



NORTH SUBURBAN YOUTH BASEBALL ASSOCIATION

2003 NSYBA HIGH SCHOOL FALL BALL REPORT

THE SEASON: The season ran from Sunday, September 14, through Sunday, October 19, 2003. Most of the games were on Sundays, with some Thursday and Friday games played under lights on Chicago diamonds. Each team was scheduled for 15 games; teams played between 13 and 15 games. Sundays saw lots of double-headers.

THE NSYBA HIGH SCHOOL FALL BALL ASSOCIATION: We had four teams. The Evanston team drew players from five different high schools (Evanston, Niles North, Glenbrook North, Loyola and Notre Dame). The Lake View team was entirely Lake View High School students and mostly their varsity. The Carl Schurz A team was their 2004 varsity team, supplemented by one outstanding player from Elk Grove. And the Carl Schurz B team was mostly Schurz sophomores and junior varsity players. The best-pitched game I saw was a complete game, five-hit gem pitched by a Schurz B sophomore. In addition, Whitney Young Magnet School joined us informally for several games -- they brought their 2004 varsity squad.

DIAMONDS: The ETHS varsity diamond gave the Chicago teams chances to play on a grass infield. The Chicago diamonds (Kilbourn Park, Hamlin Park and Dunham Park) all had mud infields. Players on the Evanston team, who had not played on mud infields since pony league, took three error-filled innings to readjust to mud at their first Kilbourn game, but had no problems thereafter. The Evanston team played a scrimmage against Whitney Young at Margate Park, which has a poorly groomed, rock-hard grass infield, and the universal opinion by players on both teams was that good mud is better than bad grass.

WEATHER: The weather was spectacular! The temperatures were mostly between the high 50's (night games) and the high 70's, and most of the time it was either cloudless or partly sunny. Less than 10% of the games were rained or mudded out. But then, this has been the NSYBA experience through five autumns of pony league Fall Ball. Autumn is the very best time to play baseball in the Chicago area.

UMPIRING: The NSYBA contracted with Sam Sparacino's umpiring service in Chicago to umpire all our games. He and all of his umpires are IHSA-patched. The overall quality of umpiring was better than what I've seen at ETHS-IHSA sanctioned games. In the spirit of the instructional nature of NSYBA Fall Ball, two of the umpires provided a lot of welcome instruction to players. When they umpired, it was almost like having another coach on the diamond.

LEVEL OF PLAY: Overall, it was decent suburban-conference junior varsity. I don't have detailed statistics from the other teams, but on the Evanston team, which batted .257 as a whole, the sophomores hit .178 (one sophomore hit .357), the juniors hit .284 (one junior hit .368) and the seniors hit .345 (one senior hit .609). The opposition hit .277. The only Evanston sophomore pitcher had a 6.10 ERA, while the team overall had a 3.19 ERA, and the opposition had a 3.85 ERA.

The teams were well balanced against each other. There were only two slaughters in the whole association. The Evanston team's record was 7-4-1, but the team only scored four more runs than the opposition.

THE PLAYERS' FALL BALL EXPERIENCE: All the players had a lot of fun, and all improved as baseball players, some markedly so. NSYBA High School Fall Ball was a career revitalizer for two of the Evanston players, both of whom figured they had reached the end of the line. Both these players now have a solid chance to make the ETHS varsity team in 2004. Three of our other players had not made their school teams' cuts. Thanks to the opportunity of Fall Ball, two of them are virtually certain to make their schools' teams in 2004. Three ETHS varsity pitchers got chances to swing the bat (something they are not permit-

ted to do during the spring or summer ETHS-IHSA seasons). They hit .365 and accounted for 16 of the 44 Evanston RBI's.

THE COACHES' FALL BALL EXPERIENCE: The Chicago teams' coaches figure that Fall Ball helped them fill critical holes in their lineups. They also tell me they're now faced with some pleasant dilemmas. Instead of having to ask the question, "Where am I going to find a player to fill this position?" they now can ask, "Which of these solid players will fill this position?" One remarked he was astonished at the emergence of a sophomore star pitcher, who will greatly strengthen his varsity starting rotation in 2004. Another found that ever-elusive leadoff hitter for his varsity team, a player he never suspected of being able to fill that role. Another coach found a very decent third baseman, who could plug a gigantic defensive hole on his school's team in 2004 and 2005. Yet another coach said he had the great satisfaction of working with a catcher who now is almost certain to make his school's sophomore team, after being cut as a freshman.

OBSERVATIONS: NSYBA High School Fall Ball is for fun, first and foremost. On all the teams we had some recreational players, players who don't play on their high schools' teams in the spring and summer. Several of them sought me out to thank me for giving them an opportunity they never thought they would have: playing baseball at the high school level. Far from being drags on their teams, these guys played hard and right up to the level of their abilities and skills. They were quite competitive.

NSYBA High School Fall Ball is also for instruction. There were no playoffs, and in the final analysis, the games don't count for anything. A lot of good coaching went on, and all our players benefited greatly from their experiences. Nearly every player got a chance to play lots of defensive innings and got in a lot of repetitions.

WHAT 2004 HOLDS: The season will be a week longer: eight weeks instead of seven, since we'll start a week earlier. If negotiations with park districts and schools are successful, we'll also see Saturday games in 2004.

We hope to have at least eight teams in the association next year. This will give us a "critical mass" to do much more than we did this year. We look forward to drawing teams from many different sources. High schools (private, parochial and public, from Chicago or the suburbs) are welcome to enter as many teams as they want. Park district league teams are welcome also. So are totally independent teams, such as the 2003 Evanston team (a majority of the players weren't from ETHS). We also encourage local baseball schools (such as Line Drive in Evanston or North Shore Baseball Academy in Deerfield) to enter teams of their students.

The umpires and I noticed considerable ignorance of the IHSA baseball rules on the part of players and (incredibly) coaches. I am working with our umpires to develop a rules seminar for players, coaches and scorekeepers.

Playing high school baseball is expensive for the players. Umpiring at this level costs more than at Little League or pony league. The NSYBA insists on liability and medical insurance, especially since schools and park districts insist on such coverage. Some teams need to buy uniforms and/or hire a coach. Some teams have to pay rental for their home diamond. So, we're planning fundraising activities. First and foremost will be a Players Handbook. Included will be team rosters and school/sponsor ads. Teams can buy additional pages to resell at a profit to the team (the NSYBA will provide the typesetting services for free). We also plan a sponsored schedule handout, to be distributed at local retail establishments -- this is good-quality baseball and well worth watching by fans unrelated to players. We're investigating the possibility of setting up click-through advertising on the heavily-traveled NSYBA website. Finally, the Chicago Park District needs chores-in-the-park help, which is payment in services for the use of their diamonds. All NSYBA players, Chicago and suburban, will participate, after which we'll hold a fundraising barbecue. Most of these fundraising activities will commence shortly after school's out for summer break.

Tom

Tom Kendall
Acting NSYBA High School Commissioner