

Gibson going into Hall of Fame

(First of a four-part series on the 2003 inductees to the Kings Mountain Sports Hall of Fame).

By GARY STEWART
Editor of The Herald

Since he was a kid growing up on the northern end of the city, some of Barry Gibson's happier times have been spent with a baseball in his hand.

The former high school and college pitching standout, and retired Kings Mountain educator and coach, will likely continue to be giving pitching and hitting tips as his young grandchildren Gibson and Harrison get into the sport.

For his many years of association with the sport Gibson will be inducted into the Kings Mountain Hall of Fame at the 16th annual ceremony Saturday, May 17 at 6 p.m. at the H. Lawrence Patrick Senior Life & Conference Center. Tickets are \$10 each and are available from any member of the Hall of Fame committee.

Gibson's first association with baseball came in the early 1950s in pick-up games around the neighborhood, and like most kids his first taste of organized ball was in little league.

From that point throughout his playing and coaching careers he appreciated the influence that people, especially friends, teammates and coaches, had on his life. People like little league and pony league coaches Jim Conner, Willie Grice and Major Loftin, high school and legion coaches Jake Early and Fred Withers, and college coaches Walt Cornwell and Skip Downs came immediately to mind. Perhaps the coach that meant the most to him was his high school assistant, Bud Bumgardner, whom Gibson inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1995 after Bud lost a long and courageous fight with cancer.

Gibson, who posted a 140-108-1 record with two conference championships in 13 years as head coach at KMHS, credited most of that success to good players and Bud Bumgardner.

"Bud helped me in some of my most successful years," he said. "If you would look back you'd see there's a direct connection between those successful years and having Bud as my assistant coach. He played an important role but he always shied away from the credit he was due.

"We got along so great as coaches because we both learned our baseball from the same two people - Fred Withers and Jake Early. Bud was about five years older than me and we never got to play together, but we were always on the same page as coaches, teaching the same set of fundamentals and the same philosophy of the game."

Gibson's philosophy could be summed up in one word: discipline. He believed in having fun on the field, but he also believed in doing the fundamentals right. He expected his players to give a hundred percent on and off the field.

Gibson turned out some good athletes during his coaching tenure from 1971-73. His 1975 and 1980 teams, with 14-4 and 21-5 records, respectively, won their conference championship and the 1980 team played for the State Championship. Six times in those 13 years, Gibson was voted by his peers as the Southwestern Conference Coach of the Year.

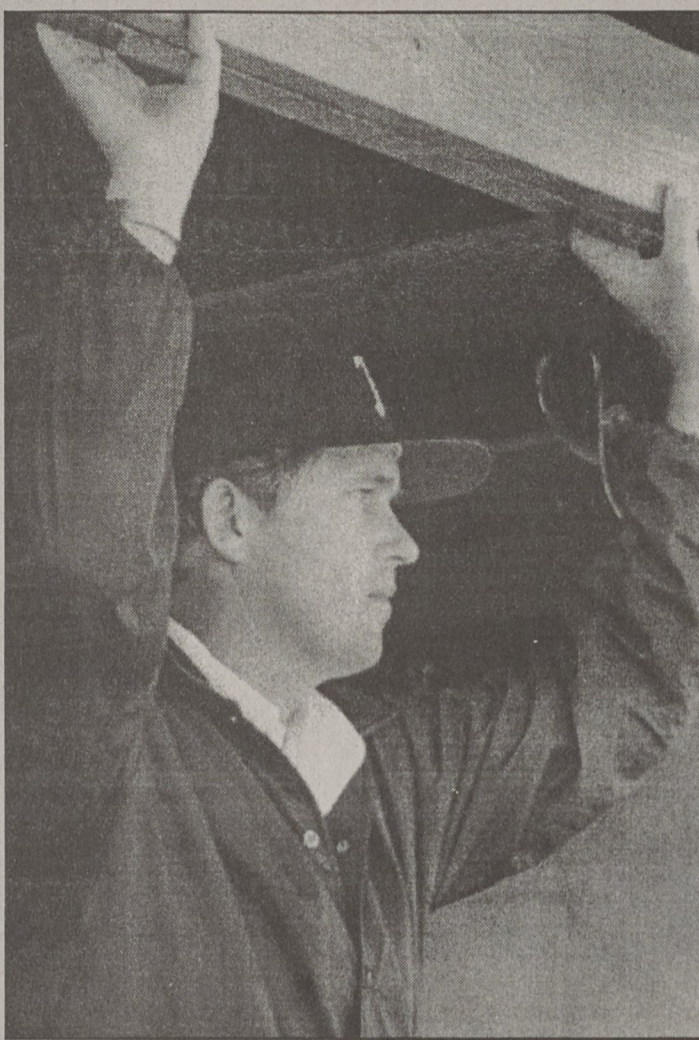
But he takes none of the credit for the Mountaineers' success.

"I always had a bunch of great kids to work with, and I'm sure I gained more from the young men than what I gave to them," he says.

He says his wife, Susan, and daughters Mary Elizabeth and Jennifer Ann deserve their own awards for putting up with him during his coaching career.

"I always tried to leave baseball on the field when I went home," he said, "but I'm sure there were times when I took it home with me and put it too high on my priority list."

Gibson said all of his teams were special but, of course, the championship years are more easily remembered.



Barry Gibson played and coached baseball at Kings Mountain High School.

"Both the '75 and '80 teams were special," he said, "but not just because we won championships and got into the playoffs. At the beginning of such a season there's always a special feeling that you get and even the players sense that it's going to be a good season. It happened both times. It was almost like they weren't going to be denied."

The '75 team, led by slugger David Lancaster and pitchers Richard Gillespie and Chuck Austin, edged a very strong Shelby team for the SWC crown. Back in those days, only the conference champion advanced to the State playoffs. Kings Mountain lost in the playoffs to Marion.

In '80, the Mountaineers rolled through the SWC and won the Western NC championship before losing two straight games to Greene Central in the best-of-three State Championship series.

"I especially remember Tim Leach (pitcher) and Lyn Hayes (catcher) were natural born leaders and really helped Bud and me a lot because they kept some of the other players in line," he said. "We had some younger players who were good ball players but had a streak of hot dog in them, and Lyn and Tim kept them in line pretty good and the players respected them for that."

Gibson left coaching after the 1983 season to go into administration.

Gibson helped Fred Withers' 1963 Mountaineer team win the school's first conference championship in 22 years. He posted a 4-0 record and was MVP on a team that featured a talented three-man pitching rotation that also included Jackie Hughes and Bo Goforth. Gibson and Goforth would later hook-up as opponents in college - Gibson at Lenoir-Rhyne and Goforth at Appalachian. His senior year at L-R, Gibson went 5-1 and was voted the school's most outstanding spring athlete.

"I remember that '63 team well," Gibson said. "We had players like Jim Leigh, Richard Gold, Pat Murphy, Charles Goodson, Louis Cook, Richard Little and Henry Hilliard. We had a good, cohesive unit."

Kings Mountain won the conference title on the last night of the season, thanks to Gibson's 2-hit, 13-strikeout performance against Belmont. On the same night, R-S Central was beating Shelby to break a tie between KM and Shelby for first place.

The Mountaineers went on to play Hickory in the first round of the playoffs, and lost by a run.

"Hickory had a good ball team and it was just their night," recalled Gibson, who was called on to relieve in the late innings. "Baseball's a funny game. It seems like any team can beat any other team on a given day, and that's what happened that night. We had just as good or better team, but it was their night. Still, we were glad to get that far because it had been over 20 years since Kings Mountain won a conference championship. Coach Withers retired from coaching after that season and that was a good way for him to go out."

As a coach, Gibson said it's difficult to remember everyone, but he was asked who were some of his best players in different categories.

Defense - Robbie Moore, who played for Gibson at Kings Mountain Junior High and was later on his first three teams at KMHS.

"He had the best glove and quickest hands and quickest feet of any infielder I ever had, bar none," Gibson said. "He was amazing in the infield."

Gibson also remembers Moore starting out his senior season getting a hit in his first 12 at-bats. Moore, a Baptist minister, will induct Gibson into the Hall of Fame.

Best natural swings - David Lancaster, who slugged 11 home runs as a first baseman on Gibson's 1975 championship team, and catcher Scott Ellis, who played in the mid-to-late 1970s. Both were left hand hitters.

Best hustlers - Darrell Van Dyke, a center fielder in the early to mid-70s who went on to play with Moore at nearby Gardner-Webb College. Van Dyke is now the coach at East Gaston High, where he has over 200 career wins; and David Ray Robinson, a pitcher-infielder who went on to become the leader of the Western Carolina University mound staff in the early 1980s and who has spent most summers since coaching recreation league and AAU baseball in Kings Mountain.

"I always liked the kids that hustled," he said. "I don't care if their ability was limited. I would take a player who had that limited ability and who hustled any day over somebody that had ability and wouldn't put out. I think most coaches are that way."

If he could give advice to coaches today, Gibson said it would be that "fences make good neighbors. Always be aware and appreciative of fan support but never let it interfere with the decision you make as a coach. Always be your own man without attaching strings."

And, if he could give advice to the fans, he said it would be to "let the coaches coach and the players play."

"There's been some changes in high school sports, and I'm afraid there's more aspects of school sports where the line has been blurred a little bit," he said. "When I came along and played and during my coaching career, everybody knew their role. Today some of those lines have been blurred. I don't like to see some of the attitudes we sometimes see in the stands. I'm not only talking about Kings Mountain, but in school sports in general almost anywhere in the nation."

Upon being notified of his election into the Hall of Fame, Gibson was obviously surprised but very grateful.

"I'm humbled, I really am," he said. "I'm shocked. It's nice to be among all the others that have gone in before me, and it's a nice way to top things off."

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