

A COACH'S JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME BEGAN ON THE FIELD 30 YEARS AGO



I went to watch my two younger brothers play a Little League game at Stancill Park one Saturday morning, and wound up coaching kids just like them over the next 30 years.

Those three decades all came together last month. The Senior Softball team for 15-16-year-old girls, that I was just happy to be a part of, won the District 5 Championship, the Maryland State Championship and traveled to Worcester, Mass., for the East Region, the last step before the World Series.

As best I can tell, no Havre de Grace team before 2008 had won a state Little League championship. This year, not only did the 15-16-year-old girls win one, but also the 10-11-year-old girls softball team won one. The 10-11s won the first District 5 Championship 15-year history of Havre League Softball.

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A few days later, our team won the second. We won the race for the first state title, getting ours in Waldorf the day before they got theirs in Chesapeake City. We didn't expect any of it. After years of getting pounded when our softball program was just getting started, then years of narrow misses and heartbreaking losses, none of us dared let on just how much we wanted to win one of those white Maryland District 5 Champion banners trimmed in dark blue. But all of us, some more than others, wanted one.

And we got it. There were a lot of demons of 30-something to nothing losses and just as many close tournament losses that these girls exorcised July 15 at Stancill Park with their 11-1 win over Elkton in the District 5 Championship game. This was for all the coaches, who, over the years, helped build the softball program - folks such as Steve Allers, Keith Bloch, Karen Cornett and her dad, Herb, Dave "Pee Wee" Glenn, Greg and Randy McRoberts, Fred Ripken, Larry Strong, Chad Tate, Debbie Thompson and many, many others. And for all of those players, too numerous to mention, who helped Havre de Grace Little League grow and, eventually, prosper.

All of this doesn't mean much to some people. It is, after all, just Little League. But Little League is important to many kids and grownups, letting them be part of something positive. What I see at

Stancill Park are kids having fun, playing hard and playing together. Sure, it isn't that way all of the time with all of the kids, but it's true of so, so many of them.

Sitting in a frame on my desk at work is an 8x10 print signed four years ago by 12 girls, who had suffered the toughest of losses, giving up two runs in the bottom of the last inning of a District 5 Championship game.

I look at it often, and try to remember it always. This is what it says:

One Hundred Years From Now

It will not matter what kind of car I drove,

What kind of house I lived in,

How much money I had in my bank account,

Or what my clothes looked like.

But the world may be a little better

because I was important in the life of a child.

I have come to believe those words over those three decades that began on a Saturday morning in May of 1978. That's when the manager of the team my brothers were playing on showed up 15 minutes before game time, threw the equipment on ground, said "I quit" and left nine teenage boys wondering what came next. I looked around and wondered the same thing before realizing what came next was me. That's how I became a coach.

Coaching has given me great friendships and wonderful memories. I hope by being there, trying to do my best, I've helped some young people have the same the same enjoyment.

Pat, my beautiful bride for the past 25 years and my beautiful girlfriend for quite a few before that, has helped make so much of this possible. So have many, many others.

When I remember all of those who have coached with me — starting with my dad in the early years and Ernie Grady, Bob Johnson and Jim Crowe in the most recent years — I can't thank them enough for helping me grow as an adult leader, as a coach and as a dad.

When I think about all of those kids — boys in 13-15 baseball and girls in all ages of softball — I hope I did half as much for them as they did for me.

But that's the past. The present, as Sportswriter Dewey Fox so nicely presented it on these pages last week, is 11 girls doing what hadn't been dreamed of, yet alone done. The girls — in alphabetical order, Christy Ayres, Megan Appold, Ashley Crowe, Lindsey Gartside, Meredith Grady, Tiffany Green, Taylor Hendricks, Lauren Rogers, Mariah Ripken, Amber Thompson and Kristy Thompson — made it all happen, taking us where we've never been: to the District Championship, to the State Championship and to the East Region.

They have memories that will last a lifetime. They will always be able to say: "We won states!" The best way to describe what they accomplished, as I've told the girls, is "WOW!"

Susquehanna State Park has so much to offer

BY ROSE DiPAULA | Record correspondent

Many local people are familiar with Susquehanna State Park, but maybe not as familiar as they think.

Most people know the park boasts great access to the river, but did you know it also offers historic sites, more than 60 camping sites, hunting areas and nearly 17 miles of hiking trails?

The park is home to plenty of local history, with Native Americans having used the region for years. Most people would probably be surprised to learn Capt. John Smith, famous for his part in the legendary Pocahontas story and for putting Virginia on maps in Europe, explored the Susquehanna River in 1608, according to the park's Web site.

He seemed to like the river and the surrounding area so much, that he noted that "heaven and earth seemed never to have agreed better to frame a place for man's commodious and delightful habitation." He stayed and spent time with the Susquehannocks Native American tribe. From the beginning, the area was used for its natural resources such as wood, coal and farm produce.

Many historic locations and sites have been restored in the park. Rock Run Grist Mill is one of them. It was built in 1794 by John Stump, an owner of mills in Harford, Cecil and Baltimore counties. The mill is fully operational and houses displays of old farm equipment. On summer weekends, corn is ground into meal in a public demonstration.

"The grist mill is probably more popular than the other sites," park manager David Taylor said.

The Rock Run House sits on a hill overlooking the mill. The house is actually a mansion, with 14 rooms, and made out of stone.

Part of the Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal, built in 1836, runs between the river and the mill. The canal linked Havre de Grace with Wrightsville, Pa., and was used commercially until the late 1800s. The ruins of two canal locks are within park boundaries.

A little way up the river stands the Jersey Toll House, a building that used to cover a bridge over the river. The abutments of the bridge can still be seen in the river, though the bridge itself has long since been washed away.

"We are in the process of restoring our Toll House," Taylor said. "That's going to be our welcome center."

Just across the road from the Toll House is the Rock Run miller's house, which is a private residence for park personnel.

Steppingstone Museum has its base in a historic building, and it is also host to plenty of fun activities. A private, non-profit organization, the museum houses plenty of crafts and artifacts from the late 1800s and early 1900s. Tours of the house show off the sitting room, sleeping rooms and the kitchen. Safety guidelines and demonstrations for historic weapons are also available. The museum also offers a pavilion and space for weddings, receptions, reunions and other group

UP THE HILL

TED HENDRICKS | Record staff

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