

20 QUESTIONS

seasons including six in a row from 1894-1899. As a big league manager for 20 years, his record was 1,491-1,367. He helped Ban Johnson recruit players from the National League to establish the American League in 1901 and was the owner of the Washington Senators from 1920 until his death.



In the mid-1960s, Lady Bird Johnson's beautification initiatives eliminated two of the four baseball fields on the Ellipse and forced the league to relocate to Northern Virginia. The Griffith League wasn't the only activity disrupted by Mrs. Johnson's conservation efforts. As President Johnson once explained: "Whenever I try to take a nap, there is Lady Bird in the next room

with Laurance Rockefeller and eighty ladies talking about the daffodils on Pennsylvania Avenue."

In the early 1970s, the Griffith League adopted the use of aluminum bats which had become popular with amateur baseball organizations. The iconic Cape Cod League became the first collegiate summer league to reintroduce wooden bats in 1985 after a decade of using the aluminum bats favored by college baseball. The wooden bats attracted major league scouts which in turn drew the best college prospects to the Cape. With a goal of improving the quality of players, the Griffith League made the switch back to wooden bats in 1993, changed its name to Clark C. Griffith Collegiate Baseball League, and relaxed its rules about accepting players from outside the Washington area. Griffith League teams captured the championship of the All-American Amateur Baseball Association in Johnstown, PA in 1997 (Prince William Gators) and 1998 (Arlington Senators). In 1999, the Big Train became the fifth team in the league. The Senators would repeat as national champions in 1999 and win again in 2001 and 2002.

The Big Train was a consistent competitor in the Griffith League right from the start, finishing in second place in our 1999 inaugural season and representing the league with a third place finish in the National Amateur Baseball Federation (NABF) College World Series. In 2000, the Big Train posted the best overall record at 29-11 in the Griffith League, but finished second in each round to two different teams and failed to make the playoffs (yes, we changed the rules after that). The 2000 team was runner-up in the NABF College World Series. Bethesda slipped to fourth place out of seven teams in 2001 posting its only non-winning season at 20-20. The Big Train finally broke through in 2004 and won the Griffith League crown.

Some in the Griffith League leadership appreciated the fan friendly, community service values of the Big Train and the Silver Spring-Takoma Thunderbolts, but others did not. In the end, our culture never meshed with the self-described "baseball guys" of the Griffith League. After winning the championship in 2004, we decided to start a league explicitly dedicated to the community service values that had inspired our founding.

We decided to focus the new league in Maryland and approached two top teams that regularly competed in the national AAABA tournament. The College Park Bombers readily agreed to join. The key, it seemed, would be to get Youse's Maryland Orioles, a Baltimore-based team named after the legendary scout and coach Walter Youse. In 60 years as the backbone of amateur baseball in Baltimore, Youse had helped produce scores of major leaguers, including Hall of Famers Al Kaline and Reggie Jackson. The Big Train had regularly played exhibition games with the Orioles at Povich Field. When Youse's manager Dean Albany agreed to join the effort, the project had instant credibility in the world of college baseball. The Thunderbolts of Silver Spring-Takoma had joined the Griffith League in 2000 and modeled its program after the Big Train. They became the fourth team giving the new league the critical mass needed to move forward.

Very quickly, we realized that the perfect way to honor Maryland's tradition of old school, fundamental baseball would be to name the new league after Cal Ripken, Sr. As one of the architects of "The Oriole Way," Ripken Senior's maxim was simple: "Perfect practice makes perfect." The Maryland native began managing his way up the Orioles minor league system in the Class D Florida State League in 1961 at the age of 25. He served as manager of the major league Orioles in 1987 and 1988. He left a legacy of excellence admired by all who love the game. On September 6, 1995, Cal Ripken, Jr. broke Lou Gehrig's unbreakable record of consecutive major league games played, and he said this about his dad that night: "He not only taught me the fundamentals of baseball, but he also taught me to play it the right way, and to play it The Oriole Way. From the very beginning, my dad let me know how important it was to be there for your team and to be counted on my your teammates."



We had a great idea for the league's name. Now, we needed to get it approved. In addition to managing the national champion Youse's Orioles, Dean Albany was a scout for the major league Orioles. Dean and I met with Billy Ripken, a twelve season major leaguer and one of Ripken Senior's sons, and laid out our plans for the new league. The family soon gave its approval and turned responsibility for negotiations with the new league over to the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation. The inaugural season of the Cal Ripken, Sr. Collegiate Baseball League began with a June 10, 2005 game at Shirley Povich Field between the AAABA national champion Youse's Orioles and our 2004 Griffith League champion Big Train. Over time, the six team Ripken League grew to ten and expanded its territory into the District of Columbia and Virginia. Some of that growth came as the Griffith League contracted and ultimately suspended operations after the 2009 season. Youse's Maryland Orioles had replaced the Griffith League's Arlington Senators as the dominate national team winning the AAABA crown in 2003-2008 and 2010-2011 and again in 2013 before it suspended operations after the 2014 season. In 2010, the league dropped "Sr." from its name to avoid sounding like a league for those 55 and better.

6. What is the Big Train's win-loss record over the years?



The Big Train has been a success since the very first inning of the very first game on June 4, 1999. My wife Peggy gave me one of those "You are an idiot?" looks that I seem to get from

people fairly frequently when she asked just before our inaugural game, "Why would you schedule opening night against the national champions? Wouldn't it have made more sense to schedule a team you could beat?" While silently questioning my own sanity, I breezily responded: "But wouldn't it be cool if we beat the national champions?" It was a great relief when with