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BASEBALL ALUMNI NEWS



FORMER PLAYERS GIVE MAJOR LEAGUE INSTRUCTION TO KIDS AT TUCSON CLINIC

By Fabian Ardaya / MLB.com

TUCSON, Arizona — A familiar sound echoed throughout one of the practice fields at Kino Sports Complex.

With each thud of a baseball hitting the grass, the voice continued.

“You’re out!”

Several baseball hopefuls donned numbers to match their idols. One wore No. 44 for Arizona’s Paul Goldschmidt. Another wore No. 1, matching Houston’s Carlos Correa. A third wore No. 34 for Bryce Harper. The voice bellowed from a No. 32 Sedona red jersey, as former Diamondbacks pitcher Albie Lopez led the series of pitching drills at the Major

League Baseball Players Alumni Association’s Legends for Youth baseball clinic in Tucson on Saturday, January 20.

Lopez joined former three-time Gold Glove winner and two-time All-Star Eric Davis as one of several former Major Leaguers hosting the free clinic for a projected 200 local youth, teaching life skills in addition to how to throw a four-seam fastball as the kids cycled through pitching, hitting, infield and outfield drills.

Those joining Lopez and Davis included former Major Leaguers Shelley Duncan, Willie Adams, George Arias, Damon Buford, Dave Burba, Gil Heredia,

Charlie Montoyo, Nikco Riesgo and Mike Sember.

It’s an opportunity that Lopez, a local product who was part of the Diamondbacks’ 2001 World Series team, didn’t have at the same age.

“I was kind of in the same boat as these kids where the coaching and opportunities were very limited,” Lopez said. “To be able to have these former Major Leaguers come out and talk to these kids, we can help them dream and give them a routine where they can come out daily and execute it.

“To be able to receive instruction from these Major League guys is huge, maybe helping them get help or giving a tip that an

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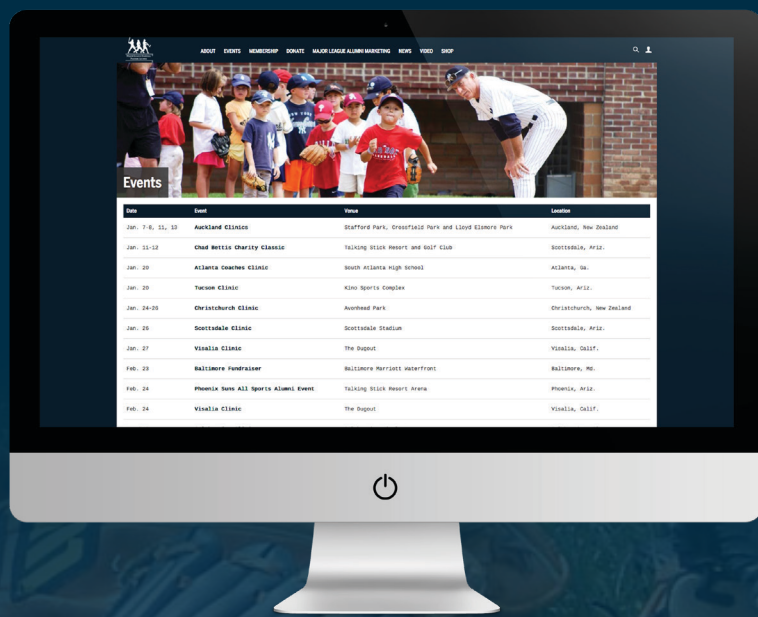
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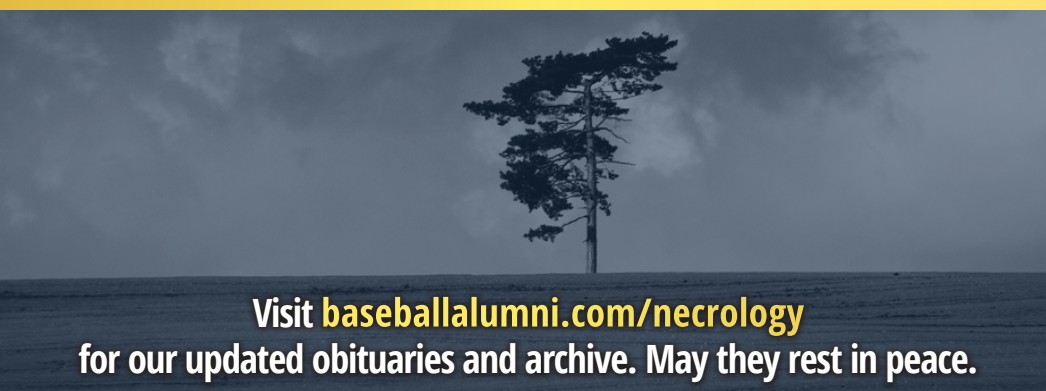
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IN REMEMBRANCE OF BASEBALL LEGENDS

ordinary coach might not have.”

When Davis, who grew up in Los Angeles, was this age, his dreams weren't on the baseball diamond - they were on the basketball court. Now Davis—the first player in Major League history to smash 30 homers and steal at least 50 bases in the same season (1987) and a World Series champion -- got the chance to teach kids the game he wound up falling for.

“It's fun, because you get the chance to help the kids and identify with them and help them towards their dream,” Davis said. “Here, the dreams aren't as emphasized as once you sign a professional contract, but here is just the fun part of teaching them and watching them learn.

“From an informational standpoint, to be able to see all the players and the Major Leaguers that have played, it would've been huge (for me). My mouth would've been wide open, just like these guys' are.”

The lessons - and autographs - are mementos parents and coaches hope can stay with the young players far beyond the clinic.

“Baseball has taught me in my life to be a good human being, to be a good teammate,” Lopez said. “I'm always trying to be helpful, especially in baseball, because baseball has allowed me to be surrounded by good people my entire life.”

This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.



Three-time Gold Glove Award winner Eric Davis rolls groundballs to kids in the outfield at a Legends for Youth Clinic in Tucson, AZ.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



RICK SAWYER

By Alex Trihias, MLBPA

Former right-handed pitcher Rick Sawyer loved coaching so much that he put together a team for a city league in Bakersfield, California. However, this was no ordinary team.

After a few years of playing Major League Baseball for the New York Yankees and San Diego Padres, decades of real estate and sales experience and a successful high school baseball coaching stint, Sawyer turned his love for baseball into an outlet for military veterans.

“I just wanted to do something to help veterans and baseball has been such

a big part of my life, it felt natural to bring the two together,” Sawyer said. “Sports can give a veteran a chance to get out, talk to other veterans and hopefully if they need support or want support they will meet someone who has been through what they might be dealing with.”

After quitting his high school coaching job in 2017, Sawyer was encouraged by his wife, Theresa, to visit a local charity in Bakersfield called the Wounded Heroes Fund. Sawyer's goal was to gather enough people for one team to play in the City of Bakersfield softball league. His would be the only veteran

team to participate – allowing for an effective way for veterans to bond.

Sawyer asked if the organization had 10 people who would be interested in playing. The Wounded Heroes Fund sent out flyers and soon enough, responses poured in.

In just one week, he had more than 40 veterans of various ages interested.

“It surprised me how interested everybody was,” Sawyer said. “I can't believe all the calls.”

This year – his second year of coaching the veteran team – Sawyer expects the number of participants to double.



Rick Sawyer and his veteran team visit the San Diego Padres at Petco Park during the summer of 2017.

The purpose of the baseball team that Sawyer assembled is to assist in helping military veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Bakersfield Vet Center outreach specialist and resource, Jenny Frank, said that when a veteran is suffering from PTSD or other injuries, they sometimes have difficulty reaching out for help. They may also feel that asking for help is a sign of weakness or that therapy would be uncomfortable.

"It's amazing how these guys, they've bonded together in this thing," Sawyer said. "I mean, it doesn't matter if we've won or lost, they're having fun, they're laughing and if a guy makes an error, a guy makes an error. It's no big deal. They just like being together with all these guys that served with them."

Sawyer said he's even received calls from the players saying that they're interested in playing in the winter as well.

"They want to play 365 days a year," Sawyer said.

During the summer of 2017, Sawyer took his players to Petco Park for a San Diego Padres game, courtesy of his former teammate Randy Jones.

"I got some donations, we got a bus and we took 25 veterans down to San Diego for a game," Sawyer said. "They actually gave us a tour before the game and the vets got to meet some of the players and enjoy the game and came back so that was a good opportunity for them."

Donations rolled in to support Sawyer's team including a donation for the bus from an old friend of Sawyer's, a graduate from the United States Military Academy at West Point.

"I got local vendors around here to donate and we all put in money and we bought them uniforms and entry fee into the game," Sawyer said.

Sawyer plans to do another trip for his players to either a Los Angeles Angels or Los Angeles Dodgers game – since most of his players are fans of those teams – as he anticipates the larger volume of interested veterans for the 2018 season.

"We'll probably have three or four teams around this time," Sawyer said.

Sawyer enjoys watching the veterans talk about their time serving and having fun playing the game. He feels that the sentiment of teamwork that they lose once they're out of the military gets found again in an atmosphere like his.

"These guys come out of service and they're so respectful and they're just enjoying themselves now," Sawyer said.

Sometimes, however, it takes some convincing. Sawyer had one instance when a veteran with PTSD was hesitant about joining the team because of a lack of skills.

"It doesn't really matter," Sawyer said in regards to softball skills. "He came out one time and then he'd come out a second time and then he wouldn't

come out. I kept emailing him and texting him and still."

Though this particular veteran has yet to join the team, Sawyer hasn't given up on him.

"I'm going to try to get him again this year, see if he'll come out there," he said.

Sawyer said he doesn't have a specific way of encouraging veterans to join the team because he's "just an old baseball player". Rather, he tells them of his experiences.

"They ask questions about my experiences and I tell them, I have no problem with that. Everybody likes baseball stories."

Though at the end of the day, Sawyer prefers to stay out of the spotlight. He considers himself blessed to get to spend time with some individuals he highly respects.

"It's not about me," Sawyer said. "I get a lot of satisfaction watching these guys just kind of enjoy themselves. When they win a game they get excited about it. It's amazing how these guys come back from the service and all of the sudden they have to get a job and now they're excited about something. They look forward to a game and I enjoy that."

Photos courtesy of Rick Sawyer and Doug McWilliams/National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum



RIPKEN SR. FOUNDATION CARRIES ON LEGACY

By Oliver Macklin MLB.com

BALTIMORE—Cal Ripken Sr. fully embraced the role of coach. Not just in baseball, but in life.

Ripken was a natural born leader, teaching the importance of a strong work ethic, responsibility and healthy living in the Major Leaguers he managed during his 37-year run in the Orioles' organization, and the youth he mentored following his career in the pros.

Though he passed away in 1999, his legacy lives on through his wife, Vi, and sons Cal Jr. and Bill, who created the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation in 2001 in his honor.

The Foundation, in conjunction with the Major League Baseball Players Alumni Association, hosted its 14th annual Aspire Gala at the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront on Friday, February 23 to raise money to help support the "programming and initiatives for at-risk youth and underserved communities across the United States."

"What we're trying to do is carry on [Cal's] legacy, and carry on what he believes so strongly in," said executive director Steve Salem.

Hall of Famers Andre Dawson, Rollie Fingers, Goose Gossage, Fergie Jenkins and Jim Rice were among the 800 attendees at the event, which honored Baltimore Ravens legend Jonathan Ogden, former Maryland Terrapins coach Gary Williams and U.S. Marshal Johnny L. Hughes.

"These guys are really passionate about making a difference and mentoring people, and keeping people on the right track," Salem said.

The Aspire Gala raised more than \$3 million last year, and is expected to raise even more in 2018. It is one



of the greatest one-day fundraising events in Maryland, according to the Foundation.

"This year we'll raise more money than we've ever raised before," Salem said. "All the money goes to reaching these kids in Baltimore, and across the country. So, knowing that it's going to help us at least for the next year and build momentum into the future is really wonderful."

Since its inception 17 years ago, the Foundation has joined forces with "hundreds of youth and law enforcement agencies" to educate and improve the lives of children throughout the country. The organization has also constructed 74 Youth Development Parks since 2009, creating safe recreational facilities for more than 460,000 kids each year.

In addition, there are 14 fields in the development phase nationwide; two are nearly complete in the greater Baltimore area.

A pair of new program initiatives launched over the past year -- STEM Initiative and I'm GREAT (Girls Respecting Each Other and Themselves) -- will help the foundation continue to better the lives of children in need.

In 2017 the Ripken Sr. Foundation opened 10 STEM Centers throughout the U.S., all of which are supplied with the necessary resources to teach enjoyable and engaging programs to more than 1,600 at-risk children.

I'm GREAT is expected to implement curriculums at three North Carolina sites to make a positive impact on teenage girls and help them comprehend the decisions they make, and how they can affect their lives as they grow older.

Of everything the foundation in honor of Cal Sr. has accomplished, Salem said, "It's all about carrying on his legacy." ●

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MLBPAA Mission Statement

To promote the game of baseball, raise money for charity, inspire and educate youth through positive sport images and protect the dignity of the game through former Major League players.



Pitcher for the 2008-2009 Atlanta Braves James Parr demonstrates how to properly grip a baseball at the Legends for Youth Clinic in Celebration, FL.