

Last one out turn out the lights

Baseball ghosts will be dodging cars as field closes for intersection

By Robin Brinkley
The Virginian-Pilot

There must have been a good reason in 1959 for establishing Kempsville Pony Baseball at the intersection of Kempsville and Princess Anne roads.

But whatever it was has been fogged over in nearly five decades of massive growth and rush-hour traffic that creeps along like a game with two wild pitchers and a far-sighted ump.

KPB, which boasts more than 400 players ages 7 to 18, will move next spring to a site off Providence Road, making way for much-needed road improvements. The new intersection will re-route cars across what is now Field 1.

The league's new facility will feature on-site parking, a blessing for parents and players who must walk across four lanes of Kempsville Road to reach the current complex.

It will have permanent rest rooms instead of portable toilets, shiny aluminum bleachers instead of splintered wooden slats and grass infields.

Call it progress, if you must, but baseball, more than any sport, is steeped in tradition.

"When it's gone, it's going to be missed," said KPB president Frank Albero. "There is something about driving down Kempsville Road on a nice spring night with the (baseball) lights on."

Those lights have been a beacon for dozens of great players over the decades. Billy Paschall, a right-handed pitcher, spent parts of three seasons in the 1970s with Kansas City.

Outfielder D.J. Dozier played for the New York Mets and in the NFL.

Justin Jones, a left-handed pitcher, is in extended spring training awaiting assignment



"We're winning, we're winning!" exclaims Antonio Carrigan, 9, left, as he and other members of the Orioles, including Steven Robison, middle, raising arms, and Donovan Fabera, right, celebrate a lead in a Mustang division game at the current Kempsville Pony League field in Virginia Beach.

to a Washington Nationals farm team.

Dozier threw his only no-hitter at KPB when he was 14 or 15.

"I had this curveball, and there was a man in the stands – he lived right down the street – who'd yell, 'Throw that roundhouse.' It broke me up," Dozier said.

Five area high school baseball coaches – Kempsville's Paul Shows, Tallwood's Monty Hilliard, First Colonial's Scott Stubbe, Bayside's Jason Hatcher and Bishop Sullivan Catholic's Guy Hyatt – are KPB alumni.

Hatcher, 30, has fond memories of the former High's Ice Cream store that sits just beyond the left field fence – but not for reasons you'd expect.

"We used to try and hit fly balls on the roof and over it," said Hatcher, who played Colt and Palomino at KPB from ages 15 to 18. "I hit some over High's and in those trees in left-center field."

Hatcher is still a regular at KPB. His son Tyler, 9, plays for the Mustang Pirates.



Traffic builds near the Kempsville Pony League field. This is the last year the field will be used as a new one is being built.

"It's fun to go back," Hatcher said.

Stubbe, 34, began playing at KPB when he was 13. His first coach was Selby Ballance.

"He was a hard-nosed, in-your-face kind of guy," Stubbe said. "Scared the heck out of me."

Stubbe waxes nostalgic about those warm summer nights under the lights.

"We had good crowds, good parents," he said. "It felt like a

big-time atmosphere."

Except when someone hit a foul ball to the right side. Home plate on Field 1 is 43 feet from Kempsville Road, and vehicles routinely are in jeopardy of getting hit.

"It's amazing how many near-misses there were," Stubbe said. "In all the time I was there, I think, I only saw one car get hit."

KPB was one of Dozier's two favorite hangouts, along

Collecting memories

Kempsville Pony Baseball seeks to preserve its history of the intersection at Kempsville and Princess Anne roads by collecting stories and photos from families who have played there since 1959.

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with the Oceanfront.

"We played a game called 'cup ball' on the third-base side near the scoreboard," he said. "We'd ball up a cup and bat it around for hours.

"When we got older the girls became a little more visible. It was interesting to see which females were at the game."

This is Albero's 13th season at KPB and first as president. He no longer has children playing there, but considers it one big, happy family.

"I love this league and what it provides to players and families in Kempsville," he said. "There are several people like me on the board, who started by coaching their children on teams in the league and then got involved in the administration of the league."

Said Albero, "Some coach teams even though they don't have children in the league. Hopefully, we'll continue to develop players and coaches the way we have for many years."

The only difference is that it will be in a new location with nicer amenities. That appeals to parents of younger players with no tradition of attending games there.

"They come up, look around, and says it's a little rundown," said Albero.

But to the players themselves, it's no big deal.

"New fields will be nice," said Mason Zimmerman, 12. "But I don't mind the ones we have here. I just want to play baseball."

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