

# BIG TRAIN BEACON



*The Official Magazine of Bethesda Big Train Baseball*



## ***BARRIER BREAKER***

*Kelli Jenkins' journey to  
becoming the first woman to  
play in the Cal Ripken League*

Issue 4: August 1, 2020

[www.bigtrain.org](http://www.bigtrain.org)



# THE BIG TRAIN BEACON

Fourth Issue  
August 1, 2020

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                                   **Noah Ziegler**

## A Message from Bruce Adams

To Our Big Train Community:

I am pleased to announce that **Chris Rogers** has been named General Manager of Bethesda Big Train baseball. While serving as Acting GM since our Bethesda Community Base Ball Club (BCBBC) retook stewardship of Big Train on June 1, Chris has been a whirlwind of activity. Under his leadership, Big Train has produced three shows each week on bigtrain.tv to entertain our fans deprived of baseball by Covid-19 and four issues of this Big Train Beacon while raising more than \$50,000 to help us prepare to bring the fun back to Shirley Povich Field in 2021.

Chris has attended Big Train games since he was a kid. He takes over as General Manager after serving two seasons as Big Train's Assistant General Manager. Chris helped strengthen Big Train's internship program and improved the organization's online media presence. He started with Big Train in 2015 as a writing intern, and spent two summers as volunteer coordinator before being named assistant GM in January 2018. Chris has a B.A. in journalism from the University of Maryland, where he spent two years as the managing editor of the Maryland Baseball Network.

I am also pleased to announce that at our July 25 meeting the founding board elected six new members to our board of directors. We are really excited about the new members. They bring diversity, energy, and expertise to our organization.

The new members are:

- **Katelyn Engen**, a native of Kensington, serves as an athletic trainer at the University of Maryland;
- **Manny Hidalgo**, of Silver Spring, is executive director of Shepherd's Table;
- **Marjorie Lane**, of Potomac, is a marketing consultant and co-owner of Bruster's Real Ice Cream of Gaithersburg;
- **Ramin Nejaddehghan**, a Potomac native now living in Washington, DC, practices commercial real estate finance law at Krooth & Altman LLP;
- **Emily Waldman**, of Bethesda, has served as the Big Train's host family co-coordinator since 2016; and
- **Donnie Wright**, of Chevy Chase, was Maryland Gatorade Player of the Year for baseball while at B-CC High School. Donnie serves as a Managing Director of Investments at Wells Fargo Advisors in Bethesda.

More complete biographies of the six new board members may be found on the [Big Train website](http://www.bigtrain.org). The new members join the founding board members: President **Bruce Adams**, Vice President **Eric Cole**, Secretary-Treasurer **John Daniel**, **Becky Crowley**, **Bill Hickman**, **Dick Lipsky**, **Rachel Northridge**, and **Alex Thompson**.

Thanks to those who have already contributed to our BIG susTRAINability campaign to help make sure we can bring the fun back to Povich Field in 2021. We are within \$10,000 of our goal of raising \$60,000 this summer. If you have not yet given, please go to [www.bigtrain.org](http://www.bigtrain.org) and hit the DONATE button. There is still time for you to get a Big Train face mask along with a season pass for 2021 for a contribution of \$100 or more.

Stay well. Be strong. Roll train!

**Bruce Adams**

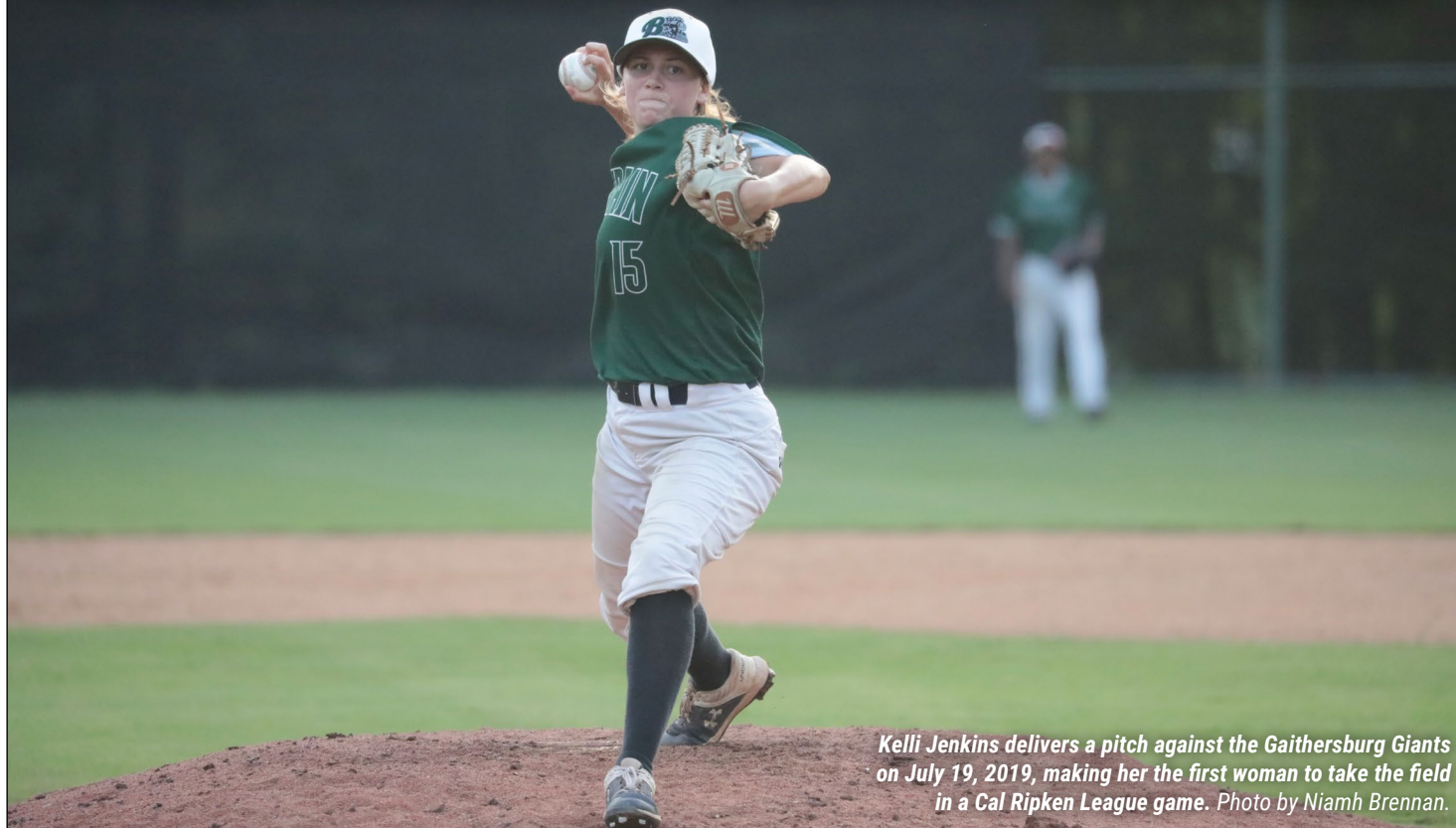
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## Kelli Jenkins: Barrier Breaker



*Kelli Jenkins delivers a pitch against the Gaithersburg Giants on July 19, 2019, making her the first woman to take the field in a Cal Ripken League game. Photo by Niamh Brennan.*

**By Noah Ziegler**

When **Kelli Jenkins** was in the third grade, her teacher gave the class a reading assignment. She was given *A Strong Right Arm: The Story of Mamie ‘Peanut’ Johnson*, by Michelle Y. Green. It’s a story about Mamie Johnson — one of three women who played in the Negro Leagues — and how she overcame adversity to play professional baseball from 1953-55.

Jenkins was a baseball player herself at that age, but didn’t have a figure to look up to and see a pathway for a female baseball player. Once she completed the story, she had a new role model, and has kept the same copy of the book to serve as an inspiration for her career.

From then, Jenkins continued to break barriers in the D.C. area baseball community, becoming the first female in numerous leagues and teams.

In 2019, she became the first female player to play in the Cal Ripken Collegiate Baseball League (CRCBL). But if you ask her, that achievement is something she’s grown accustomed to.

A native of Potomac, Maryland, Jenkins grew up in a baseball-oriented family. Her brother, Niko, helped her practice alongside her siblings. While the idea of switching to softball hovered, Jenkins stayed committed to pursuing a baseball career.

“Everyone in my family plays. My older sister played, but she eventually transitioned to softball just because she wanted to play with girls,” Jenkins said. “My older brother, he’s just two years older than me, so I just played with him. I have a younger brother who plays baseball and he has dreams of playing in college, too. It’s kinda like if you’re in my family, you play baseball.”

From family games and regular throwing sessions, her career continued with the St. John’s College High School Cadets in the Washington Catholic Athletic Conference — which has produced professional athletes across numerous sports.

The competition didn’t faze her. It only fueled her.

“It’s one of the toughest programs in the area that you can play in,” Jenkins said. “It just kind of made me realize how much I love the sport, because if you play baseball

at St. John’s, you live and breathe it. It’s your whole life. Waking up at 5 a.m. for workouts, I loved it. I loved seeing my teammates and everything ... I don’t think I would be playing in college if it weren’t for me going to St. John’s.”

Jenkins played basketball as well during her prep career, helping her gain skills and attributes that she could use in both sports. It wasn’t until the summer following her freshman year at St. John’s when the idea of playing baseball at the next level settled in.

The dream became reality at St. Mary’s College (MD). While walking off the mound following a 1-2-3 inning in a high school summer game, the Seahawks saw what Jenkins could bring to their team. She was offered a spot on their roster, with the opportunity to continue both her baseball and basketball careers.

“What stands out about Kelli is how confident and poised she is when on the mound,” Big Train manager **Sal Colangelo** said. “You’d never know that she had a nerve in her body. You’d never know she’s getting ready to throw to a big-time college hitter ... She’s more confident and poised on the



# BARRIER BREAKER

mound than some of our guys. That's just what she brings."

In 2019 — her freshman campaign — she appeared in two games for the Seahawks. Her collegiate debut came against Wesley; she pitched one inning, gave up one hit and no runs. Her second outing, versus Christopher Newport, saw another shutout inning.

She reached out to Big Train Stars — known colloquially as the Little Train — and asked head coach **Bryan Towers** if she could earn a spot on the team, which plays in the Maryland Collegiate Baseball League (MCBL). Towers was more than happy to give her that, but what Jenkins did with that opportunity gave her the chance to break the biggest wall of her career.

The moment Jenkins was told she would be brought up to the main team came after a scrimmage between the Big Train and "Little Train." Colangelo and Towers told her how impressed they were, and said they wanted her to play in games before the Big Train began League Championship Series play.

What stuck out to Big Train coaches was how she handled herself on the mound. Pitching coach **Craig Lopez** said her breaking ball sparked attention, but it was her composure when facing batters that gave the staff confidence she'd be up to the challenge of being called up to the Big Train. Her knuckle ball also threw opposing batters off balance, which helped continue the pitching staff's momentum in keeping hitters at bay.

"What Kelli brought to us was that she made our family better," Lopez said. "I'm telling you, she was impressive. Just her character, tenacity, integrity, the way she came at each and every day. She helped me become a better coach. I loved what she brought to the game."

Colangelo didn't call up Jenkins to the Big Train to be attached to a milestone in CRCBL history. He knew the skillset she carried and the poise she brought. He knew that the mindset of a pitcher can greatly influence how a team performs, and Jenkins brought the calm presence that could inspire her team to play with the same mentality.

That mindset gave her a moment she'd worked tirelessly for. On July 19, 2019, it came.

In a game against the Gaithersburg Giants at Povich Field, the Big Train led 2-0 in the top of the fourth inning. After **Anthony Piccolino** (James Madison) threw three shutout innings to open the contest, Colangelo went to Jenkins for the top of the



**LEFT: Jenkins pitches for St. John's College High School.** Photo courtesy of Kelli Jenkins.



**RIGHT: Jenkins makes the second appearance of her Big Train career.** Photo by Niamh Brennan.

fourth. She was nervous, as she describes the moment as the biggest game of her career, but it wasn't long until she settled down and she focused on the task at hand.

"I think I walked the first or second batter, that's when I told myself, 'Alright, these nerves need to stop,'" Jenkins said. "And I just calmed down and went back to normal."

She threw one inning, giving up just one baserunner and no runs. She'd go on to make a second appearance five days later against the Silver Spring-Takoma Thunderbolts, further cementing her place in Big Train and CRCBL history.

"When she pitched, man it was a cheering section," Colangelo said. "They just loved her ... As a dad of two young ladies, it shows no matter male or female, you can play this game at a high level."

Jenkins' perseverance stems back to her childhood. Countless questions of why she didn't transition to softball were put away, and her fortitude in ignoring the stigma of female baseball players culminated as she threw her first official pitch at Shirley Povich Field — a field where as a kid she grew more in love with America's pastime.

The barrier was broken. The path for young girls aspiring to play baseball has been paved by the likes of Jenkins and Mamie Johnson. Jenkins shows that girls can exhibit the intense athletic ability required to compete against top-level collegiate male athletes, as she did when she took the mound for Bethesda. Despite the milestone achievement, she doesn't let it go to her head. It's just another chapter in her career.

"I never really think about that because that's kind of normal for me to be the first girl to play in all these teams," Jenkins said. "I never think about that when I'm pitching."

Colangelo knew it was her moment. Not

his, not the Big Train's, but Jenkins' time to be embraced by her team and the Bethesda community. But, it was indeed a proud moment in his coaching career. That's how the Big Train community works, he says. Any one part of it is a member of the Bethesda family.

"She's given the youth for tomorrow an opportunity that it can happen if you put your mind to it," Colangelo said. "She has been a silent leader in society just by her actions and her on-the-field play to show all the young ladies that if they want to play the game of baseball, they can do it. She will be a role model for those young ladies."

After two years at St. Mary's, Jenkins is transferring to Chatham University in Pittsburgh, where she will play on the baseball and women's basketball teams.

Currently, she's focused on continuing to improve in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, and with the help of her baseball-crazed family, she'll be ready to go once collegiate sports return.

Her craft earned her the opportunity to play for the most storied franchise in the CRCBL. Her passion enhanced her teammates' and coaches' Big Train experience, earning the trust and love of past and present players. When she fielded every question about her decision to play baseball, she let her talent do the talking.

Now, she serves as an inspiration to younger generations of female athletes.

"I love that because like I said, in the third grade, I didn't really have anyone to look up to," Jenkins said. "I didn't know whether it was possible for me to continue playing. Then, I read the book about Mamie Johnson, and I was like, 'Alright, I can do this.' I feel like I'm kind of the same for younger girls who see me play."



## John Daniel: Big Train Secretary-Treasurer

By Alex Murphy

Baseball is the soundtrack to summer, and for those who go to Big Train games at Shirley Povich Field, the sounds of the ballpark are sweet melodies to all.

They are as commonplace as seeing **John Daniel** in the stands during the season. A regular since the club's 1999 inaugural season, he has missed few, if any, games over the team's 21 years.



"I think that John Daniel has been to more Big Train games than anyone else," Big Train founder **Bruce Adams** joked. "It seems like he's there every single night."

The passion Daniel has shown for Big Train is the same he's had for music, especially the local scene.

"I don't have a music playing background, but I have a love and an appreciation for music," Daniel explained.

Daniel is a trustee for the Johansen International Competition for Young String Players, a triennial string competition held in Washington D.C. Additionally, he has served on the boards for the Washington Saxophone Quartet and the Washington Revels.

He brought the Revels, a local troupe that retells and celebrates worldwide cultural traditions through music, dance and drama, and Big Train together, having their Maritime Voices ensemble perform at Big Train games for many years.

"He's a master at putting people together and creating connections," Revels Executive Director Greg Lewis said. "I don't know any community that he hasn't been an important member of."

An Alabama native, Daniel moved to Montgomery County with his wife, Linda, and two kids in 1976 to work in environmental law.

Nearly two decades later, he and Adams first met, not at a baseball game, but in local politics as Adams ran for Montgomery County Executive in 1994.

His bid fell short, but Daniel remained Adams' ardent supporter, which continued into 1999 when Adams spread the word about Big Train through his political mailing lists.

Twenty years later, when Adams reassembled the Bethesda Community Base Ball board, there was one person who fit the Secretary-Treasurer role perfectly: Daniel.

"When I was assembling the board, I thought, 'Who better than John Daniel?'" Adams said. "He's a humongous Big Train fan and he's this wonderful, welcome personality with legal and financial skills who's in touch with many other Big Train fans."

He got an immediate yes from Daniel, who had worked the same position for several other nonprofit organizations.

The transition of stewardship has made for a hectic last couple months for the BCBBC board, but Daniel has provided a steady presence on the board.

"The opportunity is not something that I had even thought of, I was just glad I was able to be chosen to be in a position to help contribute," Daniel said.

## Dick Lipsky: Big Train Board Member

By Alex Murphy

It started with a conversation, waiting in line for a John Kinsella bobblehead on a Saturday evening last August.

**Dick Lipsky** is an avid bobblehead collector. When he heard about the Potomac Nationals' Field of Dreams night at Pfitzner Stadium in Woodbridge, Virginia, he had to go.

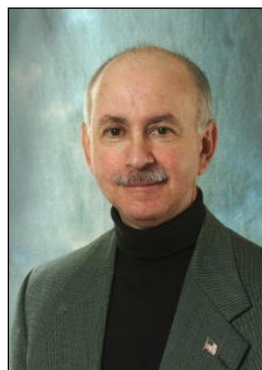
*Field of Dreams* centers around magically uniting people through a love of baseball. On this night in Woodbridge, the movie unexpectedly brought two people together: Lipsky and Big Train founder **Bruce Adams**.

"I hear this voice behind me say, 'Bruce!' and it was Dick, who is equally insane in terms of having to collect cool, weird bobbleheads," Adams said.

The two talked the entire game about the future of Big Train baseball.

"That was the most important conversation of the last nine months that led to the re-creation of the Bethesda Community Base Ball Club," Adams said.

Lipsky's passion for baseball dates back long before his bobblehead obsession. Born in Los Angeles, he originally grew up an Angels fan, but his passion for the game blossomed once he moved east to New York City.



"I went to a lot of games at Yankee Stadium, which was about two miles from my house," Lipsky said. "Also, when I was in high school, I was a vendor at Shea Stadium."

Lipsky started playing baseball at eight years old, excelling as a pitcher and first baseman. In Babe Ruth League, Lipsky threw a no-hitter, but his career ultimately ended when he was the last player cut from the Flushing High School team. While his time on the field was

over, his fandom wasn't.

He found his way to Maryland after working in Central Pennsylvania, taking a position at Montgomery County Public Schools in 1985 and is currently the district's television supervisor.

He attended local minor league and major league games for years. Once Big Train began in 1999, he was hooked.

"I said 'I love baseball, why don't I go down, take a look and try one of the games,'" Lipsky said. "I went to a couple of games and it far exceeded anything I had seen at the college level."

When it came time to recreate the Bethesda Community Base Ball Club, Lipsky, a long-time season pass holder, was an obvious addition. Though there is no 2020 season, Lipsky is looking toward the future as he looks to help to build up the organization.

"To be anything involved with baseball, starting when you're eight years old and you're still working in it in some capacity, is like a dream come true," Lipsky said.



## Big Train honors five community heroes

"The name of our organization is Bethesda Community Base Ball Club," explains Big Train founder and president **Bruce Adams**. "Community" is as important as the baseball," according to Adams.

The Jim and Carol Trawick Foundation has supported the Big Train's "Nonprofits of the Night" initiative since 2009. Each season, forty or more nonprofits each receive 100 free tickets to a Big Train game with an opportunity to throw a first pitch and showcase their organization to the Povich faithful.

Early this year, Adams reached out to **Carol Trawick** with an idea based on the Birdland Community Heroes program of the Baltimore Orioles. He proposed recognizing community heroes at Big Train games and giving each hero a medal, a Big Train jersey, and a check for \$250 to the hero's nonprofit. Trawick enthusiastically embraced the idea.

Because Covid-19 shut down our season, the Big Train Community Heroes, instead of being honored on the field, were honored as part of the "Safe at Home Tuesdays" interview show on [bigtrain.tv](http://bigtrain.tv). All the "Safe at

Home Tuesdays" interviews are available at the [bigtrain.tv archives](http://bigtrain.tv/archives).

Recognizing our community nonprofits needed funds now more than ever, the Trawick Foundation agreed to make \$250 donations this summer to each of the organizations of these heroes.

"These are not just Big Train Community Heroes," Adams said. "These are my personal community heroes."

Here are the Big Train Community Heroes: **Mark Bergel** is the founder and executive director of [A Wider Circle](http://www.widercircle.org), an organization dedicated to ending poverty that works to create stable homes by providing furniture and other basic needs items.

**Sheryl Brissett Chapman** is the executive director of [The National Center for Children and Families](http://www.nationalcenterforchildrenandfamilies.org) that supports the most vulnerable children and families within the community.

**Jackie DeCarlo** is the CEO of [Manna Food Center](http://www.mannafoodcenter.org) which has been actively combating the national food emergency in Montgomery County.

**Randy Schools** helped establish [The Children's Inn](http://www.childrensinn.org) at The National Institutes of Health (NIH), helping to meet the needs of children and families participating in groundbreaking research at NIH. "In addition to his extraordinary work at NIH and in the community," according to Adams, "Randy served as chair of our Booster Club for the first two decades of Big Train baseball."

**Teresa Rios Wright** is a board member emeritus of [Identity](http://www.identityinc.org), an organization serving Latino children and families especially impacted by the health pandemic.

Adams says the Big Train will honor these five community heroes on the field in 2021 and pledges the program will be a hallmark of the club's commitment to building a stronger community in the coming years.

"Yes, we are building an organization to support Big Train baseball, but community is in our name for a reason," Adams explained. "Making the contribution we can make to building Martin Luther King's 'Beloved Community' is an essential part of what we are about."

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*Top Ten Thursdays is a weekly [bigtrain.tv](http://bigtrain.tv) show that highlights the ten greatest games in Bethesda Big Train history, as voted on by team historian Bill Hickman, manager Sal Colangelo and founder Bruce Adams. Visit [bigtrain.org](http://bigtrain.org) to see the recap of Game #3, and tune into [bigtrain.tv](http://bigtrain.tv) on Thursday, August 6 for Game #2.*

## #5: July 31, 2016 Big Train 4, Redbirds 3

By Erin Byard

The fifth greatest game in Bethesda Big Train history pitted the Big Train against longtime rival, the Baltimore Redbirds, in a game three winner-take-all battle for the 2016 Cal Ripken League Championship. The Big Train was eager to capture the title, as the team had lost to the Redbirds in four straight championship games.

The series had been played in dramatic fashion leading up to game three. The Big Train edged out the Redbirds in the first game of the series at home on Friday night. Rain would delay the second game in Baltimore halfway through, leaving the teams to pick up the game Sunday. The delay put a halt in the Big Train's rally, and the Redbirds were able to pick up the win, evening the series and setting up a decisive game three later that afternoon.

As the visiting team, the Big Train would have their work cut out for them, having lost all three previous games played at the Redbirds' field, Calvert Hall, including game two just hours before.

Baltimore took the lead in the first after Big Train starter **Johnny York** (St. Mary's CA) surrendered a double that came around to score. They held that 1-0 lead until the fourth inning when **Clayton Daniel** (Jacksonville State) was hit by a pitch, bringing **Vinny Esposito** (Sacramento State) to the plate.

Esposito, the eventual regular season and playoff MVP, stepped up big, hitting a double off the center field wall, sending Daniel to third. **Cody Brown** (Mississippi State) continued the charge with a single, plating both Daniel and Esposito and giving the Big Train their first lead of the game. The rally continued for the Big Train, as catcher **Austin Hale** (Stetson) hit a bases-loaded, two-out, two-run single to give Big Train a 4-1 lead.

York allowed two runs over six innings and turned the ball over to right-hander **Drew Strotman** (St. Mary's CA) with a 4-2 lead.

Strotman surrendered a home run in the eighth, bringing the score to 4-3, but avoided further trouble. He went back out for the ninth, with all eyes on him, as he needed just three outs to capture the championship. The tying run reached second, but manager Sal Colangelo stuck with Strotman and he delivered, striking out the final two batters of the game to seal the victory for the Big Train.

"I remember specifically the last batter of the game was just pretty much all sliders," noted Strotman.

The Big Train won the game 4-3 and had captured the elusive Cal Ripken Championship over the Redbirds. This would go on to be the first of four straight league championships for the Big Train.



**Drew Strotman closes out the victory.** Photo by Nicole Kittay.

## #4: July 13, 2017 Big Train 6, Aces 5 (15)

By Patrick Sanderson

The Bethesda Big Train hosted the Alexandria Aces in a high-stakes late-season contest. In a league usually dominated by the Big Train and Baltimore Redbirds, the Aces entered the game with a one-game lead over Bethesda in the Cal Ripken League South Division with five games to go in the 2017 regular season.

The Big Train immediately jumped on Aces starter Matthew Brooks in the first inning with a three-spot thanks to RBIs from **Kevin Milam** (St. Mary's CA) and **Luke Heyer** (Kentucky).

The Aces didn't allow Big Train to settle into a three-run advantage for long, scoring a run in the second and two more in the third off **Blake Sanderson** (Florida Atlantic) to tie the game at three. Bethesda then jumped right back in front after an RBI hit by **Vinny Esposito** (Sacramento State) in the fourth. The Big Train made a call to the bullpen, after Sanderson threw five innings allowing five hits and three runs.



**Big Train players watch eagerly as the game goes deeper into extra innings.** Photo by Nicole Kittay.

The Aces plated a run in the seventh to tie the game off **Stephen Schoch** (UMBC), who came into the game with runners on base. Schoch shut down the next two innings, and with neither team scoring, the game headed to extras.

The Big Train threatened in extras numerous times, but couldn't convert. Meanwhile, **Nash Eppard** (Bryant) put up zero after zero on the mound for Bethesda, until Mack Nathanson's no-doubt homer in the top of the 15th seemingly put the dagger in Bethesda's hopes. However, the Big Train, with one final shot in the bottom half of the 15th, kept the line moving off Aces reliever Jacob Parker.

Esposito swung and missed at what seemed to be the final strike in the game, but the ball got away, allowing him to reach first. **Zach Jancarski** (Maryland) followed with a base hit and Bethesda was in business. Things got out of control for the Aces reliever, as he walked **Fox Semones** (James Madison) and **Logan Driscoll** (George Mason) consecutively on eight pitches to force in the tying run, bringing **James Outman** (Sacramento State) to the plate to be a potential hero. Outman swung at the first pitch, blooming a single into shallow left-center to score Jancarski and win the game.

The Big Train won 6-5 in a 15-inning thriller, taking one of the most important games of the 2017 season. The win began an undefeated stretch to close out the season, and they rode this momentum into the playoffs and captured a second straight league title.



# SAFE AT HOME TUESDAYS

## Taking a virtual summer college ball road trip

By **Patrick Sanderson**

In the sixth edition of Safe at Home Tuesdays, Big Train founder Bruce Adams and Will Geoghegan, author of *Summer Baseball Nation*, took viewers on a virtual road trip around the United States to some of the nation's finest collegiate summer ballparks.

Geoghegan's love for baseball began with watching the Cape Cod League every summer growing up. Originally raised in Louisville, Kentucky, his parents are both from Boston, leading to the annual trip to the northeast.

"For me, it all started with the Cape League, being a kid and going to games in Cape Cod," Geoghegan said. "It's probably where I went to my first game. Every summer it was something I looked forward to."

His book features nine ballparks that he toured, ranging from his beloved Cape Cod League in Massachusetts to the beaches of Santa Barbara in California.

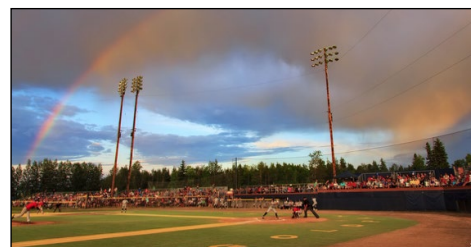
For some ballparks, such as the home

of the Santa Barbara Foresters, the setting stands out more than the field itself.

"They moved to Pershing Park which is right in downtown Santa Barbara right by the water, the shops and the restaurants," he said. He noted that their on field product impresses as well, and Forester manager Bill Pintard may be "the winningest manager in all of summer baseball."

Geoghegan and Adams took viewers on six mini-road trips and ended with a pair of "bucket list" worthy baseball adventures, visiting 15 summer college venues in all. The virtual tour ended with one of baseball's strangest adventures — the annual midnight sun game hosted by the Alaska Goldpanners at Growden Memorial Park in Fairbanks, Alaska

"It was at the top of my bucket list for a long time. The midnight sun game is played in Alaska every year on the summer solstice," Geoghegan said. "The sun sets, but not really. It dips below the horizon around 1 a.m. [It is] still just twilight around that



**The midnight sun game in Fairbanks, Alaska.**  
Photo courtesy of Will Geoghegan.

time, and then it comes back up, so it's 23 hours of daylight."

The midnight sun game became a local tradition on the summer solstice, leading to large crowds every year.

Geoghegan hopes to travel to Bethesda to see Big Train's own Shirley Povich Field, perhaps next summer when the cicadas come out of hiding so he can acquire an "I Ate A Cicada at Povich Field" t-shirt.

*This episode originally aired on Tuesday, July 14. To rewatch it, visit [bigtrain.tv](http://bigtrain.tv) and click "View Full Archives."*

## Greenberg and Berg: Two Jewish baseball icons

By **Patrick Sanderson**

In episode seven of Safe at Home Tuesdays, **Bruce Adams** spoke to documentary filmmaker **Aviva Kempner** about the lives of two Jewish baseball stars: **Hank Greenberg** and **Moe Berg**.

Kempner, who is a child of a holocaust survivor, first began her filmmaking career in 1986 as a producer for *Partisans of Vilna*, a film on Jews fighting Nazis.

"I was opening up that film in L.A., I'll never forget that, and I'm in my hotel room getting ready for my big opening and I heard... that Hank Greenberg had died," Kempner said. "And I said, 'That's my next film.'"

Kempner remembers how Greenberg was one of her childhood heroes and her dad would talk about how he himself looked up to the great Jewish baseball icon — almost as if she was meant to tell his story.

Over his Hall-of-Fame career, Greenberg accumulated 331 career home runs and a .313 lifetime batting average, despite taking four years off to fight in World War II.

Adams explained how Kempner's 1998

film, *The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg*, persuaded the Big Train to retire Greenberg's No. 5 at Shirley Povich Field.

"We chose to honor Hank Greenberg by retiring his number because your film convinced us that Hank Greenberg belonged with **Jackie Robinson** and **Roberto Clemente** as one of baseball's most significant barrier breakers," Adams said.

Kempner followed her Greenberg film with 2019's *The Spy Behind Home Plate* about Moe Berg. She recalled a conversation with a friend of hers, Bill Levine, who suggested several 20th century sports stars for her to make films on. His first few ideas didn't spark her interest, but then he suggested Moe Berg, a baseball star turned spy. Berg was such a brilliant and adventurous person that Kempner was immediately hooked on the idea.

According to Kempner, Berg's father, despite his son's natural athleticism, didn't approve of him playing baseball.

"His father never saw him play in high school, in grade school, in college or in the major leagues," she said. "[His father] was a



**Hank Greenberg during World War II.** Photo courtesy of Aviva Kempner.

workaholic, he wanted his kids to succeed, so, in fact, Moe did go to law school in the offseason from playing baseball...I think it's very sad."

Kempner hinted at more stories to come on Moe Berg through the Ciesla Foundation. The stories she told about Greenberg and Berg through her documentaries have shed light on the lives of prominent Jewish athletic heroes during the 20th century.

*This episode originally aired on Tuesday, July 21. To rewatch it, visit [bigtrain.tv](http://bigtrain.tv) and click "View Full Archives."*