

Unexpected award for Manassas Park coach

Usually when someone receives a high school coach of the year award, it's for two reasons. Either the coach's team finished in first place or the coach oversaw a substantial improvement in the team's win total.

Bryan Contino checked neither box this season. In his first year as Manassas Park High School's head baseball coach, the 28-year-old went 0-17 in games, which were typically decided by lopsided outcomes.

But when the Class 3 Northwestern District coaches met via Zoom on June 7 to determine their coach of the year along with the all-district team, they bucked convention.

All knew the challenges Contino faced in leading a program short on experience and numbers. And they also knew first-hand how he continued to coach his players to the end even though they were outscored by a total of 381-51.

So as they openly discussed candidates, a consensus quickly built.

"We, as the district coaches, thought that Bryan did a great job keeping all of his players interested in baseball even when they struggled," said Brentsville's Brian Knight. "He was very patient and stayed positive with all his players. I noticed they had improved so much when we played them in the season finale. He kept them playing hard all season long and they never gave up."

Initially, the coaches selected Contino and Knight as co-coaches of the year. But afterward, Knight had second thoughts about that decision. So the next morning, he emailed the district's other baseball coaches and said Contino earned the award himself. No one disagreed.

The recognition surprised Contino. He voted for Knight because the Tigers won the district. But he appreciated the gesture.

"At first, I thought maybe it was done out of pity," Contino. "And maybe there is some of that. But it was really about them knowing what I'm doing and that I didn't give up."

Contino had no time to kick back and let the game run its course. There was too much to do, things that most high school coaches rightfully assume their players



Manassas Park's Bryan Contino was named the Class 3 Northwestern District Baseball Coach of the Year.

COURTESY

know at this point in their careers.

He had to remind batters that three strikes equal an out. Or that four balls means a walk.

"To use a baseball reference, we're playing teams that are on a big diamond starting at third base ready to go home," Contino said. "We're on a little diamond starting at home plate."

When he applied for the head coaching job after spending the 2022 season as an assistant, people around him kept asking him the same question: Did he understand what he was getting into?

Contino knew baseball. He earned all-district honors as a pitcher and utility player at Dumont High School in New Jersey and went on to play at McDaniel College in Maryland.

But Manassas Park's situation would test any coach's resolve. The Cougars last posted a winning season in 2011 and did not field any teams in 2021.

Contino admits the lack of interest and baseball knowledge shocked him. He expected around 25 players to come out. Instead, he started the season with 14 and

finished with 11.

But the special education teacher still saw an opportunity to make a difference. He wanted to provide stability to

kids who kept seeing teachers and coaches come and go with high frequency.

So when parents started asking him five games into the season whether he planned to come back next year, Contino knew the answer.

"These kids were not getting the consistency from teachers,"

Contino, who came to the area with his fiancée, Osbourn graduate Roxana Aviles, whom he met at McDaniel. "It's the whole profession. It's a rotating door. I learned from my dad you have to be dependable."

The disparity in skill level forced Contino and his assistant coaches to make certain concessions.

If an opponent led by a wide margin and the game was dragging on, he'd meet with the team's other coach to remedy the situation. The other coach suggested his runner take a bigger lead off from first. That way the runner could be picked off



DAVID FAWCETT

easier by Manassas Park for a quick out and move the game along.

It was an unusual approach, but then this was an unusual circumstance.

Still, Manassas Park experienced positive moments. Not every game finished in five innings due to the 10-run mercy run.

Contino also took pride in seeing his players develop, none bigger than freshman Wesley Howell Jr. Howell had played only one year of baseball before this season and had dealt with off-field adversity in his young life.

But Howell craved improvement. Whatever Contino taught him, Howell absorbed. Howell ended up hitting .350, breaking up a couple of no-hitters and going 4 for 4 in one game from the plate.

Howell even took a leadership role to make sure his teammates kept their heads up in the face of defeat. He saw the progress and most of all a brighter future.

"He said, 'As long as he's here, I'm here,'" Contino said. "So let's get at it."

Contino can't wait.

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PRINCE WILLIAM BRIEFS

SCRUBB, WELLS JOIN NEW TEAMS

Hylton High School graduate Andre Scrubb is now with the Diablos Rojos del Mexico.

Scrubb had his contract purchased by the Mexican Baseball League team. Scrubb was playing for the Southern Maryland Blue Crabs at the time. The Blue Crabs announced the transaction June 8.

At the time of his departure, Scrubb led the Atlantic League with a 1.15 ERA. He had struck out 18 batters in 15.2 innings.

Scrubb began the season with Southern Maryland after playing in the Los Angeles Dodgers' and Houston Astros' organizations. Scrubb pitched in the majors for the Astros.

Meanwhile, the Gastonia (N.C.) Honey Hunters of the



ANDRE SCRUBB

Atlantic League announced they had signed Battlefield graduate Nick Wells.

The left-handed pitcher spent last season with Southern Maryland. Wells was a third-round pick out of Battlefield by the Toronto Blue Jays in 2014.

NATIONAL CHAMPS

Five former Prince William County standouts are members of the University of Lynchburg's Division III college national baseball championship team.

The Hornets defeated Johns Hopkins 7-6 on June 8 to win the program's first national title in baseball.

The team includes Woodbridge graduate Eric Hiett, Patriot graduate Bryce Demore, Osbourn graduate Cam Lane, Hylton graduate Ethan Parotske and Forest Park graduate Sean Pokorak.

Lynchburg finished with a 10-2 record in Old Dominion Athletic

Conference record 48 wins. In 12 NCAA Tournament games, the Hornets went 10-2 and outscored their opponents 80-57. The Hornets are also the first ODAC team to win a national baseball title.

HYLTON GRAD CARSON JOINS ACC

The Atlantic Coast Conference has hired Hylton High School graduate Jackie Carson as its senior associate commissioner for women's basketball.

Carson joins the ACC after serving as Furman University's women's basketball coach for 13 years. She went 205-197 in that time and took the Paladins to two NCAA Tournaments.

Carson, who also starred at Furman, is in the school's hall of fame and had her jersey retired. She was named to the Southern Conference 100th Anniversary Women's Basketball Team.

Cape Cod foul ball connects past with present

By her own admission, my wife, Emily, is not the most athletic person. She avoids exercise and exertion at all costs. Too much effort and too much coordination required.

But she is competitive. And if Emily has a chance to push her way to something she wants, look out. She'll do it and do it gladly.

So when someone yelled "heads up" at a recent Cape Cod League summer baseball game in Cotuit, Mass., Emily did what came naturally. As she walked toward the ballpark, her instincts kicked into high gear when she realized the ball coming toward her had taken one bounce and then gotten stuck under the rear passenger side tire of a parked black Acura.

All of a sudden, it was game on.

Three high-school aged boys tracked the ball as well, naively thinking they had a shot at it.

But with a head start and a deft touch, Emily turned around and raced toward the car about 15 feet behind her. Bending down under the rear bumper, she simultaneously reached for the ball with her right hand while with her right leg blocked one of the boys who came in from the side in a vain attempt to grab the highly sought souvenir.

Her actions said, "Nice try, kid." Her one-word boast declared it. For all to hear, Emily proudly held the ball in her hand and stated, "Mine!"

The boys, meanwhile, reacted to her success with a mix of frustration and disappointment.

"Who got it?" one asked.

Another pointed at Emily. They shook their heads and stomped off. If the boys were younger, Emily would have let one of them have the ball. But she kept this one.

"That's right," Emily said later that night in retelling the story. "[They] were beaten out by an old lady."

A group of women, meanwhile, sitting in the upper section of the home bleachers on the third-base line joyfully watched this unfold. Thrilled that a fellow female had outmaneuvered three males,

one of the women loudly cheered Emily's accomplishment. It was as though in a moment of solidarity they celebrated Girl Power together.

It wasn't that she got a foul ball. Those happen all the time at baseball games. It's how she got it that caught the women's attention – and rightfully so.

For the rest of the night, Emily tossed the ball back and forth in her hand, brimming with confidence. If either team had asked her to pitch, I believe she would have suited up immediately and stared down the batter without fear.

It didn't hit me then, but as I thought about that moment later, I realized it was the perfect way to wrap up the last night of our annual weeklong vacation to the Cape.

No place in the world means more to Emily than this stretch of land that juts into the Atlantic Ocean. It's a place she always loved visiting the most because it meant seeing the two people she loved spending time with the most: her grandparents.

Wally and Louise Wallace were family-centered people who put others first and genuinely made you feel special. Grampy and Nana, as their grandchildren affectionately called them, have since passed, but memories of them still resonate from summers on the Cape filled with Smitty's Ice Cream, Sam's Seafood and boat rides to Washburn Island.

Now Emily had a new memory in her hands that served as a reminder of whose genes she carries.

I believe Emily's fighting spirit comes at least in part from a woman who lost her husband at age 36 while carrying her fourth child and yet never wept a bitter tear in her life. Giving up or giving in are two phrases Nana refused to live by.

So on this night, Emily channeled her inner Nana. Yes, it was just a baseball, far from a life-or-death experience. But it connected the past and present in an unexpected, yet significant way. No woman has positively impacted Emily like her Nana. Heck, Nana, a die-hard Red Sox fan, is the reason Emily even



DAVID FAWCETT



Emily Fawcett proudly displays the foul ball she chased down at a Cape Cod League baseball game in Cotuit, Mass.

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enjoys baseball.

Of this I have no doubt: Full of vigor and a mouth to match, Nana would have cheered the loudest at her granddaughter's determination. She'd then point and

proudly say, "That's my girl." And she would have been right.

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LOCAL BRIEFS

COLGAN HEADLINES ALL-STATE SOCCER TEAM

Colgan senior forward Sam DeGuzman has been named the Class 6 Player of the Year and head coach Tom Warzywak the Class 6 Coach of the Year for girls soccer.

DeGuzman's perfectly executed left-footed cross to Tiana Cruz with four minutes remaining in the Class 6 finals gave the Sharks a 1-0 lead and the program's first girls state championship.

The Virginia Tech-bound wing player



SAM DEGUZMAN

finished her brilliant season with 28 goals and 12 assists. Her 89 career goals are the fourth most in VHSL history by a Class 6 player, along with 32 career assists.

The Colgan girls' soccer program, led by Warzywak since 2019, had its breakthrough season in year five. With a record of 21-1-1, Colgan won its third consecutive district championship and its first region championship. Since the 2020 COVID year, Warzywak's teams have been 49-3-1 and 65-8-4 overall.

Colgan finished ranked seventh in the final United Soccer Coaches' spring high school girls soccer rankings.

GATORADE HONORS WINGER

Colgan's Kamryn Winger is the 2022-23 Gatorade Virginia Girls Soccer Player of the Year.

The rising senior anchored a defense that allowed three goals all season en route to the Class 6 state title.

Winger is the program's first recipient of the Gatorade award and the second winner in the school's history. The other is 2021 graduate Brycen Lentz, who won the award for boys cross country.



KAMRYN WINGER

She is the first Prince William County player to win the award in girls soccer since Forest Park graduate Ali Krieger in 2002-03.

Winger, who has committed to UCLA, has also played with the U-17 Women's National Team. She carries a 4.28 grade-point average.

THREE HIGH SCHOOLS RECOGNIZED FOR SPORTSMANSHIP

Battlefield, Forest Park and Gar-Field were among the 116 high schools honored for their sportsmanship during the spring athletic season.

No player or coach was ejected during any game, nor were any of their programs placed on warning status.

One phone call from a priest about football changed my life

Here it comes, I think to myself. Another parent ready to berate me for denying their kid recognition.

This time, though, I'm ready.

As opposed to the day before when I experienced a similar situation as the Potomac News' sports editor by telling a mother why I couldn't print her son's name in our annual school-year college commitment list I put together for the paper.

Although her son lived in Prince William County, he attended a school in Alexandria. I made it clear in the announcement soliciting submissions that only seniors attending school in Prince William, city of Manassas and Manassas Park schools were eligible. End of story.

She, however, saw it differently, said I was unfair and promptly hung up.

So when another Prince William resident called me the next day with the same request regarding his son, who attended another high school in Alexandria, I told him the same thing. I then took a deep breath and braced for impact with attitude in my tone.

It wasn't necessary.

"Oh, that's OK; I understand," the man said.

Wait, what? You don't understand. No one understands. The thick file of parent complaints in my desk drawer attests to that, a file I'd like to turn into a book someday titled, "Yes, they really said this."

This gentleman, though, got it. He actually got it. What a relief.

So with that issue resolved, I figured it was time to hang up and get to the rest of my to-do list. Except that's not what happened.

Under normal circumstances, the conversation should have ended that day and we would have gone our separate ways. Little did I know how this one phone call in the spring of 2000 would transform my life.

It had nothing to do with sports or kids. It had everything to do with God. And at the center of this unexpected blessing was John Guernsey – yes, the parent of a St. Stephen's & St. Agnes senior going to Cornell for football. But, as it turns out, so much more.

For reasons that escape me now, we stayed on the line and started talking about church and God. He asked me if I went to a church and I told him I did, an Episcopal one in Haymarket.

Funny I should mention that. John was an Episcopal priest then at All Saints' in Woodbridge. When he said that, I do remember thinking: Oh, thank goodness I monitored my mouth. Now we're talking to clergy.

John invited me to attend All Saints' if I ever wanted to come. Of course, I'm thinking, yeah right, that will happen.



John Guernsey retired Feb. 18 as the bishop of the Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic. HEIDI REICHERT

And of course, I was wrong again.

More than 20 years later, I remain a member of that church. It's a place where I began to seriously reconsider my identity and what I value most. I'd been searching for a firm foundation through other ventures without success. But God used John for this next step in my life and took my faith to a new level.



DAVID FAWCETT

Have you ever had someone who believes in you more than you believe in yourself?

Someone who could stop everything, look you in the eye and say the right thing that elevated your level of faith beyond what you thought was possible?

Someone who says something during his sermon and makes it sound like it's specifically directed toward you?

Someone who always has time for a kind remark or encouraging insight no matter how busy they are?

John did that for me.

How many times I'd say, "I can't do that." And he'd say, "Why not? Check with God and trust in Him."

I remember going through a difficult time in my personal life and talking to John about it. He suggested I talk to one of our church members, who was also a counselor. John noticed my immediate frown and asked why the reaction?

I told him I wanted to act in a different way and fix this situation now. John said, we can do that later, but for now it's best to talk to the counselor.

Because it's John and because he ministers only if the Holy Spirit prompts him, I agreed to get this person's number. I went back to the Potomac News' conference room, closed the door, turned the lights off to make sure no one knew what I was doing and made the call.

The counselor agreed to see me. And

for at least 10 years, we typically had a standing appointment on Wednesday at 4 p.m. for a nearly hour-long talk. The conversations liberated my life in the best way possible.

Another lesson learned: It's smart to heed John's wisdom.

Of course he'll deflect any credit. I get that. He's letting God use him to reach others.

I remember doing a story on John when he stepped down as All Saints' rector. The story focused not only on his church ministry, but also on how he affected the wider Prince William community in so many ways. When we met at a McDonald's near his Woodbridge home to talk, I could tell from the start he was uncomfortable. Talk about God? Absolutely. Talk about himself? Not so much.

But John deserves recognition for doing his part out of humble obedience to reach those who need to hear God's truth. And he reached me in the most unexpected way.

John officially retired Feb. 18 as the bishop of the Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic, closing another chapter on a life defined by faithful ministry to God's word that included 28 years as rector of All Saints' Church in Woodbridge and 12 years as a bishop leading this diocese.

But his legacy is rich. I'm one of many who saw their lives changed for the better through his ministering to them. And to think it started with a phone call one day about his son going to play football at Cornell.

What a gift. You start off a conversation about sports when it's really about something much more important with implications far beyond anything we do on this Earth.

Only John. Only God.

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LOCAL BRIEFS

KANNEH BACK WITH REDBLACKS

Abdul Kanneh (Potomac) has re-signed with the Canadian Football League's Ottawa Redblacks on a one-year contract.



ABDUL KANNEH

Kanneh has played eight seasons in the CFL, including five with Ottawa over two

injury-shortened 2022 season, Kanneh recorded 37 tackles, two interceptions and one forced fumble in 12 games for the Redblacks.

Kanneh was a CFL all-star in 2015 and an East Division all-star in 2016 for Ottawa.

WRIGHT JOINS MERCURY

Monica Wright Rogers (Forest Park) is the new assistant general manager for the WNBA's Phoenix Mercury.



MONICA WRIGHT ROGERS

Wright Rogers comes over from the NBA league office, where she served as the Elite Basketball Women's Operations Lead.

Wright Rogers was the second overall pick in the 2010 WNBA Draft by Minnesota and won two WNBA titles with the Lynx in 2011 and 2013.

She's a former assistant coach at her collegiate alma mater, Virginia.

CASSEDY MAKES MARK

Christopher Newport University freshman pitcher Brandon Cassedy (Colgan) became the first player in the program's 42-year history to strike out nine or more batters in his collegiate debut.



BRANDON CASSEDY

Cassedy achieved this milestone Feb. 18 when he struck out nine over the Captains' 5-0 victory over New Paltz.

Overall, Cassedy allowed just one hit and faced only two batters more than the minimum. He was the 2022 Class 6 state baseball player of the year.

CAMPBELL TRADED TO STORM

Woodbridge High School graduate Kyree Campbell is now with the Sioux Falls Storm of the Indoor Football League.

The Storm acquired the defensive lineman in a trade with the Bay Area Panthers. Last season, Campbell played in seven games for the Green Bay Blizzard, recording 12 tackles and a sack in his first IFL season.

A-10 HONORS ODURO

Gainesville resident Josh Oduro was named the Atlantic 10 men's basketball player of the week.

The George Mason University senior averaged 22 points, 9.5 rebounds, 3 steals, 2 assists and 1.5 blocks in the Patriots' two wins last week.

He totaled a game-high 25 points Feb. 18 against LaSalle. He posted his league-leading 11th double-double with 19 points and 12 rebounds Feb. 15 against George Washington.