

Local Legion Officials Pleased With Early Results of New Diamond Team

BY JOHNNY CRAIG

Pennant fever hasn't caught on yet with Brunswick Shores Post 445, North Carolina's newest American Legion baseball team, but the club's organizers are pleased with what they have seen thus far in the season's opening three weeks.

Post 445, now with a 3-8 record as a member of the rugged Area II Eastern Division, has shown rapid improvement, especially during the last two weeks.

After losing their first four games, the team, comprised of players from both West and South Brunswick High Schools, has played nearly at the .500 level with a 3-4 mark.

Post 445 commander Albert "Tebo" Rogers of Southport and athletic officer Danny Gore of Shallotte are pleased with the early returns on the team's play but realize long-term success will likely be several years down the road.

"We began meeting in late December concerning the possibilities of starting this team," said Rogers during Brunswick Shores' 14-0 loss to Whiteville last Friday night. "Later in January we worked out the details with state and area legion officials and here we are. It's been a lot of hard work because we've done what we have thus far short-handed and with very little help."

"We're looking to build a program. It will probably take three years to build a good, self-supporting program. Financially, this initial season has been a real burden. Getting the proper amount of funding has been tough."

Involvement with the new team has meant quite a number of long days for Rogers and the of the Post 445 staff since late May.

Having been employed at Sunny Point Military Ocean Terminal as part of "Operation Desert Storm" earlier this year and now as part of the post-war "Operation

Desert Storm" project, Rogers often comes straight to the ball park immediately from work on nights of home games.

"It can certainly make for a long day," laughed Rogers. "This is my 30th year in baseball and working with this team, in one way or another, I've helped out in all phases of the program."

Rogers graduated from old Southport High School in 1959 after having played prep baseball and then played several years of semi-pro ball.

Rogers started coaching in Little League in 1960 but a year later began a four-year stint in the Navy.

Since that time Rogers has umpired, coached and served as president of Brunswick County youth baseball and girls' softball leagues.

"There's been a lot of controversy in Brunswick County on legion baseball," explained Rogers. "I don't mean to downgrade the group that has developed the other program in Brunswick County. However, legion baseball hasn't been opened up to the people in the southern and western ends of the county until now. They shouldn't feel hard at us in the fact that we have now opened it up."

"We want an honest and fair program with everything above board. We've got four legion posts (Town Creek, Shallotte, Southport and Long Beach) involved with this program indirectly and we certainly hope that each one will be more involved in the years to come."

"This is a big task of putting together a program of this magnitude because there is so much travel involved. And the high school coaches that we have are working during their usual off-season with the travel

expenses basically coming out of their own pockets."

In order to increase funding for the program, letters from the sponsoring Town Creek Post 445 have been sent to all municipalities in the Brunswick Shores area requesting inclusion in the towns' new fiscal 1991-92 budgets.

"We want to be a completely self-supporting program in three years," said Rogers. "Most area legion posts are made up of 'old timers' and we want to get these members out and support the program."

"We've won three games in this our first year and that's great. I figured before the season we would be lucky to win one. We will probably win a few more before the year is over," added Rogers.

"The players get down a little when they lose but I feel they are doing exceptionally well for a first-year team and they are very dedicated. Our coaches have done a good job at keeping the morale up."

"To play at this level and be competitive you have got to rise up a notch or two above high school ball," said Gore who sported a Post 445 uniform to assist coach Jack Brown in the absence of manager Mike Alderson who was participating in the North Carolina State Games. "We've got a fairly young team with quite a number of sophomores and rising juniors who are all getting better. And the only way we're going to get better is to play so this is a learning year for us."

"The average high school baseball team will have some weak spots in its lineup," explained Gore. "You won't find any weak spots in the field at the legion level and all can field and all can hit."

"We knew coming into this season that this would be a tough year for us. We need the support of the parents and community but at the same time everyone needs to re-

alize that this is not little league."

"We want the kids to have a good time like at the younger level but we want them to have that mental edge that they need to play in this league."

"Probably the biggest need this program has at this point is community support and community understanding of the program. Once we get that, we will be able to attract more kids and more people in the stands," added Gore.

"Every day you play at the legion level, you will face someone's number one pitcher," said Brown. "There are several teams in the Waccamaw Conference that you see in the state baseball playoffs year in and year out. It is those teams that have their players playing legion ball each summer."

"The support that we've gotten has been pretty good," said Gore. "It just takes a lot more from the community to support a legion team than most people realize."

In fact, operating a first-class American Legion baseball team can cost as much as \$10,000 per year according to Brown.

"We've tried to run this program on a shoe-string budget," said Gore. "We started with absolutely nothing and have raised our own money. We still owe money. Having such a late start hurt us but we'll be able to begin earlier for next year."

In addition to working to raise funds to support the team, members usually sacrifice summer jobs in order to play and quite often face hectic schedules.

"We play nine games in the next 10 days," explained Gore of the remaining Brunswick Shores schedule.

"Playing in this league will help with the high school baseball programs and with the

kids learning to be competitive. And that will have a carry-over effect for the kids in both academics and the rest of their later lives. Discipline and self-control are taught as well."

"I'm pleased with where we are at now. We certainly would like to have more wins but we've been in every ball game we've played with the exception of tonight's 14-0 loss to Whiteville," said Gore. "It will take two to three years for our level of competition to rise to that of the other top teams in the league."

Many of the players on the current Brunswick Shores roster will be eligible for at least two more years which both Gore and Brown feel like will give the team a good base to build upon.

Brown is in his first year of American Legion baseball since arriving in Brunswick County three years ago. Prior to being named head coach at South Brunswick, Brown managed a legion team in Moore County that drew primarily from 4-A Pinecrest High School (Southern Pines).

"My experience from coaching in Moore County says that defense is a real key at this level. Everyone, at some point or another, is going to run out of pitching because it's a nine-inning game compared to seven innings in high school. And when that happens, you've got to have some defense."

"The only way to be the best is to play the best," said Brown. "When these kids go back next spring to playing high school ball, it will make things a lot easier."

Brunswick Shores visits county rival Post 68 in Leland tonight (Thursday) at 7:30 p.m. in next action.

Post 445 continues Area II Eastern Division play traveling to Wilmington Post 10 on Friday and then closes out its regular season Monday hosting Burgaw Post 165 at Boiling Spring Lakes. Both games begin at 7:30 p.m.



ROGERS



GORE

Whiteville Post 137 Rips Brunswick Shores 14-0

BY JOHNNY CRAIG

Whiteville's 14-0 whipping of Brunswick Shores Post 445 in American Legion baseball last Friday should send out a message that Post 137 hopes to bring another state championship to the Columbus County town.

Whiteville High School captured the state 2-A baseball championship earlier this month with an impressive two-game sweep of Swannanoa Owen.

With six members from that same state title team on its roster, Whiteville Post 137 improved to 7-1 Friday in the Area II Eastern

Division with possible visions of adding a state legion pennant to its prep championship.

Post 137 dominated Friday's contest as a trio of Whiteville pitchers—winner Richie Blackwell and relievers Ricky Benton and Clay Boykin—combined on a three-hitter.

Whiteville also banged out 16 hits including John Sherbert's three-run homer in the fourth inning and a RBI-triple and double by Brian Smith. Also adding doubles for Post 137 were Brett Harwood, Sherbert, Chris Smith and Brian Etheridge.

Brunswick Shores also committed four errors to aid the Whiteville cause.

Post 445's lone hits came on a two-out, ninth-inning double by catcher Mike Clewis and a pair of Texas-leaguer singles by losing pitcher Scott Coring in the third and Bobby Farrar in the seventh.

Brunswick Shores was without the services of regular shortstop/pitcher Brian Alderson, centerfielder Aldwin Lance and manager Mike Alderson who were in Chapel Hill participating in the North Carolina State Games base-

ball tournament.

Blackwell hurled the first five innings for Post 137, limiting Brunswick Shores to one hit while striking out 12.

Benton and Boykin tossed two innings each of relief with both giving up one hit and striking out one.

Coring retired the first three Whiteville batters he faced in the first inning before the bottom fell out in the second.

Post 137 sent nine batters to the plate during the second using five hits and one Shores error to grab a 5-0 lead.

Calvin Freeman led off the frame with a single down the third base line, stole second and scored on Sherbert's double to left-center field.

David Whaley reached base on a fielder's choice with one out while Sherbert scored on the same play on Mike Sellers' error.

Andre Spicer then singled to left field to score Whaley and gave Post 137 a 3-0 lead.

Spicer then stole second and scored on Harwood's double to give Whiteville a 4-0 advantage.

Harwood scored the final Post 137 run of the inning on Brian

Smith's triple to center field.

Whiteville scored two more runs in the third for a 7-0 lead. Post 137 rapped out four hits including Etheridge's two-out double to center.

Sherbert scored the first run after reaching first on a fielder's choice and going to second on Coring's wild pitch. The Whiteville catcher then took third on Chris Smith's single to right and scored on Clewis' error. Smith later scored on Etheridge's blast.

Post 137 got only one ball out of the infield during their turn at bat in the fourth inning but it was Sherbert's towering home run that accounted for three Whiteville runs and a 10-0 lead.

Coring retired Harwood and Brian Smith on a pair of infield grounders to start the inning but then issued walks to Blackwell and Freeman. Sherbert, who signed a baseball grant with Clemson University earlier this spring, then drove a Coring pitch over the left-center field fence of the West Brunswick park.

Etheridge and Harwood both

scored in the fifth inning on Brian Smith's two-out, two-run single to left to give Whiteville a 12-0 lead.

Etheridge had reached base on a fielder's choice before Harwood managed a single to shallow left field.

Post 137 scored its final two runs in the sixth inning despite Brunswick Shores turning the first of two double plays in the game.

Sherbert led off the frame going to second on Farrar's two-base error and then scored on Chris Smith's double to left.

Smith then stole third and scored himself during Etheridge's grounder that led to the Post 445 double play.

Brunswick Shores turned its second double play in the seventh inning on Benton's grounder to shortstop Scott Phillips.

Whiteville
Post 137052 322 000—14-16-0
Brunswick Shores
Post 445000 000 000—0-3-4

Friday's loss to Whiteville was Brunswick Shores' second defeat in as many games last week.

Post 445 also dropped a 3-1 road

decision to Beaufort Post 99 last Wednesday.

Brunswick Shores will continue Area II Eastern Division play tonight (Thursday) visiting Brunswick County Post 68 in Leland. Post 445 will then travel to Wilmington to face Post 10 on Friday then conclude the regular season Monday entertaining Burgaw Post 165 at Boiling Spring Lakes. All games begin at 7:30 p.m.

Whiteville Tops Post 68

Whiteville Post 137 improved its record to 8-1 with Saturday's 8-3 win over host Brunswick County Post 68 in American Legion Area II Eastern Division baseball play.

Brian Etheridge led Post 137 with a triple while Chris Smith and David Whaley had two hits each.

Chris Walker and Chris Justice led Brunswick County with two hits each.

Post 68 entertains Brunswick Shores Post 445 tonight (Thursday) at 7:30 p.m. in next action.

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