

SPORTS

Sports Memory: A High School Rivalry and a Bid for a No-No

By Hunter Hopkins
Decree Staff Writer

It was a blistering spring afternoon. The muggy weather made it feel like it was 95 degrees, as my team, the West Davidson Dragons, got ready to take on our rivals, the Central Davidson Spartans, for a spot in the conference championship game.

The week prior to this, my coach, Ryan Hokanson, approached me and said, "Hunter, I need to save you for the semi-finals as you know it'll be our best competition in this tournament. I need you to show up big for this game." We had been preparing for this game all season, as the action always gets heated against the Spartans.

That afternoon the stands were crowded. Fans came from all

over the Lexington area to watch the rivalry game take place.

Before the first pitch, I went to the bullpen to begin stretching and getting my body loose for the big game. I grabbed my foam roller and started rolling out my hamstrings, quads, calves and back. I always had earbuds on warming up so I could focus on the game and get in the zone to dominate the opposing team. I was listening to my go-to choice of music, a mix of AC/DC, Korn and some Eminem. After rolling out, I began doing my pregame hip mobility to ensure my legs were stretched. Then I proceeded to grab my resistance bands to get my arm ready to throw heat.

As I finished my warmup, my catcher, Luke Bryant, approached with a menacing look in his eye. It was his senior year, and he took this season as a retirement tour.

"Hop, I really need you to be big today," he said. "I'm not ready to be finished playing baseball yet."

His words lit a fire under me and for the first time I understood what it was like to face the possibility of playing your last game ever. I had a feeling inside me that I have never felt in the past. I was now on a mission for my senior teammates. As we lined up along the foul lines and the national anthem played, I began by saying a prayer.

When the anthem concluded, I took my final warmup pitches on the mound. I reached 84 mph on the first one, the hardest I had ever thrown. Next pitch

was clocked at 85 mph. I had no idea what was going on; all I knew was the catcher's mitt was popping and my arm felt amazing. As we wrapped up warmup tosses, my catcher approached me and exclaimed, "Hoppy, it feels like you're pumping it today!"

The first inning went swiftly. I struck out two batters and the third grounded out to second on a slow roller.

During the bottom of the first, my team came to the plate. After a three-up, three-down top of the first, it seemed like the energy was in our favor, but we couldn't seem to produce. The leadoff batter struck out on four pitches, the second batter was walked, and the next two hit shallow flyouts to the outfield.

I had a sinking feeling that this game would come down to the defense; not many runs were going to cross the plate. But for some reason this gave me even more drive to pitch well. I knew that I had to show up big for my team and now it was time to prove myself.

I got through the second inning, but the third was a little rocky, with the first batter walking. Growing nervous, I felt like I was already losing my touch and started to overthink the game. On the next pitch, the runner stole second base. Then the Spartan slugger hit a drive to right field, which, thankfully, was snagged on an amazing diving play by Zac Story. The runner tagged and advanced to third with only one out.

The next two outs were critical for me as I couldn't let the runner score. It came to a full count with the next batter and then I threw a sharp, cutting slider that buckled his knees for a strikeout. With two outs the last batter hit a roller to the shortstop, and we escaped the third inning without surrendering a run and the dugout erupted in cheers.

The game continued with the defense taking control as batters were making outs left and right. No one was able to score until the bottom of the 5th inning. That's when the Spartans let up two walks and our centerfielder Austin Musgrave blasted a huge double to right field, with both runners scoring. Our team celebrated as if we just won the World Series! The energy was unreal.

As the inning ended, my coach handed me the ball once more and said, "Hop, now is your time to shine. I need you to be big right here and finish this game for us. You have some insurance runs, do your thing, kid."

I stepped onto the mound, eager to pitch this inning. Three batters came to the plate and quickly became three outs. The crowd was roaring.

In the bottom of the sixth inning, we stranded a runner on third base and the score was still 2-0.

The seventh inning passed without incident. In the top of the 8th inning, I got a quick two outs, with a popup to the shortstop and a strikeout on an up-and-inside fastball. I gave up a walk to the

third, and the pressure was on me once more. But my first baseman made an incredible diving play on a grounder down the line, and I sprinted to the first base bag to cover for the out.

Approaching the final inning I was still pitching and had not let up a hit. There's an unwritten rule in baseball that you don't speak or think about the no-hitter or perfect game, but of course it's near impossible not to think about it when you see the zero in the hit column for the opposing team.

I began the ninth inning by striking out the first batter, throwing a curve that he was not expecting. I whispered under my breath, "Let's freaking go. Come on, keep shoving, stay in your rhythm."

The crowd kept roaring. The second batter popped out to our first baseman, and I was one out away from accomplishing a "No-no." That was until the Spartans' clean-up hitter came to the plate. I soon fell behind, 3-0, and had to throw a fastball. The fastball was whirling up in the zone and he hit it off his hands, leading to a bloop single over our second baseman's head.

The crowd's cheers turned into agonizing groans. With a Spartan standing on first base, my coach came onto the field to both congratulate me and yank me in favor of our sidearm closer who worked his way to the final out without allowing the Spartans' runner to score.

We celebrated and stormed the field. We had just beaten our rivals to advance to the finals of the conference championship to face East Davidson High School. After the game I was given the game ball and congratulated on my performance.

This game is still meaningful to me not only because it was against our rivals with playoff implications. I showed up big in one of the biggest moments of the year; I extended the season for friends who were seniors.

Seeing the crowd's reaction and the faces of my teammates, it's a moment I'll always remember and one I'm sure we'll bring up at our high school reunions.

BRIEFS

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Patterson, a graduate of Apex Friendship High School, believes that with seasoning, the Bishops will be competing well against Methodist, a perennial national power on the links. Methodist took the team championship, with its four best golfers all placing in the top ten.

Noting their rigorous practice schedules, Patterson said the Monarch golfers excel at different aspects of the game. "What makes champions like Methodist stand out is their ability to score whether they're hitting the ball well or not," he said. "Some guys can't putt, but they can strike the ball like no one else. Some guys can't strike the ball, but they're excellent putters."

But it's not just hard work and talent, Patterson said. "Team chemistry is huge. Methodist's golfers feed off each other and always put together four good scores," he said, adding, "Wesleyan is a young team. I believe within a year or two we can compete for a conference championship."

Women's Sprinters Finish 1 - 2

Two Wesleyan sprinters turned in electric performances at the USA South women's track and field championships at Brevard April 27-28, as the Bishops placed third in the team standings.

Freshman Ahnia Cherry (12.15 seconds) and sophomore Mariah Brooks (12.66) finished 1-2 in the 100-meter race. The two runners duplicated the feat in 200 meters, with individual times of 24.79 and 25.36.

In the 400-meter event, Brooks (59.98) and senior Teanna Bellamy (59.80) placed third and fourth.

Cherry, Brooks, Bellamy teamed with Snezana Spinache to take first in the 4 x 100-meter relay with a time of 48.28; the four came in second in the 4 x 400 relay at 4:08.19.

In the field events, Christian Van Norden placed third in shot put with a toss of 37 feet, 4 inches.



Freshman Ahnia Cherry. C. Lewis photo

Bishops Undertake Summer Workouts...or Not

By Mary Alice Butler
Senior Staff Writer

Nadia Simmons is a forward for the women's basketball team and wants to improve her endurance and ball control this summer. Her typical summer workout consists of running and sprint work with occasional lifting. Her head coach provides her with a summer workout program, but Simmons prefers to do her own.

While she does not try to eat healthier, she states it happens naturally. "Homemade meals help with that, instead of eating caf food all of the time." From an endurance standpoint, Simmons said it's evident during preseason which players work out in the summer and which do not.

Assistant athletic trainer Alyssa Hammock stated that summer is a time for athletes to perform power lifts and gain speed based on the demands of their sport. "It's very noticeable to see who did and did not work out over the break," she said.

She said that coaches should provide copies of workouts, with technique explanations, as well as a way to provide feedback to increase the team's overall success. There are many reasons athletes fail to complete their summer workouts. Among the most common ones: lack of equipment/gym resources, long hours at summer jobs, or simple apathy. It's worth noting, Hammock added, that not every team requires or checks in on summer workouts. While coaches can provide the guidance, it is up to the athletes to possess the desire to perform at a higher standard and then get their work done.

The women's assistant soccer and strength coach provides her athletes with a five-day-a-week program consisting of exercises to improve strength, agility, and endurance. Coach Vanessa Batchelor noted that, due to a lack of preparation in summer, many athletes get hurt in the preseason, which makes it difficult to

recover once the season has begun.

Batchelor related that a handful of her athletes complete the workouts, but the majority do not. This is evident through their fitness levels coming into training camp. "I see it when we go lift and they look at me like they've never seen that (equipment) in their life," she said.

Batchelor confirmed that the problem could be solved if the NCAA would change its Division III rules that prohibit mandated summer workouts. Until it does, she said, "it comes down to team culture and commitment."

Sophomore forward Caitlyn Butler said her summer soccer workout program includes speed and weight training. While she doesn't always follow the weight training exactly, she does follow the speed and agility training. Along with her workouts, she attempts to limit fast food and add highly nutritious meals, as she knows it will affect her athletic performance once she returns to campus.

It's easy to see who did workouts over the summer and who did not. "You can tell when we run the timed mile in preseason that the endurance isn't always there," she explained.

Like Butler, senior volleyball setter Desiree Walker spends four or five days a week lifting during the summer, focusing on different muscle groups. While Coach Batchelor provides her with a strength program, consisting of power lifts such as deadlifts, back squats, and bench presses, Walker prefers to follow her own plan. Her workouts are not volleyball specific; however, she notices a difference in her endurance level and overall strength when she returns to campus for the fall season.

Unlike women's soccer and volleyball, men's basketball has a less structured workout plan for the summer. Head coach John Thompson gives his team a list of suggested weight training and basketball-specific exercises such as ball-handling

drills. Since their season starts in early October, Coach Thompson says he does not need his men in top shape in August.

But he stresses that they be active over the summer, and he can usually tell which ones were inactive by their inability to finish workouts during the preseason, not from lack of strength, but endurance. "We don't call the time from when our season ends to when it begins 'off season,'" he said. "We call it 'development season.' Do something. Even if you don't follow the program, at least tailor it to your needs."

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BASEBALL

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LaGreca broke for home, but, in a much-debated call, the umpire ruled him out. (It appeared the sliding LaGreca was tagged in the chest after his foot touched the plate).

Then, in the sixth inning, the Pacers got to the Bishops starter, Hunter Hill, who had shut them out through five. After a leadoff single, Hill issued two walks to load the bases. A wild pitch scored Peace's first run and moved the other runners up one base. The next batter then drilled a single to left; one run scored, but the second was erased at home on a pinpoint throw from Lyon as the runner tried to leap over LaGreca, who stood his ground and applied the tag.

"Hunter worked hard to keep us in the game," said Clifton, who replaced Hill with Danny Thompson (4-2). "He gave us a chance to win."

Then came the pivotal eighth inning. Lyon led off by sending a single through the right side of the infield. Jackson Hobbs, the conference Player of the Year, hammered a double into the leftfield corner, with Lyon scoring after a bobble by the outfielder. Davie Morgan was issued an intentional walk. Colin "Scooby" Scoggins then singled to

left, scoring Hobbs. That restored Wesleyan's one-run lead, 3-2, and chased McIntosh from the game.

The onslaught continued as Alex Moskal hit a high bouncer to second and reached base on an error; that loaded the bases. Then Padgett lifted a floater past the shortstop into shallow leftfield for two more runs. After a strikeout and hit-batsman, Lyon came to the plate for the second time that inning. He stroked a pitch into right-center, the centerfielder mishandled it, and all three runners scored. Eighth inning tally: 12 batters, seven runs, five hits, three Pacer errors.

Leading 8-2 in the bottom of the ninth, Clifton summoned Davis, the team's strikeout specialist (16.48 per nine innings), to close the game. But Davis soon found himself in a jam, as he loaded the bases on a single and two walks. He then struck out one batter and induced the next to fly out to right field. A walk and a single brought in the Pacers' third and fourth runs.

With the bases still loaded and the tying run at the plate, Davis caught the next batter looking at a called third strike. Bishops win... Cue the dogpile.