



IN THE BIG LEAGUES - Bessemer City pitcher Kevin Millwood sits in the Atlanta Braves bullpen during Sunday night's game with the Philadelphia Phillies at Turner Field. Millwood made his major league pitching debut with the Braves Monday night, going two innings in relief and getting the win in a 10-6 win over the Phillies. (Photo courtesy Rev. Oscar Stalcup).

A DREAM COME TRUE

Bessemer City's Millwood winner in his major league debut with Atlanta Braves

A lifetime of dreams and hard work came to fruition for Bessemer City's Kevin Millwood Monday night when he pitched his first major league baseball game for the Atlanta Braves in Atlanta's Turner Field.

Millwood worked two innings of relief and was the winning pitcher in the Braves' 10-6 win over the Philadelphia Phillies. Many area fans made the trip to Atlanta to see their favorite son pitch, and many others were glued to their TV sets.

With Atlanta trailing 6-1, the 22-year-old former Bessemer City High star who signed with the Braves on his graduation night in 1993 entered the game in the top of the fifth inning. He struck out the first batter he faced, and went on to retire the Phillies in order.

He ran into some trouble in the sixth inning when the Phillies loaded the bases with one out, but he was able to retire the side on two straight fly balls to the outfield and finished his performance giving up just one hit, walking one and striking out two.

A grand slam home run by Millwood's battery mate, catcher Tim Spehr, brought the Braves to within 6-5 in the bottom of the fifth; and a grand slam home run by left fielder Ryan Klesko in the bottom of the sixth gave Millwood the victory.

While Millwood and Braves Manager Bobby Cox were extremely pleased with Kevin's major league debut, their joy probably couldn't compare with that of Millwood's mother, Kathy Coplen, who has seen him live his baseball dream since he first started playing T-ball in Bessemer City years ago.

Mrs. Coplen, who works at Heilig-Meyers Furniture Company in Kings Mountain, and her husband Bill Coplen, who still live in Bessemer City, were sitting behind the batter's box along with Kevin's father and his wife, Michael and Sally Millwood of Charlotte. Kevin's sister, Erica Nixon, and his grandmother, Sally V. Marshall, were among numerous others here watching on TV.

Describing her joy was not easy for Mrs. Coplen.

"I just don't think I can put it into words," she said. "It's just like seeing a lifetime come to one point. You have a lot of emotions coming together. It's just fantastic to see your son do something he's wanted to do his whole life."

"It was just one great big emotional YES!"

The Coplens and Millwoods weren't sure their son would pitch when they made the trip to Atlanta, but thought he might since two other pitchers who were called up from Richmond last Saturday with Kevin had seen relief duty the night before.

Mrs. Coplen's heart fluttered when Kevin came out of the bullpen to pitch the fifth inning.

"On the first pitch I was just trying to keep from crying," she said. "I knew this was something he had planned for so many years. I knew it was his big moment and I just wanted to be there for him. He knew we were there and he made it his game, so that was great."

After Spehr's grand slam brought the Braves to within one run and they knew Kevin would be lifted after his second inning of work, Mrs. Coplen said the people in her group were "hoping and praying" that somehow the Braves would take the lead and put Kevin in a position to get the win.

"Kevin said when Tim Spehr hit his home run that he felt like running the bases with him," Mrs. Coplen said. "We said a few more prayers that somebody else would do it, too."

The night was so special that the Coplens and Millwoods couldn't break away from Kevin until 2 a.m. Tuesday, getting home at 5 a.m. just in time to go to work.

Asked Kevin's reaction to the win, Mrs. Coplen said, "He really didn't put it into words. He said it was just one fantastic feeling to be where he wants to be. He did a good job and he felt good about the way he pitched."

"When we started to leave he pitched me the game ball and said, 'take this home and put it with my other stuff.' Then he handed me a letter that he had gotten a few days earlier for being named the International League Pitcher of the



Gary Stewart
Editor

Week for July 7-13 and told me to put it in my scrapbook. I didn't even know he had gotten that."

Millwood's road to Atlanta took a quick turn after he was promoted from Double-A Greenville, SC to Triple-A Richmond of the International League on June 11. Millwood compiled a 5-0 record and 2.08 earned run average at Richmond as a starting pitcher. He pitched six innings in a Richmond victory in Ohio Thursday night and then was notified Saturday morning that he was being promoted to Atlanta. He arrived in Atlanta Saturday night and suited up for the first time Sunday night.

Millwood was on the 40-man Braves' spring training roster but was assigned to Greenville when the parent club had to trim to 25 players to start the regular season. He had gotten to know a lot of the Braves players in the spring.

"He says the Braves are like family, and Kevin has always been a family person," his mother said. "A lot of the players have big names and make big money, but he said they treat you like a human being."

Mrs. Coplen doesn't plan any quick trips to Atlanta over the next few days, but she said she and other family members and friends are making plans to fly to Chicago July 22 when Kevin is scheduled to start against the Cubs.

"I told him I would be there when he threw his first pitch in the major leagues, and I would be there when he makes his first start," she said, "then I would have to knuckle back down to work."

Other Millwood and Braves fans from the area were in the stands Monday night, including Rev. Oscar Stalcup and his wife, Linda, Jerry and Gloria Facemyer of Kings Mountain, and Todd and Amy Stalcup.

Rev. Stalcup, pastor of Kings Mountain's Foursquare Gospel Church, said he was being treated by family and friends on his 53rd birthday, and seeing a hometown boy make his major league debut and also get the victory was the perfect birthday present. Stalcup said he coached Millwood on a Bessemer City little league All-Star team when Kevin was 10 years old.

The Stalcups and Facemyers had seats near the Atlanta bullpen and were given special permission on Sunday to go to the bullpen and talk with Millwood and take his picture.

"When we arrived Sunday for the game, Kevin had been suited up and was in the bullpen, and upon telling the ushers who we were and who Kevin was they allowed us to go down to the bullpen, even though it's against normal rules and regulations," Rev. Stalcup said. "Of course we were real proud of him, knowing him in his little league days, junior high days and high school days, and the progress he has made during his pro career."

Stalcup said he had been told by Steve Neal of Bessemer City that Kevin had been promoted to the Braves Saturday night, so when friends and family asked him what he wanted for his birthday his wish was to go to Atlanta and see the Braves play.

"When we were talking to Kevin in the bullpen Sunday, Todd asked him what he thought about all of this and he had a big smile on his face, raised his eyes and just kind of shook his head," Rev. Stalcup said.

It's hard for someone to express his dreams in one sentence, but area baseball fans who have watched as Kevin Millwood has followed his dream feel deep down inside that he will be in the major leagues for a long time.

Sport Briefs

Midnight Madness August 1 at KMHS

Kings Mountain High will open its preseason football practice on Friday, August 1, and a part of the day's activities will be the popular Midnight Madness which begins at 10 p.m.

As a part of the opening day of practice this year, the football players and coaches will be fed by community supporters and fans will have an opportunity to "Meet the Mounties." In addition, the Booster Club will sell hats, shirts and other items, and renew memberships and parking passes.

In addition, the club will raffle off tickets to Carolina Panthers football games. For one dollar donations, fans will get a shot at blocks of two and three-seat Panther tickets.

Football season tickets on sale at High School

Season tickets for 1997 Kings Mountain High School home football games are on sale at the Principal's Office at KMHS.

Season tickets for the six home games are \$25, a savings of \$5 off the gate prices. Season tickets also entitle the holder to an assigned seat in front of the press box. Single game tickets are \$5 each.

KMHS home games this year are against East Gaston on August 29, Bessemer City September 5, Crest September 26, Freedom October 3, R-S Central October 17 and North Gaston November 7.

To purchase season tickets see Sandra Bumgardner in the Principal's office or Coach Ron Massey in the field house.

Duck R Us force tie in duckpin bowling loop

Ducks R Us knocked off previous leader Duck Dodgers 6-2 Tuesday night to force a tie for first place in Mixed Duckpin Bowling League action at Dilling Heating.

Ducks R Us and Duck Dodgers now share first place with 26-22 records, followed by the Holy Rollers at 24-24 and Split Makers at 20-28.

Chuck Ruley bowled a 147 line and 367 set to lead Ducks R Us to victory despite a 143 line and 380 set by the Duck Dodgers' R.W. Hullender.

John Dilling's 115 line and Irene Ruley's 309 set led the Holy Rollers over the Split Makers. Mark Abernathy led the Split Makers with a 116 line and 321 set.

KM's Smith fourth in Hospitality 100

Kings Mountain's Freddy Smith finished fourth in the Hospitality 100 HAV-A-TAMPA Dirt Racing Series race Saturday night in Jackson, MS.

Donnie Moran took first place and the \$15,300 winner's purse. Ronnie Poche was second and Mike Boland third.

Smith picked up \$4,250 for his effort.

Smith, recent winner of the HAV-A-TAMPA series race at Cherokee Speedway in Gaffney, SC, is still third in the National Point Standings with 2,892 points. Billy Moyer leads with 3,196, followed by Wendell Wallace with 3,027.

The HAV-A-TAMPA series goes to Carter County Speedway in Olive Hill, KY, Thursday and Florence Speedway in Florence, KY, Friday.

Racing results

(Results of Saturday night's racing at Antioch Speedway in Morganton).

Limited sportsman - Tim Smith, Bruce Huffman, Russell Kraul, Richard Fowler, Herman Mooney.

Modified Four - Tim Bristol, Trent Chatham, RamRod LaFavers, Danny Smith, Bob Freeman.

Super Stock Four - Doug Hastings, Cole Beal, Travis Stump, Danny Abernathy, Roy Bean.

Pure Stock V-8 - Eddie Roane, Steve Bridges, Ellis Anderson, Donald Hatley, Marvin Waters.

Stock Four - Chad Dale, Dwayne Cline, Jeff Hudgins, Tinker West Jr., Brian Swicegood.

Pure Stock Four - Trevor Chatham, Steve Wellman, Joe Dupuis, Johnny Deal, Roy Elliot.

Lace Race - Pam Dupuis, Angie Chatham, Jennifer Phillips, Jeanine Dupuis, Penny Chatham.



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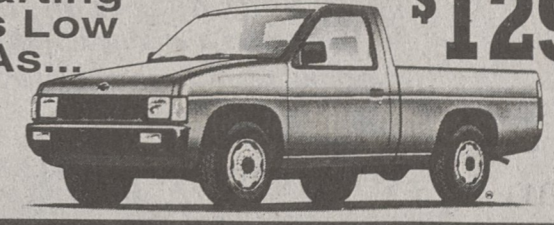
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