



Terry Pope

One tough Scorpion

Perkins has battled back from unbelievable odds

When North Brunswick head baseball coach Wes Coward nervously turned to give Phillip Perkins a batting sign, the senior second baseman was staring at two strikes and the Scorpions were two runs behind in the final inning of play.

But there was a wide smile on Perkins' face. "You never see him without a smile on his face -- on the field, around school, anywhere," said coach Coward. "To have that type of charisma on the field is something very, very special from a player."

In fact, the smile helped send a message to the second-year coach. Perkins quietly drew a walk and scored the winning run on pitcher Michael Johnston's double down the first baseline. Players and coaches greeted Perkins at the plate with open arms. North had defeated county rival West Brunswick, 7-6. Something to smile about.

But the trip from first base to home for Perkins, all in just a matter of seconds last week, was such a short one considering the long and painful journey he has been on since last January. In a matter of seconds, Perkins saw the blinding headlights, felt and heard the impact of the car's bumper against his legs.

He lay still on the cold pavement, staring up at the dark sky and quietly wondering if he would ever walk again. The accident left him with steel rods and pins in both legs, hospitalized for weeks. In some places, the bones were so damaged doctors feared the worst.

'It's going to be tough'

Yet Perkins vowed to return, not only to school, but back to the baseball diamond. He underwent months of rehabilitation and therapy to learn how to walk again, and classmates were stunned to see him struggling around campus first in a wheelchair and then later on crutches well ahead of a normal healing process.

No one questioned his determination, and slowly they saw him progress. This time last year, Perkins was still struggling around campus on crutches and saying he would be back. He missed all of the 1997 baseball season, but this season would be his senior year. It was going to be special.

"I told Phillip the first of the year, 'It's going to be tough on you coming back. It's going to take time,'" said coach Coward. "I knew it was going to take him time to get back to his normal ability. But I also knew that he would do anything it would take to get there."

Currently, Perkins is second on the team in batting at .333 through ten games and has scored seven runs and has three RBIs. He has the highest on-base percentage of all the Scorpions at .667. But an even more amazing statistic, one that proves he has returned to full speed, is his five stolen bases in five attempts.

A coach's dream

"If he never played an inning of baseball and just sat in your dugout on the bench, he is an absolutely unbelievable person just to have around," said coach Coward. "You can ask any of our 14 players what it's like to have Phillip around this season. He is the type of player that coaches dream of having. Players like Phillip is why I am involved in coaching this sport."

But along with his gentle temperament is a humble and thankful teen-ager who reflects questions about his own achievements on the field this year and says he is simply doing his part to help the team win games. He is deeply religious and carries with him at all times a protective angel pin that North Brunswick basketball coach Scott Myers gave him upon his return to the team this season. "I believe God sent a protective angel to watch over me," says Perkins. That angel is working miracles on North's baseball diamond this season.

▶ AT A GLANCE

Lowery leads big win

South Brunswick golfers topped the field at Riegelwood Country Club on Monday with a score of 161, led by medalist senior Stephen Lowery with a nine-hole 36.

Other team scores were East Columbus, 181, East Bladen 202 and West Columbus, 229.

Cougar coach Wes Shoemaker said afterward that his squad played "just great."

"Brian Hogan had a 41," Shoemaker reported, "and the Summerlin boys, Chad and Heath, were still as consistent as they can be at 42."

"Stephen could do no wrong. He is just getting better and better, and has a chance of being medalist at the conference meet next week at Lion's Paw."

That eight-squad playoff will begin at 3 p.m. Monday.

OPENING DAY

South's Ward tosses first pitch



Little Leaguers open '98 season

Southport residents awoke Saturday morning to a parade of baseball players, an annual tradition, as they gear up for the 1998 season.

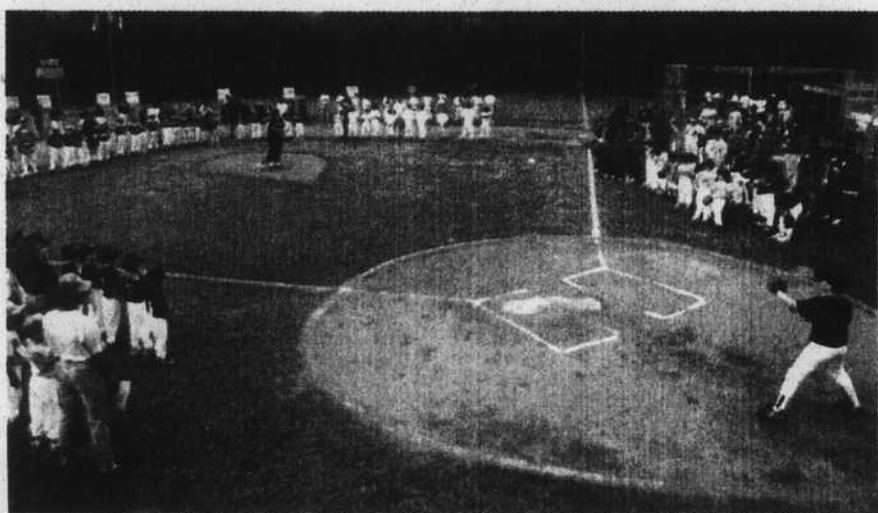
In an opening day ceremony held at Stevens Park, South Brunswick head baseball coach Daniel Ward (left) was the special guest and tossed out the first pitch to open the season.

Ward said he was honored to

be invited to take part in the festivities this season and appreciates how the Southport-Oak Island community has welcomed him and his wife to the area. It is his first season as Cougar head coach.

Little Leaguers lined the field for the event (below) and could hardly wait for the action to begin.

Photos by Jim Harper



BUCK HARDEE INVITATIONAL

North goes 2-1, South 1-2

Scorps make history with first win over Wildcats

By Terry Pope
County Editor

North Brunswick came away from the Buck Hardee Invitational last week with two wins, including a 12-11 thriller over 4A New Hanover after dropping a 9-2 decision to Wilmington Hoggard in the second round.

"Our goal in the tournament was to win two or three games, and we had a big win against West Brunswick," said North coach Wes Coward. "But we went in kind of flat against Hoggard. We were still in position to reach our goals."

The two wins both came on late-inning rallies. North scored twice against West Brunswick in the seventh to win in the opening round and scored four runs in the seventh against New Hanover to come from behind. Two of those -- the tying and winning runs -- came with two outs.

Coward said he did not even talk to his team about the next day's opponent prior to game time. North batted .358 in the tournament against quality teams.

"Either way, we had to face a good 4A team," said Coward. "We sat down and talked about it as a team at batting practice."

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Cougars play 22 innings in 21 hours, get final win

By Terry Pope
County Editor

After a 13-inning outing against New Hanover in the first round, South Brunswick carried Roxboro Person into the ninth inning before dropping a 3-2 decision in the Buck Hardee Invitational baseball tournament last week.

The Cougars played 22 innings of baseball in 21 hours time as the New Hanover game concluded close to midnight and the Roxboro game began the following day at 2 p.m.

"It was another good game," said South coach Daniel Ward. "I'm tired of saying this, but we're not hitting ball like we should."

South dropped its second-straight one-run loss but bounced back the third day to defeat Wilmington Christian Academy, 11-2.

"It was good to come back and play better," said coach Ward.

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Coach meets mentor

By Terry Pope
County Editor

When North Brunswick faced New Hanover in the final round of the Buck Hardee Invitational, it was coach versus mentor and a reunion of sorts for North coach Wes Coward and Wildcats coach Keith Moore.

Moore coached North Brunswick until two seasons ago and led North to the 1996 1A state championship, with Coward serving as his assistant. Moore resigned after the title run to join New Hanover's staff and was named interim head coach there prior to this season.

'It was a little easier for me. I was in kind of a win-win situation.'

North coach Wes Coward

But on this night, the student got the best of his former coach when North scored four runs in the seventh to take a 12-11 win, the first time North has ever beaten the traditional powerhouse from across the river.

"It's a little easier for me," said Coward. "I was in kind of a win-win situation. If we go in there and are beaten, then it was expected. Keith and I are friends, but I can't let that play into the way I'm going to coach a game."

Both teams were in their third-straight day of baseball. Moore expressed concern about his team's play in allowing 17 hits

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INSIDE

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On-line with Quinton

Devil Rays outfielder holds chat session on Internet

Tampa Bay Devil Rays outfielder and Southport native Quinton McCracken last week was the Major League guest player for a weekly on-line chat session. McCracken explained why he chose to play professional baseball rather than professional football and revealed his superstitions and advice on becoming a good hitter.

On-line fans tossed about 20 questions to McCracken during the session. Each week, a different major league player fields questions at the site: www.major-leaguebaseball.com.

Following is a transcript of McCracken's visit last week.

QM: Hello everyone! I am here! Feel free to send in your questions.

PD says: Quinton, why did you play baseball over football?

QM: After my sophomore year, I decided that if I wanted to pursue athlet-

ics as a profession, baseball would probably be best. Being 5-foot-8 and 170 pounds, I thought my stature was better suited for baseball.

tips says: Quinton, what is different about your approach to the plate this year from last year?

QM: Nothing really -- I'm just happy to be given the opportunity to play on a regular basis. Things have just been going my way.

Margie says: Quinton, who were your baseball heroes?

QM: I had many baseball heroes -- I was fascinated with different aspects of

different players' games. I was in awe of Reggie Jackson's power, Rickey Henderson's speed and power and George Brett's bat.

PD says: Quinton, if you could play in the NFL, what team would you play for?

QM: My favorite NFL team has to be the Cowboys. I have always been a fan of theirs since I was a kid.

bru says: What's your advice on hitting?

QM: Probably just to relax at the plate and find comfort in your own style. A variety of coaches have told me that, and I think it's the best advice I have received.

Fitz says: How did you get your name? Are you named after someone?

QM: My mom named me after the See Rays, page 3C



McCRACKEN