

15. How does the Ripken League compare with the Cape Cod League and other summer leagues?

There is a broad consensus that the best league in summer college baseball is the Cape Cod League. With the exception of the members of the Team USA Collegiate National Team that attracts players for international competition, many of the nation's top prospects head to Cape Cod for the summer. Founded in 1885, the league was officially sanctioned by the NCAA in 1963. The league used aluminum bats from 1974 to 1984, but then switched back to wood in 1985. This decision increased the league's popularity with major league scouts and the league became a magnet for many of the most talented college players in the nation. Virtually all other top summer collegiate leagues followed the lead of the Cape to wooden bats. In 2017, there were 306 active major leaguers who had played in the Cape Cod League with more than 1,100 league alumni playing professionally.

In 2011, the Big Train was named the nation's top summer college team by Perfect Game USA. Last summer, the Collegiate Summer Baseball website ranked Bethesda number four in the nation behind the champions of the Cape Cod League (Brewster Whitecaps), Valley League (Charlottesville TomSox), and Golden State League (Top Speed Baseball). This was our third top ten finish in the last decade as our 2009 team was ranked ninth. In my view, these national rankings tend to distribute the top spots among multiple league champions, favoring teams with dominant records over the Cape Cod teams that battle top talent every night. Truth be told, as good as we were in 2011, we would not have been crowned national champions except that the standout teams during the regular season in the Cape Cod League and the Coastal Plain League were upset in their league championship playoffs that year.

The Collegiate Summer Baseball website reports that there are now more than 40 collegiate summer baseball leagues. In addition to Cape Cod, Coastal Plain, Ripken, and Valley leagues, strong summer leagues include Alaska, Jayhawk, MINK, New England, and Northwoods. The Ripken League is a member of the National Alliance of College Summer Baseball, twelve of the top summer leagues including the Cape and the Valley leagues. If you are traveling this summer and in need of a baseball fix, consider checking out some of these other leagues. Many of the collegiate summer teams have taken over classic minor league ballparks after the minor league team has left the city.

16. Are Homer and Bunt related?

Of course! Can't you tell?



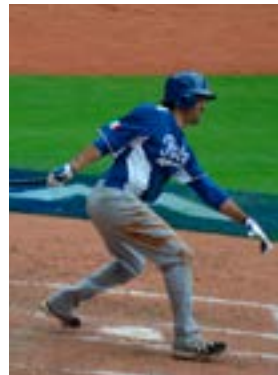
As every Big Train fan knows, Homer was the ancient Greek poet who created the first epic poems of western literature — the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. As the 17th century English philosopher Robert Burton described, Homer “did go from door to door and sing ballads, with a company of boys about him.” The Epic Home Run Race of 1998 between Sosa and McGwire brought him back to life after 2,800 years. Throughout the summer of 98, Homer kept hearing people calling out his name. “Homer!” they cried. “Homer!” But time had changed Homer. Instead of a long flowing white beard, he reappeared with long flowing brown ears. The Bible says the pools of Bethesda in ancient Jerusalem had the power to heal. Alas, neither the pools nor NIH could

turn this hound dog back into a wise man. But when he heard the citizens of Bethesda were building a stadium to honor another of the world's great storytellers, he knew Bethesda was where he wanted to be.

We don't know all the details, but sometime over the winter of 2005-2006 Homer had a son and named him Bunt. Bunt made his rookie appearance

at Povich Field on June 9, 2006. He recorded 1,000 hugs that first summer while eating 81 slices of Ledo Pizza and 224 Bean Bag cookies.

17. Does the Big Train have any international baseball connections?

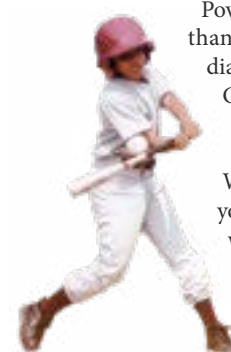


Mike Costanzo (Coastal Carolina, BT 2003) at World Baseball Classic in Miami March 12, 2013

In January 2001, my wife Peggy and I traveled with our daughter Emily to research an article about baseball in the Dominican Republic for *The Washington Post Magazine* of March 11. Our visit to Manny Mota's Campos de Sueno (Field of Dreams) in El Tamarindo led to the Big Train's first foray into international baseball. Manny and Margarita Mota were serving some of the most underserved children in the country, and we promised to help. We sent tons (literally) of sneakers, gloves, and baseball equipment donated by Big Train fans to the Motas over the next few years.

Twice the Ripken League has sent teams outside the continental United States — playing goodwill games in Puerto Rico in 2010 and Cuba in 2016. Three of the Big Train alumni who played in the major leagues played in the elite winter leagues of Latin and South America — Bobby Livingston (Trinity Christian HS, BT 2001) (Dominican Republic, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela), C.J. Jimerson (Miami, BT 1999) (Mexico and Venezuela), and Steve Schmoll (Maryland, BT 2000) (Venezuela). The well-travelled Livingston also played in Taiwan. Another former big leaguer Mike Costanzo (Coastal Carolina, BT 2003) represented Team Italy in the World Baseball Classic in 2009 and 2013. Carlos Gutiérrez (Miami, BT 2005) played in Puerto Rican Winter League and represented Puerto Rico in the 2009 World Baseball Classic. Chris Kelly (Jacksonville, BT 2001-02) played in the Puerto Rican Winter League. Justin Wright (Virginia Tech, BT 2008) played in the Venezuelan Winter League. Other Big Train alumni have played professionally in Australia, France, Germany, and Sweden. Former Big Train general manager David Ireland worked as an assistant general manager for a team in Brisbane, Australia. Big Train alumni have played for the British and Greek national teams.

18. How has the Big Train organization benefitted the community?



Povich Field was just the beginning. After making more than one million dollars of improvements to the 90' diamond in Cabin John Regional Park, the Bethesda Community Base Ball Club raised nearly \$600,000 to improve youth fields from Bethesda to Anacostia, Rockville to Takoma Park, and Germantown to Wheaton. In 2002, we built a miniature Povich Field for youth players in Cabin John Regional Park. I remember watching one of the first players walk through the gate and see that field and let out a “SW...E...E...T!” In 2003, Sharon Robinson joined Mayor Anthony Williams at Kimball Elementary School in Anacostia to dedicate Jackie Robinson Field in honor of her dad. This was the first of several abandoned fields we turned into community jewels in the District of Columbia to support the Fields of Dreams after-school baseball and character education program.

In addition to providing great baseball at affordable prices right near home, the Big Train organization has been committed to serving the community in other ways. Big Train players have collected 12,158 pounds of food for the Manna Food Center in the eight years of the Cal Ripken Collegiate Baseball League's Feed the Hungry Challenge. Players from the four Ripken League teams in Montgomery County have collected nearly 22 tons of food for our