass or dig around on the infield dirt.

"This is where it starts getting fun, when they start getting tired," CeCe Gore says from the elevated announcer's box behind home plate. "Look at that one out there throwing his glove up in the air."

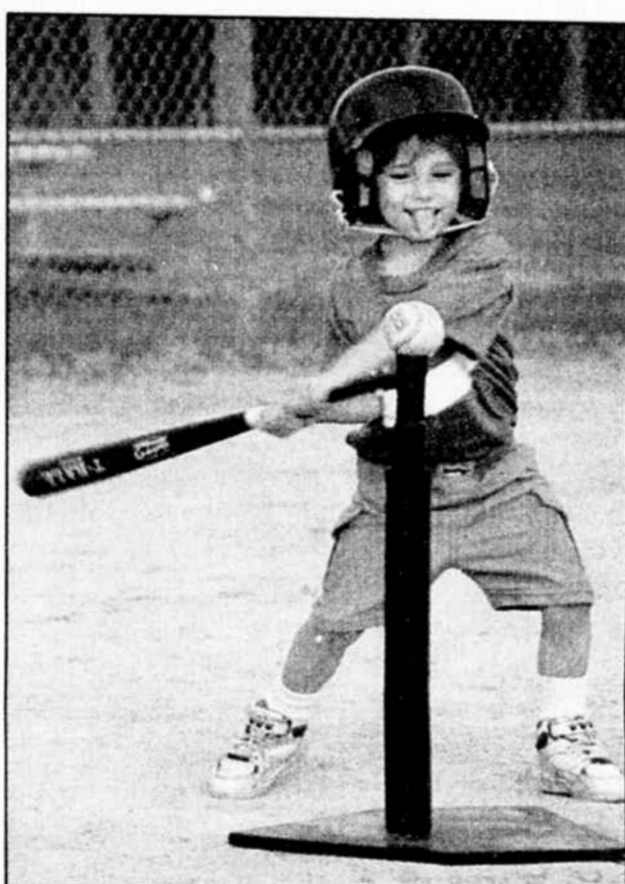
Just having fun.



"WHERE'S MY GLOVE?" asks Eagles third baseman Garrett Angelakis. The one he's wearing is just a tad big. Kyla Williams of the Gators grabs hold of her helmet.



COACH WILL LONG lends a helping hand to Whitney Smith.



CORY OWENS lets it all hang out when he plays ball.



BRANDON BLAND (above) gets some last-minute advice from Coach Tina Evans. At right, Haylie Long can't stand to watch.



Staff photos by Doug Rutter,
Beacon Sports Editor

Painted Bunting Is Without Equal

BY BILL FAVER

Sometime between mid-April and early May each year one of our most exciting birds returns to the shrub thickets along the waterway and low-lying areas of Brunswick County. Considered by some to be the most brilliant of all birds, the sparrow-like Painted Bunting returns from spending the winter months in South Florida, Cuba or the Bahamas.

The male is the colorful one with bright red underparts and rump, greenish back, bluish-purple head and a red eye-ring. The female is bright green all over with a lighter green below and is the only sparrow-like bird that is green. In their first spring, young males will be like the females, but have patches of blue on their heads.

Painted Buntings are hard to see in the wild because they are shy and their habitat of bushy places, hedgerows and swampy thickets makes concealment easy for them. Males do sing from a conspicuous perch to announce their arrival and to defend their territories and this is the best time to see them. In some quiet areas, both male and female will come for seed from a bird feeder.

The female is responsible for site selection and nest building. She will place a cup of grass, bark strips and weed stems, lined with hair and moss, in the fork of a low shrub or tree not far from the ground. While the male sings, she will lay 3 or 4 white eggs marked with reddish-brown dots and will incubate them herself for the entire time.

When they hatch she will care for the young in the nest. Some observers claim when the young birds leave the nest, she will begin a new nest for a second brood. When she completes the nest, the male begins courting again, and on the eve of the second egg-laying,

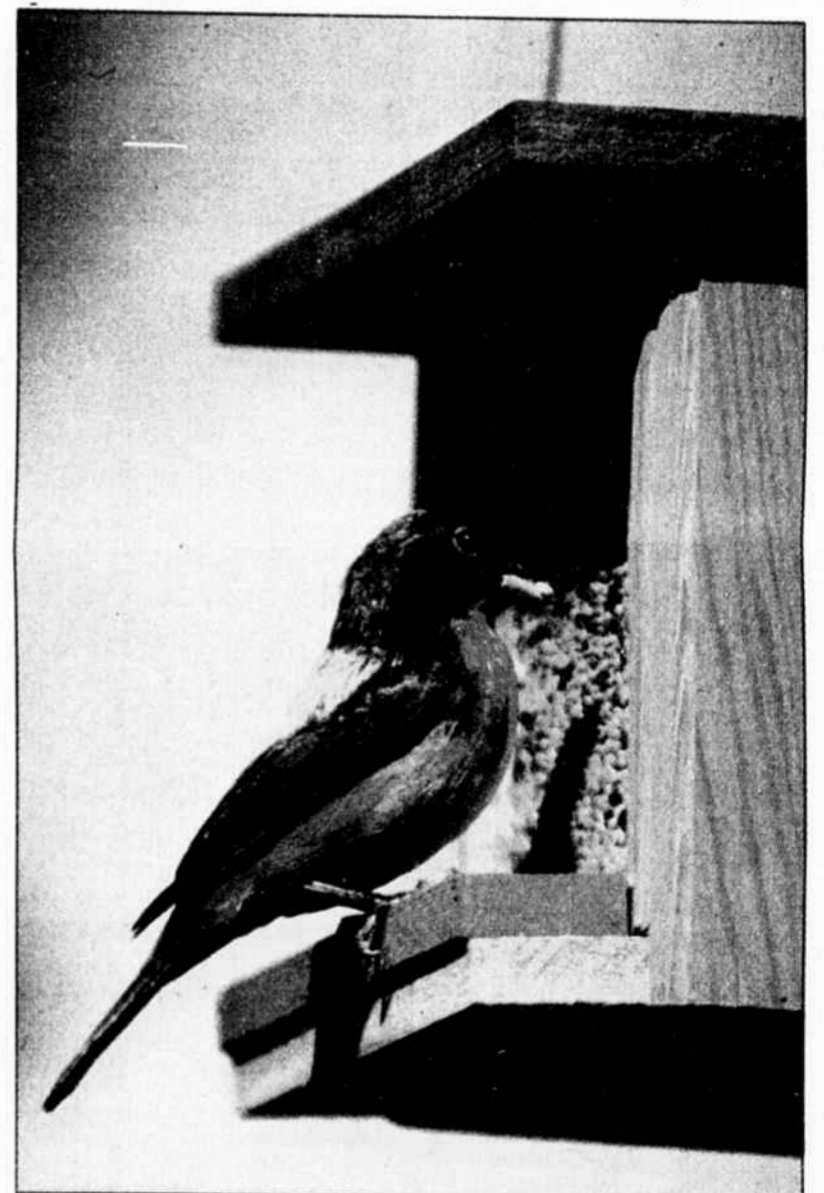


PHOTO BY BILL FAVER

THE MALE Painted Bunting is one of our most beautiful birds.

she will abandon the young and the male takes complete charge of them.

Another name for the Painted Bunting is "nonpareil," which means "without equal." We are

fortunate to have these colorful birds share Brunswick County with us as they add interest and excitement to life along the edge where land and sky and sea come together.