

East Winston Noon Optimist Soccer: Something for everybody

By DAVID BULLA
Chronicle Sports Editor

Bennie Lassiter stands behind the Boys Club on Stadium Drive on a gorgeous Saturday afternoon.

It is the sort of day for a little basketball with the boys, some light work in the yard or a relaxing walk in the park.

Lassiter, however, is watching 22 6- and 7-year-olds chase a soccer ball across the Boys Club athletic field.

"This is my first year. I tried to get her (daughter Kendra) to run track, but she preferred soccer," Lassiter says, tipping off the fact that the East Winston Noon Optimist Youth Soccer League is a family affair.

"I guess I've been won over because this league teaches you how to play something for fun. They stress that, whether you win or lose, play to have fun."

On the field, the movement of the ball is understandably slow. Occasionally, a child executes a pass that draws oohs and ahs from the crowd, and a proud parent tries to hold back a smile.

Suddenly, the largest child on the field breaks free of the pack and faces a one-on-one with the goalkeeper, who makes a splendid save. The coach, who at this age level, stays on the field throughout the game, cannot contain his elation. He lifts his goalie in the air and all cheer.

Later, another one-on-one takes place, involving the same children. This time the goalie is not so fortunate. His taller rival places a high kick to his left, completely out of reach. The ball lands in the net for the game's first goal.

"They tell you not to teach competition," said Wanda Williams, Kendra Lassiter's coach. "But that's impossible. Losing tears them to pieces."

Games are won and lost in this league to be sure, but almost half



Afternoon Delight

Willard Hodges, above, and his seventh-month-old daughter Oresha rest on the sidelines during an East Winston Noon Optimist Youth Soccer game last Saturday. Goalkeeper Daren Hunt, right, watches a shot miss high. He and his Warrior teammates, who play in the 11-14 age group, tied the Tigers 0-0 (photos by James Parker).



of them end in ties.

"But I do feel that participating in soccer benefits these children in a major way," Williams continued. "Not everybody can play basketball and football. Soccer everybody can do."

Indeed, the theme of this league is: Soccer offers something for everybody.

Bili Oshodi, who is the league's founding father, makes this point succinctly.

"What did Akeem Olajuwon

play when he was growing up?" asked Oshodi, a native Nigerian who played semi-pro soccer while he was in school in England. "Akeem was a goalie.

"So you see that anybody can play soccer, tall or short, large or small. You also feel a part of something very large, something multinational, since soccer has more participants than any other sport in the world."

But it's not just soccer that makes the 4-year-old East Winston Noon Optimist League

so attractive.

For instance, since the league plays its games on Saturday, parents get an opportunity to socialize with friends.

"I just saw a friend I hadn't seen since November," said Annie Lassiter, Kendra's mother. "We try to encourage parents to participate as much as possible and socializing is one of the offshoots.

"There's plenty to do. Parents can coach, act as linesmen, provide or serve refreshments."

Williams has coached in the league each of the last three years.

"I worked with several of the guys who organized the league," she said. "They needed bodies. Even though I didn't know much about soccer, I helped out the first year.

"Then I went to clinics to learn how to play the game. We watched films and heard coaches speak. So the next year I volunteered to coach."

That first year, the coed league

had 65 children on six teams. The league has grown to more than 200 children and 14 teams.

Four years later, Oshodi is beginning to see some positive ramifications.

"We're starting to see players from this league make it onto the high school soccer teams," he said. "What's next? We'll possibly see our players get scholarships to college. It might not happen this year, but as long as we see this, please see page B2

Bibby's back in Carolina League; this time as a Met pitching coach

By DAVID BULLA
Chronicle Sports Editor

The gentle windup belies the velocity of Jim Bibby's fastball.

"What was that?" asked the Lynchburg pitching coach of Met farmhand Kevin Burrell. "About 90 (miles per hour)?"

"Seventy-nine," yelled pitcher Wray Bergendahl, who stood nearby. "Eight-three tops."

"What!" screamed Bibby. "If you throw 85, then I'm twice as fast, even if I am a 40-year-old man."

"Eighty-seven or 88," Burrell chimed amid a chorus of figures being offered by his Lynchburg teammates.

"Go get the gun," someone said from the left field bank, just above the visitors' bullpen at Ernie Shore Field. "It'll say 85."

The Mets actually have a radar device to measure the velocity of pitching. Yet the thought was only half-hearted. Had someone plugged the machine in, it's a sure bet the 6-foot-6, 250-pound Bibby would have been throwing as fast as any of his pitchers.

Today this is a familiar scene for Bibby, whose playing career ended less than a year ago. The Franklinton native, who had the best winning percentage in the National League in 1979-80, feels fortunate to still be in baseball, one way or another.

"I miss the big-league atmosphere and the money," Bibby said last week when the L-Mets were in town to play the Winston-Salem Spirits. "But I came to accept that one day my time in the big leagues was going to end

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-- Jim Bibby

and that I would have to resort to something else.

"I'm just glad to get the opportunity to stay in baseball. I enjoy what I'm doing. But if I was in the big leagues again, that would be something I would cherish."

Bibby, who played for St. Louis, Texas, Cleveland and Pittsburgh, now oversees a pitching staff that has some tough acts to follow. Two years ago, Lynchburg had Dwight Gooden, now the flame-throwing star of New York's rotation. Four others from the 1983 team made it to the majors last year, including Calvin Schiraldi, Jay Tibbs, Jeff Bettendorf and Wes Gardner.

Last season, Lynchburg had just as much talent. Randy Myers, Rick Aguilera, Floyd Youmans, Mitch Cook and Kevin Brown all will pitch in the high minors or majors this year. They pitched the Mets to an

89-49 regular-season record with an earned run average of 2.80, compared to a 96-43 mark with a 3.13 ERA for the '83 squad.

"I don't think this year's staff is quite as deep," Bibby said. "But it's too early to tell how good it's going to be and how these guys are going to compare."

So far the Mets, who have won consecutive Carolina League championships, haven't been awed by history. They had a -- surprise! -- league-best 17-8 record through last Sunday.

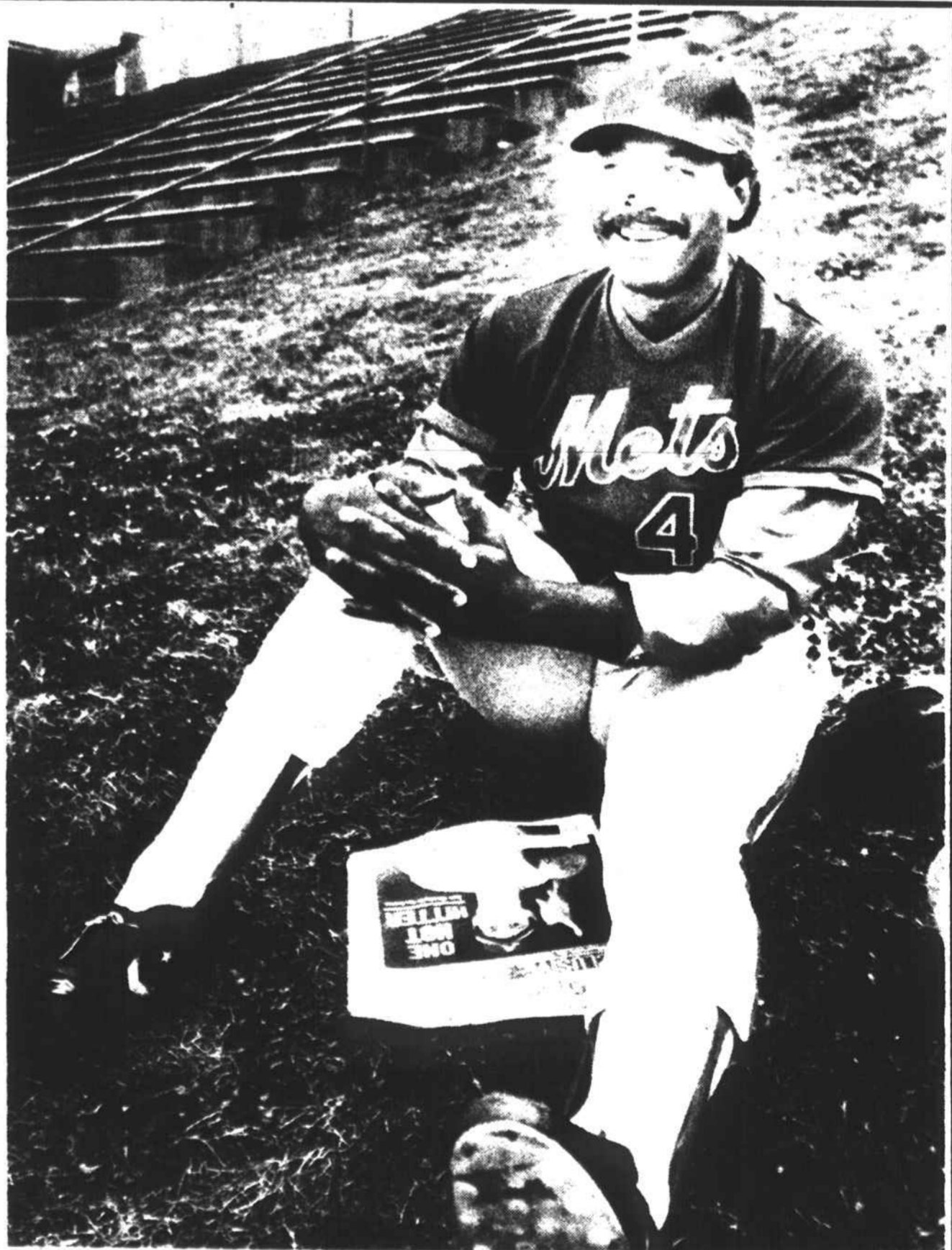
Lynchburg is Bibby's second stop as a minor-league pitching coach. After playing trials with Texas and St. Louis went awry last year, his good friend Hank Aaron, player development director for the Atlanta Braves, called and said he had an opening. Bibby accepted the position as pitching coach at Durham, the Braves' Carolina League affiliate.

When the Bulls lost to Lynchburg three games to one in a pitching-dominated league championship series last September, Bibby talked to Met minor-league director Steve Schryver. A possible move to Lynchburg was discussed, since L-Met pitching coach John Cumberland was eager for a promotion.

When Cumberland was awarded the pitching coach's job at Tidewater (the Mets' triple-A affiliate), Bibby signed with Lynchburg.

It was a perfect marriage, since Bibby has lived in Madison Heights, a Lynchburg suburb, for the last 17 years.

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Back On The Farm

Lynchburg's Jim Bibby, who grew up on a farm in Franklinton, oversees New York Met farmhands, who occasionally make fun of the 40-year-old pitching coach's fastball. Bibby's been doing some heavy reading lately on his favorite subject, pitching (photo by James Parker).