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ALERT

Halifax County residents keep diamond dreams alive in Old Timers League

DAVIN WILSON

Oct 18, 2022



Halifax County Old Timer's Baseball League Commissioner Tigie Day makes remarks as the four teams line up on the field during opening day ceremonies in 2016.

File photo

Professional tag player Hogan "Hoagie" Malloy once said, "We don't

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Okay, it was Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw, not a fictional character from the 2017 movie “Tag,” that penned the above-mentioned adage, but that doesn’t make it any less true.

Given the accuracy of the adage, Tim Alderson and his fellow members of the Halifax County Old Timers League need never get old.



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Every Sunday, two dozen or so “Old Timers” break out their crutches, knee braces and walking sticks and hit the diamond for baseball action. The aside being a joke as Alderson and his fellow teammates and league members only feel younger after playing.

“We get to feel like a kid again for two to three hours a week,” Alderson said laughing.

The league is currently comprised of four teams of 12-14 players, aged 40-67. Teams gather each Sunday — depending on weather and kids and grandkids’ schedules — for games that while might not always be close, are filled with spirited competition.

“I don’t think we ever lose our competitive spirit as we get older, we just compete in golf or other things we can still compete in.” Alderson said

physical abilities to do it. But I guarantee it, if they're on that ballfield, they want to win.”

Even the steeliest and most talented baseball players would balk a bit at the idea of playing baseball at 40-over. It's something Alderson hears on a constant basis when encouraging people to sign up. In fact, he hears it so much, he's developed a pretty convincing counter argument.

“I get players every year that say, ‘I'm not good,’ or ‘I can't contribute and don't really want to go out there and play if I can't contribute to the team,’” Alderson said. “I tell them, please come out, we need you. I tell them number two; all you have to be is better than your counterpart on the other team. Every team is going to have similar strengths and weaknesses but you just have to outperform your counterpart. At the end of the day, don't sit this out on the basis you don't think you can contribute because we need the numbers and everybody can have fun if they understand their roles in this.”

While by now we've all seen hiring signs hanging outside of businesses that read, “No experience necessary,” it's not often a phrase used or heard in sports. However, the saying applies for the Halifax Old Timers League and it's one of Alderson's favorite parts of the league.

“The thing I love more than anything about this league, if a guy wants to play baseball and has never played in his life, he's welcome,” Alderson said.

While the shop owner in Five Man Electrical Band's “Signs” may not have wanted to hire “long-haired freaky people,” Alderson and the rest of the players could care less as the league features players from all walks of life.

“We have black ballplayers, white ballplayers, we have 70 year old ballplayers, I think the oldest age is 67, we have 40 year old ballplayers. In 2019, we had a woman play. It really brings together a really diverse group of people,” Alderson said. “We’ve got a doctor, an investment advisor that probably pulls in over a million dollars per year, we have every socioeconomic group covered and everybody gets along.”

It was the same diversity that attracted Alderson to the league in the first place.

Jumping ship

Roughly 14 years ago, Alderson was competing in the adult league in Danville. While he still enjoyed playing and getting to be on the field and in the dugout with the boys, he soon found the league had lost its focus and ceased being fun.

“The league had really gotten to too competitive and I know that sounds crazy but it had gotten to the point where winning was what it was all about,” Alderson said. “I just thought they had lost their primary focus, what it needed to be and because of that, they just kept losing players and losing players.”

In order to remedy the situation, Alderson recalled league officials lowering the age requirements which led to the league becoming younger and younger by the minute, making it too competitive for some of the older players.

“When you take 20 year old’s and put them out there against 60 year old’s, it just comes to a point where the 60 year old’s are like, ‘Okay, I’m just out here, I’m not contributing, I’m pulling the team down instead

Alderson lives a stone's throw away from Halifax in Keeling and once he heard about the league in the county, he decided to jump ship and make the move East.

“It just seemed more attractive to me,” Alderson said. “There were more guys my age playing in the league and they were really about having fun and enjoying the competition and time with each other. They're still competitive and want to win, but the focus was more on having fun and the competition was more equal as far as age goes.”



A very personable guy, Alderson had no problems fitting in and despite being the age where most pitchers are retiring, found himself still able to get guys out at the plate when he was on the mound.

Three years later, he's not only enjoying playing, but serving as chairman of the league and as a scoreboard operator as well after rotator cuff surgery back in July has caused him to miss the rest of the season.

Razzing, rivalry among men, stay classy

In the 2015 comedy “Spy,” Jason Statham’s CIA agent Rick Ford tells

While Cooper, Fine and Ford are fictional characters, the “rivalry amongst men” is not as even guys that are best friends or brothers find themselves picking on or razzing each other, especially when it comes to competition.

According to Alderson, it’s the same in the Old Timers League.

“Absolutely, even people that don’t play anymore, guys that I’ve seen out at a restaurant or something, you speak, you kid, just like buddies do,” Alderson said laughing. “These are friends that are friends beyond the ballfield. We’ve ribbed each other off the ballfield when we run into each other.”

Of course, that doesn’t mean things don’t get carried away from time to time. However, baseball is considered a gentleman’s sport and like Ron Burgundy and the Channel 6 news team, Alderson and the rest of the guys always make sure things stay classy.

“There’s a ton of rivalry once the teams get entrenched in the course of the season,” Alderson said. “People always like to be the underdog and try to beat that team that always wins so internally, there’s a lot of rivalry but it’s friendly. A lot of banter back-and-forth. Does it get heated sometimes? Yes. It’s gotten ugly at points but we address it, let them know that’s not what we’re about here and that we all need to be sportsmen.”

Building community

Since the game’s creation, baseball and America have been synonymous with each other. Baseball has followed the history of this country and while both the game and the country have undergone massive changes

Just like baseball and America, Halifax County/South Boston has gone through their fair share of changes over the years.

However, the Old Timers League has been around since 1999, helping bring the communities together through America's National Pastime.

“A lot of the guys when you talk to them they say, ‘I just love being here in the dugout,’” Alderson said. “Just the baseball chatter and trying to figure out how we can win this game. Eleven, 12, 13 guys trying to figure out how to prevail just brings you together. It's that camaraderie, being together on a team, it just brings people together.”

Keeping memories, spirits alive

For a father and son, playing catch in the backyard and going to ballgames and eating gut-busting, cholesterol-raising red hot dogs is a childhood tradition.

While that tradition might fade with age, on both ends, a father watching their son(s) play baseball never gets goes away as Alderson and his brothers, who also compete in the league, found out.

“My dad was a faithful spectator when me and my two brothers were playing,” Alderson recalled. “He died in November but in October, even as a really progressed bone cancer patient, he made himself get out there and watch us whenever we played.”

Alderson also recalled the father of another league member, Jeff Irby, always being there to watch his son play. And like Alderson, Irby lost his dad not long ago either.

While not always easy, Alderson believes their dads are smiling down.

“I know my dad would not want me to give up playing baseball because he knows how much I love it,” he said. “He would expect me to continue playing as long as I could and I think others in the league see it that way. I know others who think, ‘Okay, mom’s not here anymore, dad’s not here anymore to see me, but they would be disappointed if I didn’t do this as long as I possibly can. So, does it help us process grief, maybe, I don’t know, it actually brings a little grief when you look and say, ‘Shucks, I wish dad was here to see that,’ but at the same time it helps you continue their memory.”

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http://www.yourgv.com/sports/prep_sports/emotional-moments-special-tributes-honor-gaby-bridgers-who-was-diagnosed-with-breast-cancer-in-february/article_73bf60a4-6a8c-11ed-be76-a3861a0d959f.html

ALERT

Emotional moments: Special tributes honor Gaby Bridgers, who was diagnosed with breast cancer in February

DAVIN WILSON

Nov 22, 2022



Gaby Bridgers poses with Halifax County High School Principal Kelvin Davis (left) and HCHS AD Justin Saunders (right).
Submitted photo

It was a trip Gaby Bridgers had made hundreds of times. The short walk from the parking lot behind Tuck Dillard Memorial Stadium into the friendly confines of the stadium home to the Halifax County Comets.

\$54

\$32.99

\$98.66

The support was just a small part of Halifax's Pink Out Game against Patrick County that also served as the Comets' Senior Night.



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As imagined, it was an extremely emotional moment for Bridgers who had been diagnosed with breast cancer in February.

“When I walked into the football stadium and saw all the signs that the students had made, it made me cry but in a good way,” Bridgers said. “Everyone had their pink sweatshirts on, the cheerleaders and coaches made me feel so loved.”

It was the perfect finish to a week that had started with a show of solidarity from Halifax's volleyball team in the form of the presentation of a t-shirt and a fundraising raffle that raised \$430 for the Halifax County Cancer Association.

“Volleyball totally blew me away too,” Bridgers said. “Both teams were all pinked out and everyone coming to watch had some type of pink on. Coach [Sunshine Martin] spoke and both teams had a beautiful shirt

^

“I had no idea cheerleading and volleyball were planning something in honor of me and raising money for the cancer association,” Bridgers said. “Those two days were amazing. I just grinned all day long. Cheer had sweatshirts made and volleyball had t-shirts. Both had made signs. We took a lot of pictures and I got so many wonderful hugs. Words just can’t describe how special I felt.”



Gaby Bridgers (back row, fourth from right) poses with her friends after the Pink Out game back in October.

Submitted photo



If Bridgers hadn't known about Halifax's sense of family before her diagnosis, she would've realized after.

"I say all the time HCHS is family, all of this is why it's so true," Bridgers said. "Not only does our school rally together but so does our community. The love and prayers is what got me through every day."

Life-changing news

Back in January, Bridgers received a call from her doctors at Centra Virginia Baptist's Breast Imaging Center in Lynchburg, Virginia. They had just gotten the results of her latest mammogram in and the news wasn't all good. While the doctors weren't sure, they found some abnormalities and wanted Bridgers to come back in for a biopsy.

Flash forward a few weeks later and Bridgers is back at the Lynchburg imaging center, sitting in another room, waiting patiently for the results of the biopsy to come back. A few minutes later, the doctors walked in and delivered life-changing news to Bridgers.

She had breast cancer.

"I went by myself to the appointment because I thought they will do the biopsy and I will have to wait several days, so no need to take anyone with me," Bridgers said. "Once the biopsy was completed, the doctor stayed with me and explained that it was cancer but they would have to wait for the biopsy results to know any more."

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Bridgers recalled the gut-punch sucking all the air out of her.



Gaby Bridgers poses with members of Halifax County’s High School cheerleading squad after being presented with a shirt at the Comets’ Pink Out game last month.

Submitted photo

“All the air left my body and I couldn’t speak for a moment,” Bridgers said. “Once I gathered my thoughts, I said, ‘Wait, I don’t understand. I thought you do the biopsy and that would determine cancer or not. How did we skip over that part and go straight to cancer.’”

made the walk to the car feel like an eternity.

“As I walked out to my car, the tears were flowing down my face,” Bridgers said. “I called my husband and told him the devastating news. I made lots of phone calls sitting in that car.”

The calls turned out to be productive as they were full of emotional support, reminding her just how strong she was.

“Everyone immediately said you are the strongest person we know and cancer has picked the wrong girl,” Bridgers said. “I wasn’t feeling very strong but the love and support I received that day was absolutely amazing.”

Awareness, support

Cancer awareness leads to cancer prevention, and in Southern Virginia, one of the best ways to spread awareness is through athletics.

Every year, “Pink Out” games take place throughout the region as high school and collegiate teams do their part to keep breast cancer awareness at the forefront for friends, family and fans.

School colors are replaced with a sea of pink at games all month across the region, spreading awareness to a community audience that might not usually think to practice early prevention methods.

Bridgers has first-hand experience when it comes to seeing how these events can raise both awareness and support at the same time. In fact, it’s what she loves the most about them.

awareness.”

T-shirts, summing it all up

Not long after her diagnosis, Bridgers received a t-shirt from one of her friends that says it all for Bridgers.

The shirt reads, “Supporting the Fighters, Admiring the Survivors, Honoring the Taken and Never, Ever Giving Up Hope.”

“That’s what Pink Out means to me,” she said.

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ALERT

Heaters, curves, Mother's Day, promotions: Halifax's Abbott finishes second season in Cincinnati Reds' minor-league ranks

DAVIN WILSON

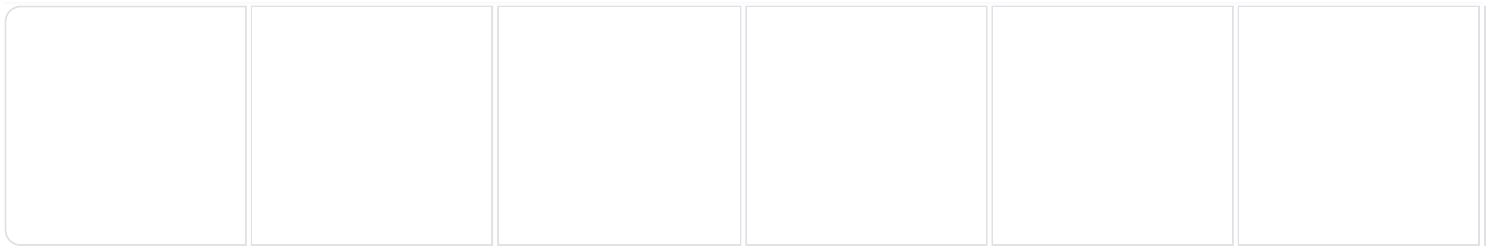
Oct 2, 2022



Former Halifax County High School Comet and current minor leaguer in the Cincinnati Reds organization Andrew Abbott poses for a picture before the start of spring training in the 2022 season.

Submitted photo





Abbott is in the middle of a conversation with his parents, David and Jeanette, when Dayton pitching coach Brian Garman walks over to him and tells him he needs to talk with him in his office, pulling him out of the conversation with his folks.

Knowing the upcoming discussion is going one of two ways, Abbott tells his parents goodbye and cautiously heads to his coach's office.



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Things turnout well for Abbott as the former Halifax County and University of Virginia standout receives the news, he's been promoted to the Chattanooga Lookouts, the Double-A affiliate of the Cincinnati Reds.

“He walks over and says, ‘hey, we need to talk to you in our offices when you’re done out here with your parents,’ and I told my folks this can be only one or two things and I hope it’s the better of them,” Abbott recalled laughing. “The manager pulled me in and said, ‘hey, you’ve pitched your butt off since you’ve been here, but the Reds feel like you need to challenge yourself and they’re sending you to Chattanooga.’ It

personality, found himself in an unusual position: at a loss of words. However, that doesn't mean he was unable to muster a few.

“I was at a loss of words that day,” he said, chuckling. “Made a flurry of phone calls to family to girlfriend, close friends from Halifax and said, ‘Hey, moving up to Chattanooga,’ so it was excitement and loss of words.”

Excitement wasn't the only emotion Abbott felt. Like any other job, a promotion comes with new responsibilities and an increased level of difficulty and leadership, and the lefty knew he would soon be facing the same.

“I was excited I was going up, but nervous at the same time because you never know what you're going to see,” Abbott said. “In High-A, I was facing guys my age, maybe one year older than me, but you get to Double-A and guys are 27, 28, 29, and have big league time and know what they're doing and have been doing this a longer amount of time than me. It was a breath of fresh air but a challenge as well, but I knew that's what the Reds wanted for me.”

Abbott's promotion wasn't the only unexpected event of the day. As chance would have it, he received the news of his promotion on Mother's Day with his mother in attendance.

While many mom's would have been reveling in serendipity, Abbott recalled things being a bit different.

and having them there was great. I didn't expect it would happen that quickly. I wasn't told in spring training they were thinking about moving me up that quickly, but I didn't question it and just went with it."

Given the way his season had gone in Dayton up to that point, his promotion shouldn't have been such a surprise.

You only get one chance to pitch a first impression

Whether it's "Rome wasn't built in a day," "a penny saved is a penny earned" or "fish and visitors stink after three days," the English language is full of adages.

However, few are as true and relevant as "you only get one chance to make a first impression" or "you never get a second chance to make a good first impression," depending on how you say it. Or, in Abbott's case, "you only get one chance to pitch a good first impression."

Abbott's first start of the season for Dayton came against the Fort Wayne TinCaps April 10 and saw the lefty throw four innings of five-hit, one-run ball and strike out four in the Dragons' 13-2 loss.

His second start of the year was even better as he picked up his first win after throwing five innings of three-hit, shutout ball and striking out 10.

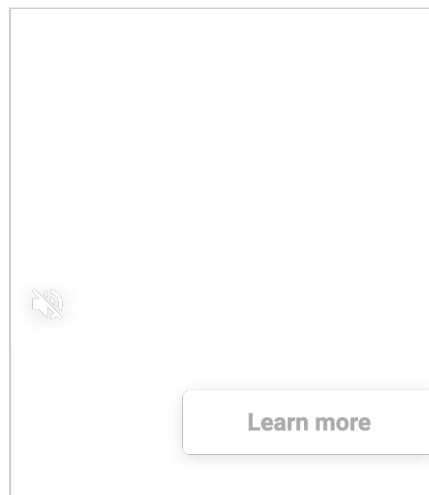
Abbott's third start saw much of the same success as he scattered three hits and a lone run while striking out 11 in this third start of the season, a 9-2 win over the West Michigan WhiteCaps.

When the dust settled on his first five starts, Abbott was 3-0 with a 0.67 ERA and had only given up a combined 16 hits and two runs and struck out 40 batters in 27 innings pitched.

The secret to his success?

“It really just came off of spring training, really,” Abbott said.

“Throwing the ball well in spring training and it culminated into the start I had. The higher guys up in the organization had seen the work I’d put in and had been really talking with me about what they wanted from me and were great about communicating their goals for me so that helped for sure. Then it’s also determination. I’ve got a goal to get to the big leagues so I know I have to push myself.”



Another good first impression, curveballs, if it ain't broke

It didn't take long for Abbott to impress his new team and coaches in Chattanooga as he made quite a few eyes pop out of their sockets in his first start with the Lookouts May 14.

7-3 win over the Braves.

Abbott's curveball made him stand out at Halifax and the pitch followed him to UUVa and to the minor leagues where it helped him turn in a solid gold start in his debut for Chattanooga.

"The higher you go, the more stuff you're going to need, you're going to need to throw off timing, have different pitches that move in different ways and in different spots because at the higher levels, hitters can hit fastballs, hanging breaking balls, they can hit your mistakes and that's what the curveball helps me do, it helps me throw off their timing," Abbott said.

Listening to Abbott talk about his hook, the old adage "if it ain't broke, don't fix it," comes to mind.

"I haven't changed that curveball since I learned it, haven't changed the grip, haven't changed the way I throw it," Abbott said. "It's been a staple to my repertoire for eight, nine years, so it's been with me through thick and thin and it's been my best pitch. I learned it from local pitching coach Jeff Stevens when I was 14 or 15 and it kind of stuck with me and I got to college and it didn't change there and got to pro ball and it didn't change there. Obviously some minor adjustments but nothing that's going to change the overall pitch. It's been my bread and butter for years and it's not going anywhere."

Over his final two starts of May, Abbott gave up a combined six runs and 12 hits in nine innings pitched while striking out seven. He fared better in his first start of June, allowing just one run, scattering three hits and striking out nine in 6.1 innings pitched against the Rocket City Trash Pandas.

Abbott surrendered four runs and five hits over five innings in a 5-3 loss to the Montgomery Biscuits. He bounced back a bit in his next start against the Biscuits, throwing five innings of four-hit, shutout ball but concluded the month on a rough streak, giving up a combined 15 runs and 16 hits in 10.2 innings pitched.

“I wasn’t throwing the ball very well, everybody goes through it but I knew I just had stick with the model, stick to who I am and be true to that,” Abbott said. “Everybody’s going to struggle so it’s just minimizing the damage is the best way to describe that. I just stayed true to myself, said you can do this and continually kept working on things.”

Abbott’s positive attitude and hard work paid dividends as he closed the season just like he started it. In his Sept. 6 start against Birmingham, the lefty threw five innings of three-hit, shutout ball and struck out four. Five days later, once again facing the Barons, he twirled five innings of two-hit, shutout ball while striking out nine and concluded his season with a start against Tennessee where he tossed six frames of two-hit, shutout ball and struck out eight.

but you know you're good, know you didn't get drafted or signed by luck and you just have to sit back and understand what you're doing wrong and that it really might not be you," Abbott said. "It may just be bad luck but you just have to take it and the last three or four weeks of the season I started throwing really well so it was just hanging with it, keep going, keep giving it your all and eventually it will get you there."

Giving credit where it's due

Abbott had the privilege of spending four years playing for the some of the best college coaches in the country in the faces of current UVa head coach Brian O'Connor, pitching coach Drew Dickinson and former UVa pitching coach and current Charleston Southern skipper Karl Kuhn.

Abbott credits their tutelage as one of the main reasons he is where he is.

"UVa has one of the best coaching staff's in America," Abbott said. "I had coach [Kuhn] as a pitching coach, then had coach [Dickinson] and I really think you combine those two guys and most of my development came from those four years at UVa."

Abbott also credited his years spent playing travel ball for Jeff Petty and former major league hurler Billy Wagner along with his time spent with Stevens for his current success.

And even though he may now be playing more than a few hours from home, he hasn't forgotten about the roles former Halifax coach Kelvin Davis and current skipper Kenneth Day have played in his success as well.

you have to know what you need to work on and be willing to work on it and that's what they taught me.”

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