

Marion Babe Ruth Baseball opens 2020 season

By Sean Douglas

While most summer youth baseball and softball leagues chose to cancel their seasons due to COVID-19, Tino Mitchener did everything in his power to make sure the Marion Babe Ruth League would continue as scheduled.

Mitchener eventually got the green light, and two weeks into his second season as the commissioner, he couldn't be more pleased with how everything has fallen into place.

For five hours a day, Monday through Thursday, Marion Babe Ruth Baseball gives Marion a glimpse of normalcy, and a reminder of simpler times in the form of a classic pastime.

"It's been absolutely awesome," Mitchener said of the first few weeks of the season. "Our first opening

night, there were more people here than I have ever seen probably since I was a kid. People have just been very excited. The kids have had a bunch of fun. Two weeks in, I couldn't be happier."

Despite several kids deciding not to play this summer, two of the League's four divisions have the same number of teams they had a year ago. The 12u division features six teams sponsored by Crest Lanes, STAR Bank, VIA Credit Union, the Marion Fire Department, the Marion Lions Club and IMG, while the coaches pitch division features teams sponsored by businesses such as State Farm, Fortress Federal Credit Union and 5-Star.

The 10u and softball divisions are both down one team, but the influx of players from Oak Hill and Mis-



Marion's 12U team played last Thursday at Lincoln Field 1 and 2. Photo by Sean Douglas

sisinewa, among others, has helped to fill the void.

"Since sign ups ended in March, we've had 60 kids quit, and we have to replace those with Oak Hill and Mississinewa kids and some new kids that decided to come out and play," Mitch-

ener said. "We are down two teams, but considering what's happened this year, I'm not upset by that."

With COVID-19 still prevalent throughout the country, Mitchener had to take precautions in order to slow the spread of the dis-

ease, including asking people to remain six feet apart and bring their own chairs.

Despite the changes, however, it has not stopped fans from filling Lincoln Field four nights a week.

"Attendance has been out of this world," Mitchener

said. "It is jampacked in here every night. Monday is our busiest night, and then it kind of tapers off through the week, but every night is jampacked from 5:30 to 10:30 at night. We are very, very happy with the turnout."

HOF

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the Marion athletic director from 1962-1969. During his seven years at the helm, Caldwell completely changed the trajectory of the program, forming the foundation on which Giant athletics would be built.

Serving as a leader during the Civil Rights movement, Caldwell used his position of authority in a positive manner, bringing people together instead of driving them apart in a time of turmoil and unrest.

"He bridged that gap," McCord said. "You look at him serving in the military and serving in the Navy during World War II, being in the battles that he was in as a navy officer, I think that prepared



ART CALDWELL

him for education and prepared him for coaching. Art was one of those guys who helped Marion bridge that gap, and really assist leading the athletic program to not see color, but to see teammates."

After that, Caldwell led the Marion baseball program from 1970-1979.

While the team did not win any state championships during his coaching tenure, Caldwell helped to get the program on its feet and set it up for its future success. Upon his retirement in 1985, the baseball field at Marion High School was named after him, and the Giants still play on that

field today.

"He set the bar and began getting that program turned around to get it ready for the next level," McCord said. "I don't think you have a state championship banner hanging at Art Caldwell Field if not for Art Caldwell. Art laid the groundwork and the foundation for what the baseball program became in the '80s."

Like many of the coaches in this year's class, Caldwell connected with his players and students in a way that so few are able. Though he had a competitive fire about when he coached, he was fiercely loved by Aev-eryone he encountered, and his contribu-

tions to Marion High School will not soon be forgotten.

"He cared for kids, educated kids, and taught kids," McCord said. "He served our country right out of high school. At that time, when you had 17 and 18 year old kids going to fight a world war, at 18, I wouldn't have even dreamed of doing that. [Then, for him to come] back, get his education and his degree from Ball State and get into coaching and teaching and spend his life in education. That says a lot about him as a man.

"I think the legacy he leaves is one of integrity."

Post 10

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season," Hancock said after the contest had concluded. "Most of these guys have 25 games under their belt by now, and now, we're at seven. That's been our issue most of the year."

Though the two teams combined to score 10 runs, no runs were scored until after the fifth inning. Dixon played a major part in keeping the Muncie bats quiet in the early going, striking out nine batters and only allowing one hit in five innings.

Marion opened the scoring in the bottom of the sixth, taking advantage of three Muncie fielding errors. Despite loading the bases, however, the Bombers could only score one run.

Once Dixon left the mound, the Chiefs began to find their offense.

Muncie opened the seventh with a hit by pitch and a double, and after the Bombers recorded the next two outs, Chiefs' first baseman Jimmy Bowen put a ball in the gap between first and second base to score Tyler Gilland and Cam Pratt and take a 2-1 lead.

The Bombers responded in the bottom half of the inning, as four walks by Muncie pitching led to another run. However, Marion never grabbed the advantage again.

A two-run home run by Ayden Wilson in the eighth inning, combined with three more insurance runs in the ninth, helped the Chiefs secure the victory.

Tomlinson finished the contest 1-for-4 with a run scored, while Brayton Pat-



Josh Pluimer fires a pitch for Marion Post 10. Photo by Sean Douglas

ton and Stephon Simmons also scored a run apiece for Marion. Wilson finished 2-for-5 with two RBI for Muncie.

The Bombers will continue to play baseball throughout July, which includes a pair of tournaments at Taylor University in the upcoming weeks.

With more playing time,

Hancock believes that his team can be successful for the rest of the summer.

"We are just missing little spots, but I think game time will be the biggest thing," Hancock said. "There are things we have to do better. We have to get back to the basics. This is the early season. This is the beginning of the year, so there are things

we have to get used to.

"Going forward, getting at-bats are going to help. With each situation, we will get better and better. I think we have a good chance to compete in these tournaments. No matter what, the biggest focus for me is just getting out here and playing baseball."