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DEC 31 2003

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Classic championship

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December 31, 2003

Vol. 71, No. 53 Hertford, North Carolina 27944

Steamers Trot out Red Sox's Nixon Sunday

Outfielder
with
Perquimans
roots supports
Edenton
league

MICHAEL WOOD
The Daily Advance

EDENTON
Ballplayers appreciate fans.

That was one point that Christopher Trotman "Trot" Nixon wanted to emphasize when he addressed a packed house at the Edenton Steamers' benefit dinner held at the Chowan Golf & Country Club Sunday evening.

The fans didn't just come out to see the Boston Red Sox' star right fielder; they came to see a North

Carolina native son whose roots grow deep in the Albemarle area.

Many Nixon family members were in attendance, including Trot's grandparents and Hertford residents Preston and Bonnie Nixon and Trot's father, Dr. William Nixon, who use to catch Catfish Hunter in summer leagues.

Trot was born in Durham and raised in Wilmington, where he led New Hanover High School to the Class 4-A baseball title in 1993. He was named the High School Player of the Year by Baseball America and chosen by Boston as the seventh overall pick in the first round of the amateur draft.

Nixon signed with the Red Sox the day before he was to report to North Carolina State for football practice.

"I loved football, and I was looking forward to starting my college educa-

tion, but it was always my dream to play professional baseball," Nixon said. "I spent five years in the minors. It wasn't easy; it was a learning process."

The Red Sox organization did not give up on Nixon, a decision his work ethic may have influenced. Nixon credits his family for instilling in him the strong work ethic.

"Many of my family were and still are farmers, and they always worked hard in the fields," Nixon said. "Even if they had other jobs, they still worked the farm. I am blessed by the Lord to be able to play baseball for a job, and I am going to work as hard as I can to get the most out of my ability."

In 1998, Nixon made it to the big club to stay. He has become a fan favorite in Boston because of his all-out style of play. Nixon is a throwback type of player, a term he said he considers a

compliment.

"The Boston fans have a passion for the game like no other fans anywhere," he said. "They love their ballplayers, and they actually push you to greatness with their enthusiasm."

While speaking at the Steamers' benefit Sunday, Nixon was joined by his 2-year-old son, Chase, who was born Sept. 11, 2001 — the day of the terrorist attacks on the United States.

That year was big for Nixon for another reason, as well. After the 2001 season, he received the Tom Yawkey Award as the Red Sox' Most Valuable Player.

"The Boston organization is the best," Nixon said, "and I hope to play my entire career there."

Nixon described the 2003 season as his best individual campaign. He set personal highs in batting average (.306) and home runs (28). Nixon had a great post

season as the Red Sox came within five outs of beating the Yankees and going to the World Series.

"It was just so much fun playing this year," he said. "We had such good chemistry on the team; we came from behind in so many games."

Nixon's biggest moment of the year was when he hit a home run in extra innings to beat Oakland in game 3 of the division playoffs.

"I got a fastball, and I thought that I had popped it up, but I saw the center fielder running back, and the ball just kept carrying into the stands," he recalled. "It was one of those moments you dream about as a kid."

"But what I will never forget is the next day when I went out onto the field to stretch before the game, the Boston fans gave me a standing ovation. Only in Boston would they do some-

thing like that. It really touches a ballplayer's heart."

Nixon said he's looking forward to the 2004 season. The Red Sox have added Curt Schilling and Keith Foulke to strengthen the pitching staff, and two-time Gold Glove Pokey Reese will play second base.

"I don't care about the Alex Rodriguez deal," Nixon said. "I'm happy with Nomar at shortstop and Manny Ramirez in left field. I really want to bring a championship to Boston."

Steamers general manager Jeff Roemer was pleased with the turnout Nixon brought to Edenton.

"I am not surprised," said Roemer, who replaced Todd Hunter as Edenton's GM this fall. "The number of people who came is indicative of the enthusiasm and support that the people in this community have for baseball and their Edenton Steamers."

PUMPED-UP PIRATES



PHOTO BY SAM WOLFE, The Daily Advance

The Pirates got pumped up in the second half, orchestrating a come-back win over Currituck in overtime to send the Pirates to the championship round of The Daily Advance Four-County Holiday Basketball Classic. Earlier in the afternoon, the lady Pirates used strong defense to defeat Edenton and also earn a pass to the title round.

New law improves highway travel

Transportation Secretary Lyndo Tippet and Crime Control & Public Safety Secretary Bryan Beatty have joined forces to educate motorists about new legislation aimed at improving highway safety and efficiency.

Under the legislation, known as the "Quick Clearance" Act, motorists involved in a minor, non-injury accident on a highway are required to move their vehicles to the shoulder of the road as soon as possible.

As part of the same legislation, law enforcement officials are now also authorized to remove without liability commercial truck cargo and other personal property interfering with traffic flow. This

allows incident management personnel to more quickly clear spilled cargo from the highway and restore traffic flow. In the past, concerns about liability sometimes caused delays in removing cargo.

Studies show that for every minute a freeway lane is closed, it takes four minutes for traffic to recover. They further show that during these backups nearly 30 percent of all highway crashes occur.

The "Quick Clearance" Act is part of House Bill 1140 and became effective Oct. 1.

To further enhance safety on the state's highways, officials remind motorists that under what is being called the "Move Over" Law, they are required to

move over to the farthest lane of travel when approaching any emergency vehicle with its lights flashing on a four-lane highway. Motorists should continue traveling in that lane at a reduced speed until safely clear of the emergency vehicle.

Motorists on two-lane roads should also slow down and use caution when passing a parked or standing emergency vehicle. Failure to do so is considered a traffic violation and could result in a \$100 fine.

Signs will be posted along highways to remind motorists to "move over" and quickly clear minor incidents from the highway. The departments have also produced an informational advisory on these laws.

Former Redskins' trainer dies

BOB MONTGOMERY
The Daily Advance

Joe Kuczo may not be the most famous name in Washington Redskins football lore, but the former Hertford resident who died last Tuesday at 89 was the trainer behind the scenes for 25 years.

Some of those years were spent working with legendary head coaches like George Allen and Vince Lombardi.

Kuczo's career spanned five decades from the 1940s to 1980s, and he spent much of his time as Redskins trainer from 1962 to 1987 away from family and friends in Hertford. But when not on the field or in the training room, his heart was in Hertford.

"He loved it. It was so much different from D.C.," his nephew Allen Lassiter, 49, of Hertford said Saturday. "He loved looking at the rural life through a microscope — the simple people and country people. That's where he got a lot of his strength. He loved the fresh air."

Kuczo lived a long and happy life, but his health and ability to tell stories deteriorated in recent years, said Sharee Wilder, executive director for the Carolina House assisted care facility in Elizabeth City. Kuczo lived his last years there with his widow, Rosa Louise Lassiter Kuczo, who still lives there.

"When I think of him, I think of the word 'gentleman,'" Wilder said Saturday. "He didn't brag. He was very humble. He felt honored when people mentioned his accomplishments."

One accomplishment that stands out, according to Lassiter, is when Kuczo got Redskins quarterback Sonny Jorgensen ready to play for a big game when Jorgensen was sidelined with cracked ribs.

"They came to Joe and said, 'We need Sonny in the game,'" Lassiter said.

"Everyone knew Sonny had been hurt."

Kuczo designed a special full body cast that allowed Jorgensen to move with relatively little pain. The idea had been unheard of at the time, Lassiter said.

"When they put him in the game, he was hit hard a couple of times, but the cast held up," he said.

The next day, Kuczo received calls from other teams around the league.

Kuczo was born in Wallingford, Conn., the son of immigrant parents from Hungary. He was interested in health and medicine, but didn't go to college.

Instead, he learned on his own. As a medic in the Navy medical corps in World War II, he treated thousands of injured soldiers.

After the war, he became head trainer at Georgetown University from 1946 to 1962, then joined the Washington Redskins as head trainer. There, as trainer and retired trainer, he was part of the 1984, 1988 and 1992 Super Bowls.

He received numerous awards for his service, including the game ball when the Redskins clinched the East Division crown on Dec. 3, 1972. He was inducted into the Georgetown University Athletic Hall of Fame and in 1990 received the Washington Hall of Stars First Special Recognition Award.

Lassiter said Kuczo had many fond memories, but former legendary head coach Vince Lombardi, who led the Redskins for a year in the late '60s after coaching the Green Bay Packers, stood out from the rest.

Once when a Redskins player fell hard after a collision in practice, Lassiter said Kuczo ran out onto the field to tend to the player.

"Joe got up to help the guy, and Lombardi said, 'Joe, leave him alone. Let him get up and run,'" Lassiter said.

That night during team

dinner, Lombardi came up to Kuczo and apologized.

"Lombardi said he got carried away and made a mistake, and he apologized," Lassiter said. "That was unheard of."

Lassiter said Kuczo had a full life and led by example.

"He was a mentor to everyone around him," Lassiter said. "Everybody can talk the talk, but Joe walked the walk every day. He never deviated from his principles."

Wilder said Kuczo at the Carolina House was a soft-spoken man, and that "when he spoke, you would listen."

"He will really be missed," Wilder added.

Kuczo will be featured in a "Life Experience" advertisement that features special elderly people who have served as mentors. The campaign is being run by Southern Assisted Living Inc. of Chapel Hill, which operates 47 assisted care facilities, including Carolina House.

The campaign, produced by Hoyt-Hamilton marketing consultants in Raleigh, will be featured over the next several weeks in regional magazine editions of "Time," "Newsweek," "Good Housekeeping," and other publications.

HOLIDAY WEATHER

THURSDAY
High: 61
Low: 36
SUNNY

FRIDAY
High: 59
Low: 44
SHOWERS

SATURDAY
High: 66
Low: 53
FEW SHOWERS