

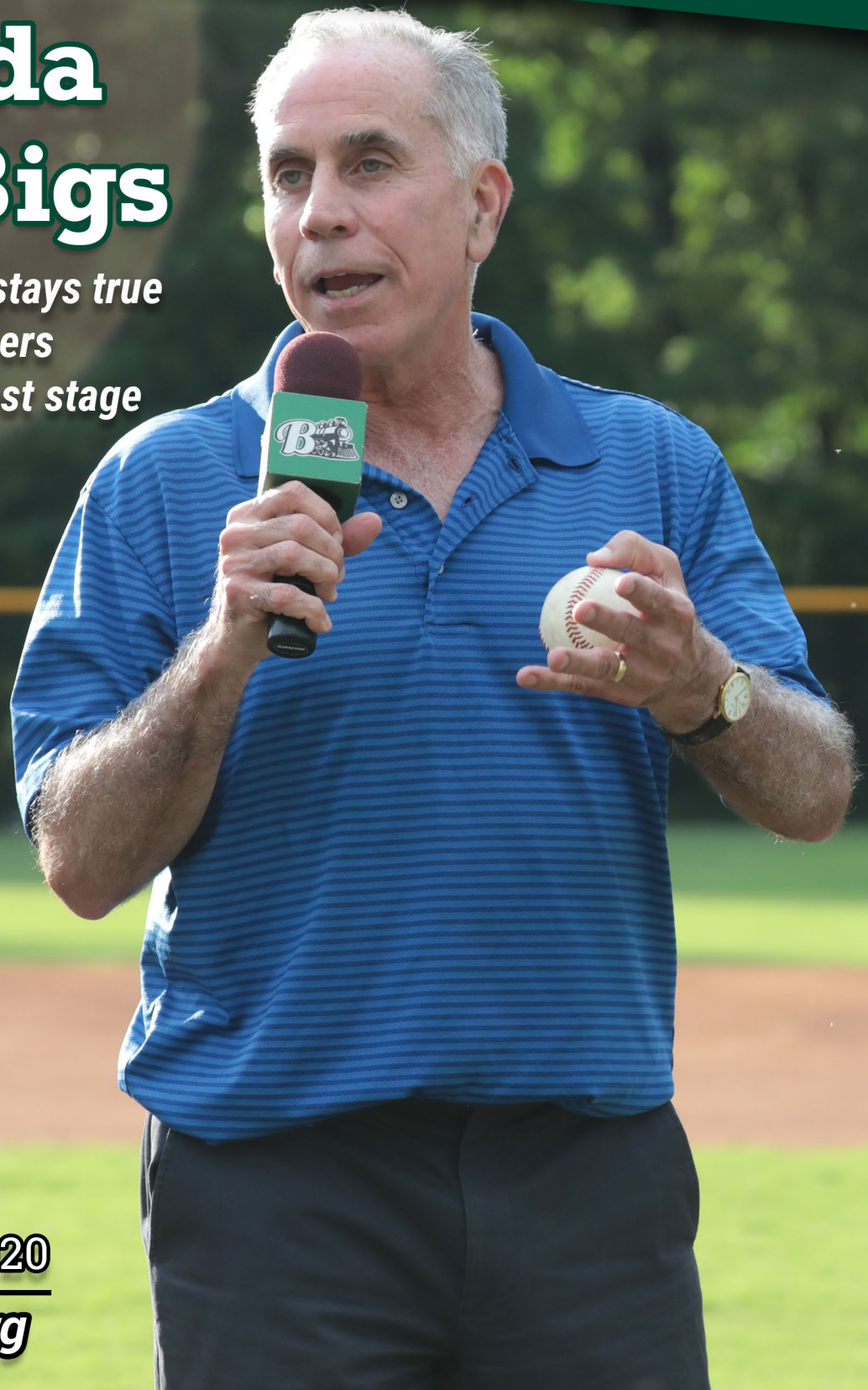
BIG TRAIN BEACON

The Official Magazine of Bethesda Big Train Baseball



Bethesda to the Bigs

*ESPN's Tim Kurkjian stays true
to his roots as he covers
baseball on the biggest stage*



Issue 3: July 15, 2020

www.bigtrain.org



THE BIG TRAIN BEACON

Third Issue – July 15, 2020

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A Message from Bruce Adams

To Our Big Train Community:

Tim Kurkjian is a community jewel.

ESPN's MLB analyst isn't just a walking, talking baseball encyclopedia. He's a really great guy. A Bethesda native and Walter Johnson High School graduate, Tim has been a wonderful partner to the Big Train for many years (you can read more about Tim on pages 3 and 4 of this issue of the *Beacon*). He comes to Povich Field to talk with the players and greet the fans every season. For years, he spoke at our annual auction holiday party. We had a Tim Kurkjian Bobblehead Night. Just last month, Tim joined Hank Thomas for our "[*Safe at Home Tuesdays*](#)" [*interview about Walter Johnson*](#).

Every time we ask, Tim says yes. His support for Big Train has been extraordinary. A couple of weeks ago, I asked again. I have been really impressed by the six college journalism students who have been turning out three nights of programming each week on bigtrain.tv and now this third edition of the *Big Train Beacon*.

It occurred to me that a new title for the interns would enhance their resumes as they seek employment in a tough market. How about calling them **Tim Kurkjian Sports Journalism Fellows**? Now, that will impress the people who hire young sports journalists, I thought. And so I asked Tim if we could do that. Tim said he would be honored. And Tim being Tim came out to Povich Field for a socially distanced conversation over lunch in our picnic pavilion to meet the newly minted Kurkjian Fellows and share his story of how he worked his way up the ladder of the sports journalism world.



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. With your support, we are more than two-thirds of the way to our goal of raising \$60,000 this summer. If you have not yet given, please go to www.bigtrain.org and hit the DONATE button, or [*click here for a direct link*](#). 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

Founder & President

Bethesda Community Base Ball Club

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Bethesda to the Bigs

Tim Kurkjian's persistence led the writer from local fields to baseball's biggest stage

By Patrick Sanderson

Since he was eight years old, **Tim Kurkjian** has lived and breathed baseball. Whether he was playing, umpiring or writing about it, he couldn't see himself making a career out of anything else.

Early in his writing career, one of his gym teachers at his alma mater, Walter Johnson High School in Bethesda, pulled him aside after reading one of his stories in the school paper – admittedly a very poorly written one.

"I hope you're not planning on making this your life's work," Kurkjian, laughing, remembered him saying.

Now, the Bethesda native is one of ESPN's top baseball analysts, but he never forgets where he came from, and each step which guided him to a career he once only dreamt of.

Kurkjian was raised in a naturally talented family; his older brothers, Matt and Andy, had successful high school and college baseball careers. Andy, his oldest brother, went on to graduate with a doctorate from Massachusetts Institute of Technology – the same school where their father completed his undergraduate degree.

Success in the classroom was a priority in the family, but for Tim, sports reigned supreme.

"I was one of those kids, not particularly

well-rounded, not particularly interested in a lot of things other than sports," Kurkjian said.

In fact, when he wasn't at school, he could be found at the baseball fields in Cabin John Regional Park, because nobody could keep him away from the sport.

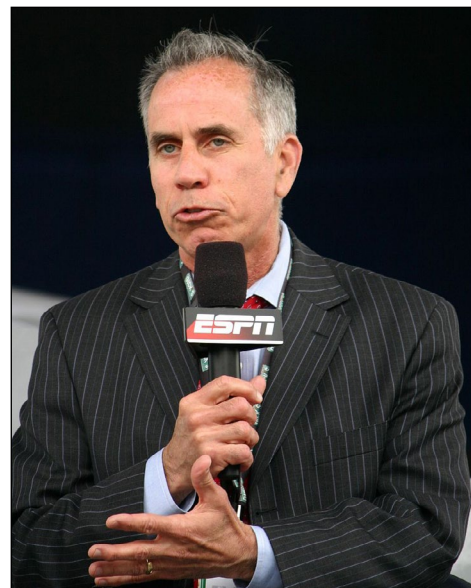
"I would watch all the games there and routinely I would play a game there, go take a shower and then I would umpire a game there, sometimes umpiring a game with kids who were only a couple years younger than me," Kurkjian said. "I would spend a lot of time at Cabin John Regional Park."

Growing up in a tight-knit community like Bethesda, his close friends would regularly gather and play baseball, only adding to his love for the game.

"There was not a day in my childhood, say age six to 18, where I didn't walk out my front door, and I had buddies of mine that you would go play a game with any time you want," Kurkjian said. "That's what I remember most. Not just all the friends I had, but how we would so easily get a group together and go make a pickup baseball game."

He played baseball and basketball in high school, but was aware that his short stature, among other things, limited his future athletic prospects. He was advised to take up writing for the school newspaper, *The Pitch*.

He later learned of a conversation his older brother had with their father regarding Tim's



Long after starting his career at Bethesda's Walter Johnson High School, Tim Kurkjian is now a senior baseball writer and commentator for ESPN. Photo by Jeff Kern/Wikimedia Commons.

future path. Andy questioned what kind of career his youngest brother would pursue, since he couldn't find much that interested him. His father thought differently, though.

"He looked at my brother, who wasn't trying to be mean or hurtful. He was just concerned for his little brother...and my dad said, 'Tim will be fine, Tim will figure this out.'"

Kurkjian decided to study journalism at the University of Maryland and covered sports for a local news outlet, the *Montgomery Journal*.

Soon after graduating from Maryland in 1978, he landed his first job at the *Washington Star*, which had previously turned him down multiple times.

While freelancing at the *Star*, he traveled to Albany, New York, to cover an event at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. This trip tempted him to leave the *Washington Star* in pursuit of a full-time, salaried staff job at the Albany paper.

However, he sought out advice from one of his professional mentors, Dan Shaughnessy of the *Boston Globe*, who advised him to stay put in Washington, where the larger market might offer more opportunities.

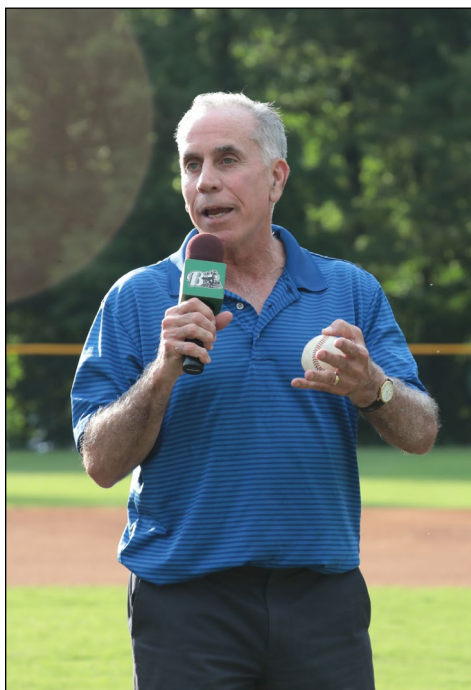
He took Shaughnessy's advice and stayed with the *Washington Star*, finally earning a spot on the full-time staff. But only four months went by before the paper folded, and just like that, he had to search the job market again.



LEFT: A high school-aged Kurkjian. RIGHT: Kurkjian (#10) starred on the basketball court and the baseball diamond for Bethesda's Walter Johnson High School. Photos courtesy of Tim Kurkjian.



TIM KURKJIAN



LEFT: Kurkjian speaks to the Povich Field crowd. Photo by Niamh Brennan. **RIGHT: Kurkjian chats with Big Train players.** Photo by Bruce Adams.

“We were just told one day that in two weeks there would be no more *Washington Star*,” Kurkjian said. “I wanted to work for the *Star* for the rest of my life, that’s how much I loved that job.”

Luckily, Kurkjian landed a job at the *Baltimore News-American* just two days after the *Star* officially folded. He covered the Maryland basketball program – a great beat to have as a new staff member – as well as the Baltimore Orioles.

However, his luck ran out after just two months as the paper downsized and laid off around 45 people, the first of whom was Kurkjian.

“I was the first guy to get laid off because I was the last guy to get hired. I lost two jobs in two months, and none of it was my fault,” he said. “It was not easy, I had to show some perseverance which, thankfully, I did, and it’s much easier to do that when you’re young.”

Kurkjian reflects on the advice from Shaughnessy, saying it was key in launching his career.

“Even though these papers folded while I was there, the best thing that happened to me was I stayed at the *Washington Star*, and I saw those great writers, and I got great exposure working for a tremendous sports section,” Kurkjian said.

Not only did staying put give him exposure and a chance to grow, but it allowed him to make connections, like Dave Smith,

his former boss at the *Star*. Smith left the *Star* to work in Dallas shortly before the paper folded, and when Kurkjian’s position at the *News-American* didn’t work out, his connection led to a job covering sports for the *Dallas Morning-News*.

“That turned out to be a great move for me because I got offered a job, there was no doubt I was going. I was a little bit afraid because I had never left home before, never left D.C. before,” Kurkjian said. “It turned out to be a great thing, and Dallas was a tremendous experience.”

He eventually worked his way up to *Sports Illustrated* in 1989. While there, he was offered a job at the *Washington Post* by sports editor George Solomon, which he respectfully declined, preferring to stay in his then-current role.

Solomon had interviewed Kurkjian for a position years before when he was with the *Washington Star*, and told him bluntly after a nine-minute interview that he wasn’t ready to work at the *Post*.

“He was right,” Kurkjian said. “He always tells the story that one of the biggest mistakes he ever made was not hiring me out of the *Washington Star*, and I always disagree. I didn’t deserve a job back then; I wasn’t good enough.”

In 1998, after nearly a decade at *Sports Illustrated*, Kurkjian accepted a position at ESPN as a baseball writer and television reporter, even without much on-air

experience. He’s been there ever since.

As he covers everything around the sport from breaking news to the MLB All-Star game to the World Series, he always remembers where he started in Bethesda.

Year after year, he comes back to meet and talk to Big Train players, coaches and staff, standing on the very field he grew up playing on.

“Every time I go back to that field, it’s a really cool experience for me. I always make sure I go talk to both teams,” Kurkjian said. “I hope to be able to counsel them a little bit on what is in front of them. I always make sure I play catch with the guys while I’m there because it reminds me of when I played on those fields.”

He continued: “I spent a good portion of my childhood at Cabin John Regional Park... If I’m going to give my time to one place, that’s where I’m going to start, because it’s so personal to me.”

Childhood homes are friendly reminders of where one came from. Bethesda is where Kurkjian found his passion, and now he is able to give back and teach when he has the chance.

And, years after Tim grew up in the shadow of his brothers, his oldest brother Andy never forgot that conversation with their father.

“He said, ‘Dad was right. You figured it out,’” Kurkjian said, smiling. “I thought that was kind of cool.”

Eric Cole: Host Dad turned Vice President

By Alex Murphy

Big Train outfielder **Drew Hamrock** (Virginia) stood in the box for his fourth plate appearance of the night on June 7, 2019.

Looking to start a rally, instead his evening came to an abrupt end, as he took a pitch to the face, forcing him to leave the game.

While not at the game due to a prior commitment, **Eric Cole** and his family, who were hosting Hamrock for the summer, got a call from the team and immediately drove to meet him at the hospital.

"I knew that he would be super responsive, super fast," Hamrock said. "They jumped in right there, right off the bat. It was kind of funny, once I was there...He was able to sit in the waiting room with me and cheer me up for [what] felt like forever."

Hamrock returned to Big Train later in the summer to help win the team's ninth Cal Ripken League Championship. Cole and his family really made the difference for him that summer.

"It was a great experience," Hamrock said. "They made me feel very welcome. To this day, they go way out of their way for me... For them to see us win it was awesome."

Big Train has become a perfect fit for Cole, currently in his first season as the team's vice president. A lifelong baseball fan, he later pursued lacrosse in college. But, the birth of his son, Ryan, helped reignite his passion for the national pastime.

"Around 2008 or 2009, we probably started going to games with [Ryan] because it was a way for him to see things up close," Cole said. "It was a great atmosphere, close to home and just a wonderful experience."

Baseball became important for **Ryan Cole**. Born with Dandy-Walker Syndrome – a malformation of the brain involving the cerebellum – his developmental, intellectual and motor skills weren't up to that of his peers.

As a result, Ryan bonded with the game, not from playing, but through pencil and paper. He found a vital niche in the dug-out as the team scorekeeper on his church's baseball team.

"One of the things that a coach did early on because Ryan liked the game so much was to tell the other boys that Ryan was going to keep the lineup," Cole said. "The boys



LEFT: Eric Cole (right) with his son Ryan and wife Andrea. RIGHT: Drew Hamrock and Ryan Cole pose with the Ripken League trophy after Big Train's 2019 championship. Photos courtesy of Eric Cole.

wanted to know what the order was, but the coaches wouldn't tell them. They would say, 'You go ask Ryan.'"

Keeping lineups evolved into Ryan's passion: scorekeeping. Therefore, Cole and his wife, Andrea, wanted to support him and get him closer to the sport – something more intimate than traveling to Nationals Park or keeping score at Big Train and youth games.

What better way to do that than to host a Big Train player? The Coles did exactly that last summer. Opening their home up to Hamrock was as perfect an experience for everyone as they could have hoped for.

"I really love Ryan. He is fun to be around," Hamrock said. "...I still refer to Ryan as my little brother."

Hamrock introduced Ryan to Big Train manager **Sal Colangelo**, who immediately welcomed Ryan and the Coles into the Big Train family.

"The players have a big heart to try to welcome him into our family of baseball as much as we do with the players and families," Colangelo said. "Ryan's just an amazing person. It was just a win-win. Couldn't have happened to a better young man."

Through scorekeeping, the Coles met Big Train president and founder **Bruce Adams** during games at Shirley Povich Field and on the road.

"Ryan is an avid scorekeeper, and I'm a scorekeeper. I started sitting with him and chatting with him at the Big Train games," Adams said.

Their relationship blossomed during this past offseason when Adams asked the elder Cole to be part of his think tank as he

prepared to retake leadership of the club.

As Adams knew, the busiest people often do the best work.

Baseball is just the tip of the iceberg for Cole, who is the Deputy Executive Officer at the National Cancer Institute (NCI) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

In 2005, he founded the Dandy-Walker Alliance, Inc., a nonprofit that supports families worldwide affected by Dandy-Walker Syndrome.

He served on the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities from 2008 to 2010, and served ten years on Maryland's Developmental Disabilities Council. Currently, he is on the Business Advisory Council for SEEC, a nonprofit dedicated to the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities.

When the Bethesda Community Base Ball Club was reestablished, Bruce asked him to serve as Vice President. "Eric was the first person I thought of," Adams said. "I could feel the passion that he had for the game and Big Train."

In Cole's current tenure on the board, he has made what looked to be a difficult, sudden transition of team stewardship quite easy.

His commitments with the NCI and the Dandy-Walker Alliance make for a busy schedule. However, he's always able to find time to work on building Big Train, which brings him joy.

"The Big Train, with Bruce's leadership, embodies the value and the character of an organization that I am proud to be a part of and consider myself extremely lucky to have this opportunity," Cole said. "...It's literally a dream come true."



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The Dandy-Walker Alliance is a proud partner of Bethesda Big Train Baseball.

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Top Ten Thursdays

Thursday, July 16
7 p.m. ET

Game #5

The countdown continues! Watch as Alex Drain breaks down the fifth greatest game in Big Train history.

Talkin' Baseball

Monday, July 20
7 p.m. ET

Host Families

Shaun Salehi and Sal Colangelo chat with one of our host families about the work they do to make Big Train so special.

Safe at Home Tuesdays

Tuesday, July 21
7 p.m. ET

Aviva Kempner

Bruce Adams chats with documentary filmmaker Aviva Kempner about the careers of Hank Greenberg and Moe Berg.

All programs stream at www.bigtrain.tv.

*Top Ten Thursdays is a weekly **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. As each game is unveiled, we will bring you a written flashback here in the Big Train Beacon. Tune in this Thursday, July 16, for game #5, a contest from July 2016.*

#7: July 28, 2018 Big Train 9, Redbirds 8

By Noah Ziegler

Fierce rivals who had faced off in the championship every year for a decade, the Big Train met the Baltimore Redbirds at Povich Field for game one of the 2018 Cal Ripken League Championship Series. Big Train hoped to defend their previous two titles while the Redbirds hoped to unseat them atop the league.

Christian Hlinka opened the scoring for the Redbirds in the second, but in the bottom of the frame the Big Train reclaimed the lead on a two-run single by **Ben Martz** (UC Santa Barbara).

An RBI double from **Carson Taylor** (Virginia Tech) and a run-scoring double-play ball from **Jacob Westerman** (San Francisco) in the third and fourth innings, respectively, extended Bethesda's lead to 4-1, but in the top of the fifth, Baltimore scored three to tie things up.

After five solid innings from Big Train starter **Chris Clarke** (Southern California), manager **Sal Colangelo** went to the bullpen. But the pitching change didn't stop the Redbirds' momentum, as the visitors tacked on a run in both the sixth and seventh to make it 6-4. Fortunately for Colangelo's squad, their rally began in the bottom of the seventh while down two.

Eventual Cal Ripken League regular season and playoff MVP **Alec Burleson** (East Carolina) doubled in a run. Then, **Jacob Southern** (Jacksonville) walked with the bases loaded, bringing the game to a 6-6 deadlock.

Baltimore took the lead in the top of the eighth with back-to-back homers, but then, the Big Train's engine began to roar.

A Redbird error, a single and a hit by pitch juiced the bases for Bethesda in the bottom of the eighth with no outs. Then, **Alec Burleson** drives in the winning run. Photo by Niamh Brennan.



Alec Burleson drives in the winning run. Photo by Niamh Brennan.

Gavin Hinchliffe (Kansas State) sealed the game in the ninth, giving Big Train a 1-0 edge in the 2018 League Championship Series.

Baltimore would go on to win game two by a 3-1 score. Due to rain, game three was never played, meaning the teams were crowned 2018 LCS co-champions, despite the Big Train (37-7) edging out the Redbirds (34-10) in total record, including the playoffs.

"We just had a lot of clutch hitting, a lot of clutch play, but the guys came to the ballpark and just wanted to play every single day. So, it was a very, very good team," Colangelo said.

#6: July 30, 2017 Big Train 4, Redbirds 2

By Erin Byard

The Big Train hosted the Baltimore Redbirds at Shirley Povich field for this winner-take-all game three of the Cal Ripken League Championship series. The rival juggernauts had battled for the league championship every year since 2009, so it was no surprise to see them face off again in 2017.

The Big Train had been a force to reckon with all season long, finishing the regular season with a record of 31-9 on the backs of strong team chemistry and a lethal offense.

"The team was fueled by offense, there were a lot of guys who could really hit the ball," team writer **Ben Portnoy** recalled. "This was a team that swung the bat really well and really just outpaced their opponents."



Starter Tyler Smith threw five shutout innings. Photo by Nicole Kittay.

Tyler Smith (East Carolina) started the game on the mound for the Big Train and dominated, throwing five scoreless innings.

The game was tied 0-0 until the bottom of the fourth when **Justin Morris** (Maryland) hit a bases-loaded double that plated all three runners to break the deadlock. The Big Train extended their lead to 4-0 later in the frame when Morris scored from third on an errant pickoff attempt.

After a strong five innings from Smith, **Ty Madrigal** (St. Mary's CA), the team's best starter in the regular season, took the bump in relief. He pitched a scoreless sixth, and after letting up two runs in the seventh, he orchestrated a pick off play to finish the inning. This ended the Redbirds threat and kept Bethesda in the lead.

Hanging on to a 4-2 advantage, manager **Sal Colangelo** handed the ball off to dominant closer **Stephen Schoch** (UMBC) in the eighth.

Colangelo described Schoch, who had yet to give up a run that summer, as one of "the greatest arms as far as just getting it done... knowing [his] plan or approach on the mound."

Schoch tossed a scoreless eighth and headed into the ninth just three outs away from the championship. The Redbirds refused to go away quietly, putting two men on against him. But with two outs, Schoch induced a ground ball to the right side. First baseman **Kevin Milam** (St. Mary's CA) fielded the ball and tossed it to Schoch covering the bag, clinching a victory – and a second straight Cal Ripken League title – for the Big Train.

The team finished the season ranked 4th in the nation, their second-best ranking to date.

Maraniss, Rieder reflect on Clemente's magic

By **Patrick Sanderson**

In episode four of *Safe at Home Tuesdays*, Big Train founder **Bruce Adams** discussed **Roberto Clemente** with **David Maraniss**, who wrote a biography on the Pittsburgh Pirate great, and **Duane Rieder**, who founded the Clemente Museum.

Maraniss, who has written biographies on several iconic sports and political figures, explained why he wanted to write about Clemente, attributing his awe to watching him play at such a young age.

"There was just something about him that I thought was just the coolest thing I'd ever seen. The way he walked, the way he threw the ball, everything about him," Maraniss said. "Every kid has a 'someone.' A writer, an artist, a musician, or an athlete that you just find a soulful connection to that's ineffable, you can't quite explain it. That was Clemente for me."

Rieder, a Pittsburgh-based photographer, spent ten years building a studio as a photo archive with Clemente collectables on the second floor.



A mural graces the side of the Clemente Museum in Pittsburgh. Photo courtesy of Duane Rieder.

When PNC Park hosted the 2006 MLB All-Star Game, Rieder was asked to host a Clemente party in the studio, and after someone told him his photo archive looked more like a museum, he decided to turn it into one.

"The day after the Clemente party, I decided to start giving Clemente tours and I started telling the stories that I've learned," Rieder said.

These stories aren't just limited to baseball. Maraniss said the Hall of Famer dedicated his life to helping others, whether it be educating children in Puerto Rico, giving money to those who needed it, or flying

to Nicaragua to help the country after a devastating earthquake. That flight ultimately took his life.

"Everything about him – not just his final effort to help people in Nicaragua, but his entire life – was shaped around that notion of being a man of the people," Maraniss said. "It was innate...some people just have that. I mean, where does any of the magic of Clemente come from?"

Rieder's collection now includes contracts, game-worn jerseys, Gold Glove awards and Clemente's prized 1971 Silver Slugger award. Today, he dedicates his time to his photography career, as well as carrying on Clemente's legacy with the museum.

"The way he died is the way he lived. He spent every moment, if he wasn't playing baseball, he was trying to help children, trying to help the needy, the poor, the stories just go on and on," Rieder said. "...I wanted to be like Roberto and I want to keep his legacy, I want to keep his story going."

This episode originally aired on Tuesday, June 30. To rewatch it, visit bigtrain.tv and click "View Full Archives."

Summer college ball in Baltimore & Washington

By **Patrick Sanderson**

In episode five of *Safe at Home Tuesdays*, **Bruce Adams**, **Dean Albany**, **Ben Trittipoe** and **Bill Hickman** dove into the history of summer collegiate baseball in the Baltimore-Washington region.

Hickman, who wrote an article with Adams on the subject for the Society of American Baseball Research (SABR), brought up the birth of amateur summer college ball in Maryland. The Maryland Amateur League started in 1909 and several other leagues followed.

Later in the 20th century, head coach **Walter Youse** dominated the Baltimore-area amateur circuit. His teams featured young talented players including **Al Kaline**, who starred locally before going on to a Hall of Fame MLB career.

Like clockwork, Youse took his team to the prestigious AAABA tournament in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, every August. **Buck Showalter**, **Joe Torre** and **Pete Vuckovich**

all played in the tournament in the early days of their careers, so Youse winning a record AAABA 19 titles over the years was no small feat.

"Walter took a lot of pride at the end of every year to take his team up there and try to compete to win a national title," said Albany, who managed Youse's Orioles after the legendary coach's death.

The Clark Griffith League was established in 1945 and provided strong competition for college players in the D.C. area for more than 60 years. The league boasted several powerhouse teams over the years, including the Arlington Senators and Bethesda Big Train, but ultimately suspended play in 2010.

"It really, really was great baseball in the early 2000s, it was a constant challenge each year," Trittipoe said. "The team that came out of the Clark Griffith League had a great chance at going to Johnstown and doing very well."

In 2005, the Cal Ripken Collegiate League took shape as the new premier league in the



Dean Albany (second from left) Sal Colangelo (third from left) and Bruce Adams (second from right) were part of the inaugural Cal Ripken League Hall of Fame class.

region. Teams like the Baltimore Redbirds and Youse's Orioles drew top-level collegiate talent from around the country.

Manager **Sal Colangelo** has risen to Cal Ripken League Hall of Fame status thanks to his decade and a half of success at the helm of the Big Train.

This episode originally aired on Tuesday, July 7. To rewatch it, visit bigtrain.tv and click "View Full Archives."