

# Players, coaches flock to tryout

Over 200 cram Cannon Stadium for chance to play in the Mid-Atlantic High School Baseball Classic

Sports Comment

By Joe Gross

August, 2007

The searing heat that began baking Joe Cannon Stadium and the world around it early yesterday morning didn't keep the scholastic baseball players from showing up to show off their skills.

Nor did the heat and humidity and the glaring sun slow the pace of Lou Holcomb who, with a clipboard seemingly attached to his hand, race-walked from station-to-station, from group-to-group, from youngster-to-youngster around the field.

It's all a colorful scene. The players come decked out in cherry and scarlet and cardinal and burgundy, and navy and azure and midnight and sky, and of course the gray and black and white. All the hues intertwine as the athletes go through their paces, run the 60 yards in the outfield, 90 feet from home to first, throwing and catching and the like.

Holcomb, the very organized and intense director of the Mid-Atlantic High School Baseball Classic, was long ago an all-everything pitcher-outfielder at Old Mill High School who created a baseball driven business called Diamond Recruiting that works to help scholastic players advance to college players and even to the professional ranks.

Part of that business was the skills combine that was held yesterday with approximately 200 players who hoped to be seen.

"I can hear to get noticed, to get people to hear my name, said All-County pitcher Austin Poretz, a rising senior at St. Mary's High in Annapolis who was among the approximately 20 local products who participated in yesterday's event.

"I think I can get a better change of getting into a college where I can play baseball," Poretz said. "Each of these showcases do about the same things,

but it's important to get my name out there because different colleges come to each of them. You also get to know what things you have to work on."

Another local player who took part in competition for position players was Mount St. Joseph High's center fielder Drew Tokasch who lives in Arnold.

"I came here expecting to get some college coaches to look at me and hopefully to be recruited somewhere, to get some letters, to get some coaches to talk to me," said Tokasch, a senior-to-be who has already been in contact with a number of coaches.

Yesterday's large field of candidates was whittled down to make up two teams that will play in tomorrow's keynote event, the all-star game that will get under way at noon at the University of Maryland's Shipley Field, an event that has become known as the "Battle on the Ship".

"We'll take the best 20 players from the North Region that represents Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York, and we'll match them up against the top 20 kids from D.C., Virginia and North Carolina.

"We started this combine five years ago with about 50 kids coming out and we worked them out at Archbishop Spalding and held the game at Joe Cannon Stadium. This year we'll have over 200 players out here with us," Holcomb said.

"I think that's the most we can really handle and do the best possible job of evaluating," he added, implying that he didn't want to cheat any of the players who turned out for the event, that players from Maryland and points south working out in the morning and those from as far north as Massachusetts in the afternoon sessions.

Holcomb explained that while it's a good thing to be among the players who advance to the all-star game, it isn't necessary to get recognized by some of the coaches looking for players who will fit into their programs.

He said that along with the coaches present at the showcase, he always is contacted after the fact by coaches wanting to know the times or the evaluations of players who participated in yesterday's event.

"What we look for ideally are athletes", Holcomb said. "We look for tools, the five tools of baseball: foot speed, arm strength, fielding their position, and at the plate we look for them hitting for contact and hitting for power. If we get a high school kid who shows us two or three of those tools, that's ideal."

Holcomb said that he actually adopted the process from the youth league all-star system that broke the season into two sections that led to all-star teams that went into the regional competitions and beyond. He also seemed to recall how important it was for the players to be treated well while going through what can be a nerve wracking process.

“Do you best out here today,” he told the hopeful candidates before they broke up into their groups. “It’s good to be a little bit nervous, that gives you more adrenaline. But remember that it’s hot so stay hydrated. That will help you do the best you can.”

During the rare break in his darting around the field, Holcomb did all in his power to make the players feel comfortable with his advice and to raise their confidence with verbal pats on the back.

While Holcomb was running the show on the field with a dozen or so other area coaches who take on the difficult task of evaluating the talents and abilities of the players, a large portion of the audience in the stands at the Hanover stadium were the college coaches. The college coaches want to see for themselves the collection of talent at the event. The coaches want to see who they may eventually want for their teams, or players who want to be a part of their teams.

The entire process, yesterday’s combine and tomorrow’s all-star game, is watched closely by college scouts who were at Joe Cannon armed with their own clipboards and rosters and stop watches along with some knowledge of some of the players they might want to bring into their programs.

And it is the college coaches who, as a group, play the most important roles in the success of the showcase event and the players who turn out in hopes of being seen and remembered for what they do in the field.

The rest of the crowd sitting in the heat yesterday were the very supportive and quite nervous, parents of the players who paid, \$100 fee for the chance to have their youngsters seen and hopefully to earn scholarships or to get invitations to play at one college or another.

Giving the youngsters the exposure to college coaches is also part of Holcomb’s business. He seems to know rather well how to do that as he has had a large cluster of coaches sweating yesterday at Joe Cannon Stadium along with the players.

The coaches were as hopeful about getting players as the players were about getting those very coaches to see them. And Lou Holcomb was coordinating the hopes of both groups.