

their homes. Each year, we need to find housing for 20 to 25 players for all of June and July. This is no small task, and we are so grateful to all the host families and to our host family coordinators who have made this happen over the years — Joyce Semmes, Jami Deise, Laura Forman, Anne Fletcher, and Emily Waldman.



Host mom Becky Crowley with two of her boys — Hunter Renfroe (BT 2011-12) and Wes Rea (BT 2014) at the Carolina-California Single A All-Star Game in Wilmington, DE on June 17, 2014

I can say from personal experience that hosting a Big Train player is one of the joys of the youth of Bethesda. Our kids, Emily and Hugh, adored the players who stayed with us. For a summer, your child can have the coolest big brother in the neighborhood.

Some years, the Big Train wins championships by beating teams that have more raw talent and professional prospects. I am absolutely convinced that our host families are the reason. Many players who could move on to other summer college leagues come back for a second or even third season with the Big Train because they love the atmosphere at Povich Field, the Bethesda community, and their host families. This gives us an edge in experience and commitment that no other team in our league can match. Hunter Renfroe (Mississippi State) helped lead the Big Train to the national championship of all of summer college baseball in 2011. Teams in the Cape Cod League would have loved to have had him in 2012. But he came back to Bethesda in significant part because he stayed with the MVP of host moms, Becky Crowley. Hunter returned for a second season and obliterated the Ripken League record books in virtually every slugging category. And it worked out pretty well for Hunter as he was selected in the first round of the major league draft the next summer.

## 10. Why do the college players use wooden bats in the summer?

As we have said from the very start twenty years ago, our goal has been to offer the fans of Big Train baseball at Povich Field baseball at its most genuine. Part of being genuine is using wooden bats. Maybe a better question would be “why do the NCAA Division 1 teams still use metal bats?”

Back in the day, bats were made of wood. During the 1970s, aluminum bats became the fashion. For young kids, the aluminum bats made sense as they were lighter and easier for kids to swing. College baseball adopted them in part because they were less expensive than wooden bats that break and need to be replaced much more frequently. So, what’s wrong with metal bats at the college level? Nearly everything. Aesthetically, no baseball fan prefers the pinging sound of a metal bat over the exquisite crack from a wooden bat. Money is far less an issue today as the modern aluminum bats now cost a small fortune. At the high school and college level, safety should be of foremost concern. The ball can come off a high quality aluminum bat at a frightening pace. In fairness, the bat manufacturers concerned about safety and about losing a valuable market have been working in recent years to make the ball come off aluminum bats in a manner that more closely resembles wood.

In addition to the issues of aesthetics, safety, and money, the switch back to wooden bats has been a huge part of the revival of summer college baseball. The Cape Cod League became the first collegiate summer league to reintroduce wooden bats in 1985 after a decade of using the aluminum bats. Hitting a baseball with an aluminum bat is a lot easier than with wood because the sweet spot is larger on the aluminum bats, and the ball has more spring off aluminum than wood. The MLB scouts like the summer collegiate wooden bat leagues for a very straightforward reason: they are trying to draft and sign players who will be swinging wood and pitching against wood. They want to see the real thing. With a metal bat, a hitter can fist an inside pitch over the

infield for a single. With a wooden bat, that same batter on that exact same pitch might be on his way back to the dugout with a stub of a bat in his hands. The Cape Cod League in 1985 and virtually all other top summer leagues in the decade following switched to wooden bats and reaped the benefits. Scouts want to see the wooden bat game. Good players want to be where the scouts can see them. And fans want to go where the best players are.

## 11. How many of the players go on to play professional baseball?

An amazing 41% of the 379 Big Train alumni who have finished their college careers have gone on to play professional baseball. Summer college baseball is a gateway to the major leagues. Most of the players endure the grind of a summer season on top of a grueling spring of classes and travel and games because they want to play professionally. They know that they need to play to get better. They know they need to be seen to get drafted. And they want to test themselves against the best with the wooden bats used at the next level. Thirteen Big Train alumni have worked their way through all the levels of professional baseball to the major leagues.

One of the great thrills of my experience with the Big Train is being able to watch our alumni progress through the ranks to the pinnacle of the sport. I remember walking into Ripken Stadium in Aberdeen in 2002 and seeing Jim Cooney (FAU, BT 1999-2000) signing autographs for young fans. He looked up with a big smile on his face and told me, “I learned to do this at Povich Field.” What a delightful surprise it was in 2013 at Marlins Park in Miami to see Mike Costanzo (Coastal Carolina, BT 2003) warming up in his Team Italy uniform for a World Baseball Classic game.



Brian Dozier (Southern Mississippi, BT 2006) added his name to ball signed by Big Train alumni in MLB at spring training in Fort Myers, FL March 5, 2014

I wish I had thought of this earlier, but a few years ago I started collecting on a single ball the autographs of our alumni who have made it to the major leagues. I ask each one to sign his name, number, and the date of his first MLB game. As of this spring, I have seven autographs on the ball: Allen, Bowman, Dozier, Garton, Hayhurst, McKenry, and Renfroe. I’ve got six to go and hope to have the opportunity to fill that ball.

## 12. What is the seating capacity at Povich Field?

750.

Our original idea was to use the aluminum bleachers already in place at Cabin John’s Field #1 and simply build a clubhouse with an improved press box, concession stand, and bathrooms. Minor league entrepreneur par excellence Peter Kirk convinced us that we



You never know who you might run into at Povich Field.

would not be able to attract return fans unless we provided real seats. That insight dramatically changed our original plans and exponentially increased the cost of our initiative. The brick and concrete grandstand that we built at Povich Field originally held 606 seats (a row of disability seats was removed a few years ago by Parks to add the flexibility to better accommodate wheelchairs). Our builders moved an aluminum bleacher from the third base side to beyond the grandstand down the rightfield line, increasing the seating capacity to 750.