

Perspective

2001

July 2001 A Special Edition of The Chowan Herald Edenton, NC

NEIGHBORS & NEWSMAKERS

Steamers provide good ole family entertainment for Chowan, surrounding area

BY HELEN KERR OUTLAND

A hot summer's night in Edenton without a Steamers game would just be another hot summer's night. However, when the smell of grilled hamburgers begins to fill the air and the lights go on at Historic Hicks Field the air changes. Steamers' fans overlook the heat and bugs and fill the stadium to cheer their young heroes on. The Steamers are as much a part of Chowan County as the river.

Twenty-one young men from universities all over the country have converged on Edenton with determination in their eyes and a dream in their hearts. Playing in the Coastal Plain League (CPL) for the Steamers can be that first step to the pros.

Summer collegiate baseball isn't something new. The Coastal Plain League existed from 1937 until 1952. It was an integral part of the North Carolina minor league. Then in 1997 the league was revived. It returned with a new face. It is now a collegiate summer league. The young men who form the league are the top players from their universities.

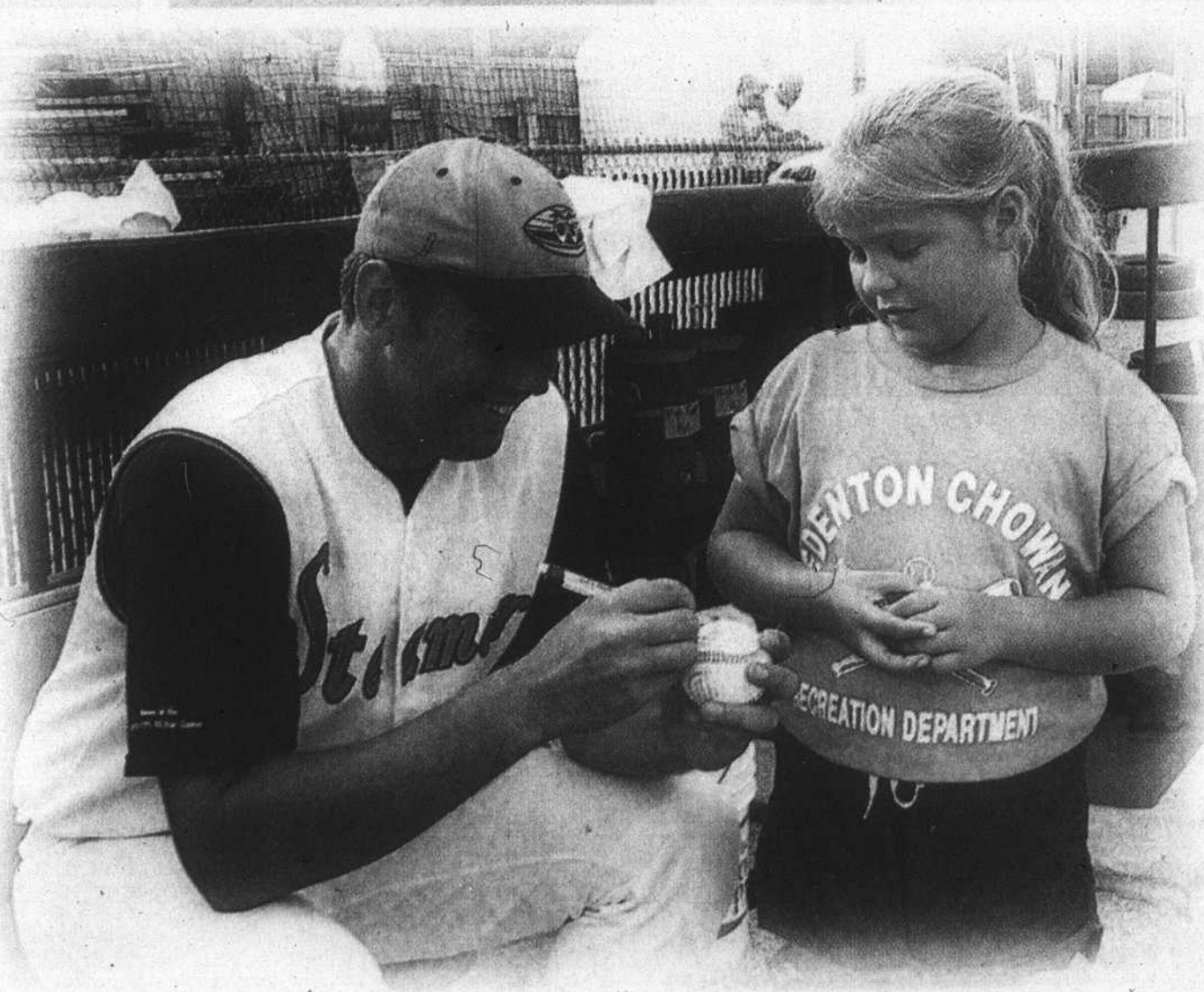
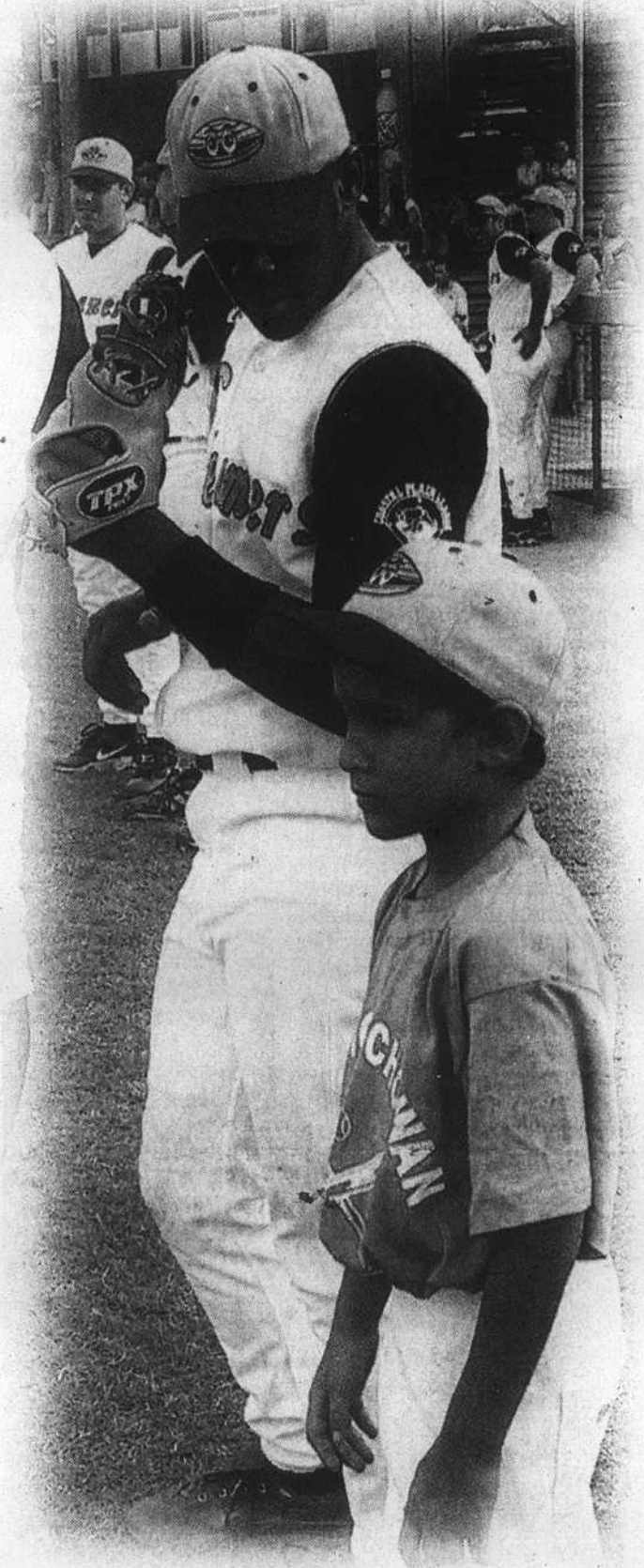
The young players get the chance to compete against other top talent and receive exposure to major league scouts. Six Steamers were drafted by the pros in the 2000 season. Professional baseball players such as Jeff Bagwell, Frank Thomas, Mo Vaughn, and Charles Nagy began their careers in a summer collegiate league.

The 2001 roster for the Steamers includes three players from the University of North Carolina and two from East Carolina University. It is here that the talents of these young men will be gripping the wooden bats—the same type of bat that they might use should their dreams come true and they go to the pros. This is where they will get plenty of playing time to hone their skills under the guidance of Coach Greg Clarkson of Gulf Coast CC.

According to the CPL media guide the Coastal Plain League was founded to fill a void in collegiate summer baseball. There are about a dozen other college summer leagues in operation from Alaska to Cape Cod. Until the CPL arrived there had been no such league located in the Southeastern United States. Edenton is the smallest town to host a CPL team. Owned by the Edenton-Chowan Community Foundation, a non-profit group, they ensure the Steamers continue to be a part of Chowan County.

The Steamers General Manager is a native son of the area. Todd Hunter had lived in the Zebulon, NC for a while with his family. There he was associated with the Carolina Mudcats but the rural life was in his blood. "My wife and I felt it was here where we wanted to raise our children," says Hunter. The opportunity to manage the Steamers gave Hunter both the chance to raise his children in grassroots America and advance his career in Sports Management.

Hunter has been surrounded by baseball all of his life. Being the son of Baseball Hall of Fame pitcher Jim "Catfish" Hunter, Todd knows the game inside out. "As a kid I would often spend time with my dad at one stadium or another," says Hunter. "We baseball brats actually spent more



time playing in the tunnels or under the bleachers than watching the games."

Although Hunter did play some college baseball himself he says he got burned out on the time commitment involved. "It was hard sometimes to see Dad leave knowing he would be gone for several weeks," adds Hunter. "I want to spend time with my family too. Of course as adult and with job responsibilities of my own, I see some of my dad's job differently."

For Hunter and Chowan County the Steamers have provided the perfect combination of hometown atmosphere and quality sports. During the summer season area families host the players. The players get the chance to interact with the community through baseball clinics, autograph sessions and charity appearances. For the players and the host families a bond and a friendship are often established that will last a lifetime.

On a hot summer night, when the lights of Hicks Field brighten the sky stop by and take a look around. Buy a hot dog, find a seat, and let the cheers of the crowd help you forget about the heat.

For on the field is a future Hall of Fame baseball player honing his skills. Cheer him on. He may be making a memory for you.