

Larry Sullivan's

SPORT SIDE

Sights, Sounds Of A Season

Touching All The Bases: A dad and his tag-along clone, the latter some 20 years the younger, sit on the sparsely-crowded bleachers munching salted-in-the-shell peanuts on the sunlight, cool afternoon. The dad cracks the shell and pours the goodies out in his hand. The little one picks out the remains, sheds the red skin, and pops them in his mouth. Neither moves his eyes from their respective targets, the dad's on the field and the son's on his dad. Dad cheers a play, and so does son. In the very same manner.

Two ball players-to-be, attending a game perhaps not of their own will, make the time useful. They wind their way into the players' practice batting cage. There, they begin their search. Finding no stray balls or bats, they improvise. One removes his T-shirt, wads it up, and ties it in a knot. The other folds up an old folding chair that happens to be nearby. Suddenly, they have their necessary tools. One throws the shirt to the other, who then bats it with the chair. The game is on. It's almost as fun to watch as the real game going on.

Moms and dads make up the majority of the audience. This makes for a constant vocal battering, but of different avenues. Dads push for the home team to get down and dirty, to make the right plays, and throw to the right base. Moms wonder why other teams do such things to their son, like pitch the ball so fast, or dare catch his grounder or fly ball.

Girlfriends attend their boyfriend's baseball game, and boyfriends their girlfriend's softball contest. Those not playing also use the games for dating places. Hands are held on walks to and from the concession stand. Once seated, some share drinks and straws. Hands bump into each other when digging for popcorn. The same nacho dipped in melted cheese is munched on from different sides. There's a pause in the date because the girl wants to see how far the ball is hit.

The smell of fresh popcorn fills the air. It meshes with the sound of the kernels hitting the large metal cooker. There's no way around not securing a bag of the fresh stuff. As soon as possible.

A hot dog is a hot dog, except at the ball park. Then it's a delicacy. There's something about the combination that makes the slab of meat wrapped around a bun such a treat. Smother it with mustard, ketchup, a little slaw and some chili, and you've got a masterpiece. And never mind the

napkin.

In the dugout, piles upon piles of spent sunflower seeds have replaced the ugly site of tobacco spit. Players these days gorge themselves on the salted seeds. The ideal way is to put the entire shell in one's mouth and suck off the salt. Then move the item around in the mouth with the tongue to allow the teeth to crack open the shell. The seed then pops out. Spit out the shell and munch on the seed. Repeat as often as needed. Players usually fill their mouths with the seeds and then munch on them one at a time. They've got it down to such an art, they can field sharp grounders, spit out a shell and throw the batter out at first.

Bubble gum, though, probably still rules the diamond roost. Bubbles are blown while players field grounders, chase flies and bat. In fact, some of the best bubbles come with the pitch on the way. Now that's a sight.

Umpires usually join the fun. It's the only fun they have. A runner takes his lead off first. He takes off on a steal. The peg is made from the catcher. It's a bang-bang, catch-'em, tag-'em play at second. The out call is made so emphatically, the ump's gum flies from his mouth. The bubble at the end of the gum is still intact when it lands on the dirt infield. The player gunned down on the play pops it with his cleats on his way back into the dugout. And smiles.

The bases are jammed with runners. There are two outs. The score is tied. It's the last of the seventh. There's a full count on the batter. And here's the pitch. It's fouled off. The drama unfolds again. And again.

Coaches are constantly moving their boxes. A clap of the hands here, a nod there. Every move means something. The removal of his hat with one hand and the scratching of his head with the other? Nothing more than wondering what in the world his runner was thinking when the pick-off took place.

Changing venues, but not direction. The starter's pistol signalling the beginning of another track event.

The swoosh! of a driver making that rare solid connection with another tee shot. The pluck-a-pluck rattling of a birdie putt finding its mark.

The squeaking of tennis shoes rubbing across the court in quest of continuing the volley. The twang! of a ball racketting off a racquet for an ace.

What a season for sights and sounds. Camping Under An Infield Fly: This season wouldn't be complete without making mention of Mooreville's American Legion baseball team.

The beginning of the season is just over a month away. Whitey Meadows, the Moors' crafty veteran skipper, has already been seen at area games involving potential players. The move is on to recruit players. Those returning players who won't turn 19 years of age until on or after Aug. 1, have no worries. Those first-timers meeting the same age requirements, though, do.

Anyone interested in playing for the Moors, currently the reigning Southern Division and Area III champions, should make arrangements to do so as soon as possible. This means the securing of a birth certificate to assure eligibility.

Frank Owens is again the man tending to the team's red tape. Those players who have played before have their birth records on file. It's the first-time players who need to tend to this business. Now!

Post 66 will draw players from Mooreville, South Iredell, and West Rowan, depending on players' residences. Even with Statesville fielding a team this season, those players who played for the Moors last season will return. For more information, contact Owens, after 7 p.m., at 663-1590.

Driving Through The Fairway: This is the first true week of golf month. Remember that?

It begins Friday with the playing of the annual Shot in the Dark. There are as many as 18 teams aligned to play in the none-hole, after-hours affair. It is set to get underway around 8 p.m. at the Mooreville course.

It continues right into Saturday, with the staging of the annual BPW Club one-day captain's choice outing. It, too, will be held at the local municipal course.

And throughout this weekend, some of the premiere amateur talent in the state will be in the area competing in the yearly Mooreville Jaycees Invitational at Mallard Head. There is a more-than-capacity field of 60, two-man teams entered in the two-day, best-ball field. There's no telling just how good the best-balls will be for the winners. Good golfing for all!

Pitching, Hitting, Scoring, 3-0 Red Imps Doing It All

You name it, Mooreville Junior High's baseball team has done it.

And all within less than two weeks of the season. After three games, the Red Imps are off to a fast, 3-0 start overall and in Tri-County Conference play, cashing in on their pitching, hitting and scoring to win in three different manners.

The Imps began the season by out-scoring its opposition in an 11-6 conquest of Corriher-Lipe. Then last week, in a two-day span, Mooreville first rode the one-hit pitching of Peter Scire to a 10-0 cruise past Knox Junior High Thursday, after which it recovered from its first defeat of the season to card a 5-3 decision over host China Grove Friday afternoon.

Combined, it gives the Imps of head coach Rick Spielman that 3-0 record that puts them at the head of the TCC class.

"Besides the obvious," noted Spielman, "we're playing well. We're doing what we have to do, when we have to do it. It's been a little bit of everything. And it's been fun."

It's been particularly fun for Scire, who has collected all three pitching wins, two in starting roles and the third in relief. It was a starter and reliever that he figured in on both decisions last week.

Friday at China Grove, in a game postponed from an earlier date, Scire came on in the fifth inning, after the Imps had seized the lead for the first time in the top of the inning, and held the hosts at bay to notch his third win.

Michael Park started and worked the first four innings, leaving trailing 3-1.

China Grove had opened the scoring with two runs in the second and a single scratch in the third stanza before the visitors began their comeback with a single tally in the top of the fourth.

Junior High grabbed the lead for good with three runs in the

fifth and added an insurance run in the sixth.

Scire benefitted from the uprising to pocket the win, his first as a reliever.

At the plate, the guests whacked out eight hits, including four for extra bases.

Scott Hagger belted his team-best second home run, while Ryan Byers batted a pair of doubles. Scire also delivered a two-base hit.

Ryan Whittington smacked two singles, while Park and Heath Hipp each clubbed a safety.

Whittington, the catcher, also keyed the defense by throwing out three runners each at second and third.

At home to host Knox Thursday, Mooreville kept its homefield unbeaten streak intact — improving it to 2-0 — by riding the pitching of Scire.

Scire allowed but a third-inning single while gong the distance and hurling the shutout.

In a game shortened to five innings by a league 10-run lead rule, Scire chalked up all but one of the 15 outs via strikeouts, finishing with 14 whiffs.

In his defense, the Imps struck for a pair of runs in the first, piled up five runs in the second, added a single run in the fourth, and plated the final two runs in the fifth to complete the shutout.

Hager bashed a home run and a triple to lead the assault from the plate. Second baseman Greg Edwards, who leads the team in

putouts after riling up five in the game, and Byers each ripped a pair of safeties, while Scire slashed a double, and Vince Vavrunek slapped a single.

Junior High was tabbed to travel to Erwin Monday afternoon, but that game was postponed by wet grounds.

As a result, the Imps return to play this (Wednesday) afternoon with a home game against league foe North Rowan.

Game time is set for 4 p.m. on the Moor Park field the Red Imps call home.

Vikings Finish In Second, Vikettes Third In Track

South Iredell's girls and boys track teams warmed up for this week's annual Iredell County meet by participating in a tri-school meet on the same track and field facility late last week.

At the home of the Vikings and Vikettes have some more warming up to do.

The Vikes fashioned a second-place finish, and the Vikettes finished third, in a Foothills Athletic Conference outing hosted Thursday afternoon by Statesville.

Statesville will also serve as the host for this week's annual county attraction.

South's boys rang up 56 points to finish in between meet champion Statesville, with 87 points, and third-place Wilkes Central, which picked up 40 points.

South's girls, though, finished third with 22 points. Statesville also finished as the winner, with 95 points, while Wilkes Central collected 58.

Both South Iredell teams will join teams from Mooreville, Statesville, West Iredell and North Iredell in competing in the annual countywide event later this week, to be held on Statesville's track facility tomorrow (Thursday).

For the Vikings, they picked up four first-place finishes and added seven seconds to boost their effort last week.

Elmer Barlow topped the field in the 110 high hurdles, while Terry Ikard accounted for a gold medal with the best time in the 400-meter dash. Mike Heagans wound up with a first-place showing in the 800-meter run. South's four-man, 1,600-meter relay team also crafted a top finish overall.

South's Vikes added second-place showings in the high jump, triple jump, 800 and 400 relays,

400 dash, 300 hurdles, and 200-meter dash to further complement their effort.

For the Vikettes, long distance running ace Christie Hicks kept them from being shutout in the mile, and ribbon team. She topped the opposition in both the 3,200 and 1,600 meter runs to account for both Lady Viking first-place finishes.

The Lady Vikes also turned in second-place efforts in the discus and 400-meter dash.

In addition to serving as the two squads' final tune-ups prior to competing in this week's county meet, Thursday's match also served as the team's final regular season FAC outing of the season.

Following participating in the day-long Iredell County Meet tomorrow, South Iredell will be open for a week before returning a third straight time to Statesville's facility to engage in the league-deciding conference meet.

That event will be held April 30, with Statesville once again serving as the host.

While regular-season competition counts, it's the league meet that means the most, as its results determine individual event champions as well as team championships in the conference.

South Iredell heads into the conference meet with Barber among the boys, and Hicks among the girls, as favorites to emerge as league champions in their respective favorite fields of competition.

In addition, several members of both teams have already reached distances in the field events, and times in the track ones, to qualify for upcoming statewide postseason play, set to take place in early May.

Proving Timing Is Everything, Devils Stay Among SD-7 Elite

Timing is everything in baseball.

Mooreville provided additional proof last week.

With one of their three games lost completely to rain, and another winning frequently by it, the Devils split decisions on the diamond but timed their performances so that the loss came in non-conference play while the win came against a fellow

Southern District Seven Conference member.

The week's first game, a crucial one against fellow second-place holder Malden, was called by rain after less than two innings Tuesday night, leaving it to be reset later in the season.

The Devils then ventured outside league borders to call on an even less favorable foe North Stanly Thursday night, where they suffered a 7-1 loss to the host Comets and former head coach Mark Quinn.

The following evening, on a night frequented by hard to light rain and drizzle, respectively, Senior High resumed league play by recovering from a 3-0 deficit entering the bottom of the first to escape with an 8-6 triumph over incoming West Lincoln.

The split decisions puts Mooreville's overall record at 7-4, but hikes its four-important conference record to the 4-1 level, entering this week's play.

"Friday's game was a crucial one for us," assured Joe Pinyan, in his inaugural season as the Devils head coach. "We were coming off a non-conference loss in which we just didn't hit the ball or play well. Then we had to come right back and play a conference game. It was a big one for us."

"The fact that we got down early," added Pinyan, "but battled back is a plus for us. It turned out to be just the kind of game that we needed."

But it surely didn't start that way.

Even with ace pitcher, in unbeaten senior Roy Frye, on the hill, Mooreville's couldn't prevent the visitors from jumping out to a 3-0 lead in the top of the

first.

But just as quickly, the hosts responded with four runs in the bottom of the inning to take a lead they would never lose.

The hosts, still among the league's elite near the midway point of the conference season, added a single run in the third and plated their sixth run in the fourth for a 6-3 advantage.

After West touched Frye for a run in the top of the fifth, the locals scratched for their final two runs in the last of the frame.

They proved vital, as the guests engineered one last thrust that generated a pair of runs in the seventh that accounted for the game's final margin.

Frye, roughed up early but who weathered the early punches to deliver the distance-going performance, racked up his fifth win of the season — all but one against league foes — against no defeats.

The senior righthander allowed the six runs, four of them earned, on nine hits with an even dozen strikeouts, the last three in setting down the side in the top of the seventh.

In the win, the Devils banged out seven hits, including four for extra bases.

Leadoff batter Daron Patterson clubbed a triple, which cranked up the rally in the first, and a double, while Otis Cowan and Decomba Conner each smacked a double. Cowan's two-bagger was a ground rule job that one-hopped the fence in left center.

Conner added a single to join Patterson with a pair of hits, while Frye and T.J. Goswick each gathered in a base hit.

At North Stanly Thursday night, Mooreville matched wits with its former coach's squad in a non-conference clash for both schools.

It marked the second of three times the two teams are to meet this season.

Quinn, who coached at Mooreville for five years before moving to North Stanly for his first season, guided his homestanding crew to the 7-1 win that earned his Comets a split so far of the

third in the 800 run.

For the Devils, they dominated the discus and shot put events, placing first and second in both.

In the discus, Thomas Cross placed first, followed in second by teammate Kelly Painter.

In the shot, the two reversed roles, with Painter taking the gold and Cross racking in the silver.

Wike Wingler accounted for a pair of third-place finishes, placing there in the 110 high, and 300-meter intermediate hurdles.

Mooreville was scheduled to host a three-school meet Monday, including Chase and Bantam, but that outing was postponed until later in the week.

As a result, both teams are scheduled to engage in the annual Iredell County Track Meet in Statesville tomorrow (Thursday).

All boys and girls track teams from the county, involving those from South Iredell, West Iredell, North Iredell and Statesville, will be competing in the yearly attraction.

Mooreville's teams return to competition at home April 23, in a two-team meet with North Meck.

Senior High is tabbed to appear in its final SD-7 regular season affair April 25, in a five-team meet with host Bessemer City, Newton-Conover, West Lincoln and Cherryville, before engaging in the postseason portion of its season.

The girls SD-7 meet will be held April 30 at Chase, while the boys championship meet will be held at Bunker Hill May 1.

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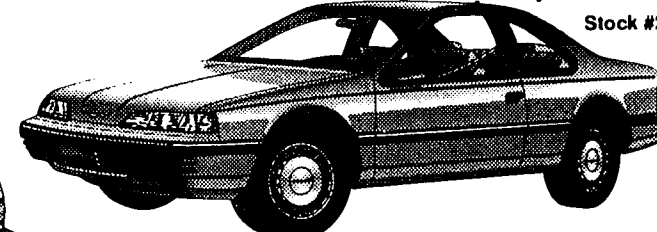
Through roughed up early, Frye recovers to deliver fifth win, stay unbeaten

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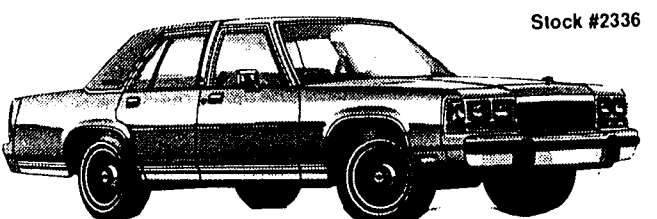
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