



Sigma Summaries

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“Let’s All Pitch In”

A friend recently remarked that corporations rarely give back to their communities, a comment that I thought was a gross overstatement and incredibly narrow-minded. Nonetheless, it got me to thinking and I realized that corporations represent nothing more than the collective characters that make up the board of directors, senior management and rank and file employees. Hence, a corporation will only be as committed to supporting a community as their people. This further got me to reflecting on how the individuals at Sigma spend their non-work hours. I am pleased to note that there is a great deal of community involvement, from Marisa Lenhard’s volunteer work as the treasurer of the Detroit based, non-profit arts group, Scarab Club, and Ken Bernard’s leadership on the board of Yad Ezra, a local food pantry, to Roger Steeds’ leadership role in the Sigma Investment Counselors/Ellington-White Project joint effort at implementing the Student Economic Partnership, or STEP, a financial literacy program aimed at inner-city Detroit youth that kicked off this past summer. Of course, Dave Bergman has a long-standing reputation as one of the Detroit area’s foremost promoters of amateur baseball through his Baseball Showcase, for high school baseball players interested in playing professional baseball or obtaining scholarships to play college baseball. Detroit Free Press sportswriter Curt Sylvester is guest writing this month’s Sigma Summaries, with an exposé on the 2005 Baseball Showcase. We hope you enjoy reading it.

Dave Bergman thought he knew what he was getting into. He’d take a team of 14-year olds – including his son, Troy – coach them through four seasons in the Macomb Amateur Baseball Federation and that would be it. That’s what he thought 13 years ago – in 1992 – when he was wrapping up a successful 16-year professional baseball career and was convinced by a sports writer/baseball coach wanna-be that he’d enjoy passing along his knowledge of the game to youngsters in the east side program. “I just thought it was going to be one team, take it all the way through and see what happens,” Bergman said recently. “Then, of course, I became good friends with Danny Griesbaum and Tony Braun, and they kind of convinced me maybe two teams would make some sense.”

Okay, two teams instead of one – with Griesbaum, the Grosse Pointe South coach, and Braun, a Grosse Pointe attorney with a love of the game – and they’d keep them going for four or five seasons. It sounded perfectly reasonable. “Then from two teams we went to four teams,” Bergman recalled. “And there was a time we actually had five teams.” Sure, four teams – one in each of the four upper age groups – a team for the 15-year-olds, a team for the 16-year-olds, one each for the 17s and 18s. And, yes, why not a team for the college kids?

With his former Tigers teammate Kirk Gibson helping him launch and finance the project, the concept and the program grew, taking on an identity of its own. The team became the Redbirds – a name

chosen by a group of the original players after seeing Bergman’s Illinois State University Redbirds jersey framed in the basement of his home. “Midway through the process, as it stands now, Tony Braun – along with Dick Swarouth – presented to me that he’d like to do a showcase and things got crazy,” Bergman said, laughing. “But without all the help and without all the commitments from the volunteers, none of this would work because I just don’t have the time to put into working this 24/7. When you’re running all these teams and a showcase, it requires a lot of time.”

To be sure, there are volunteers; Bergman can be very convincing when he goes through the community looking for volunteers. He has coaches with strong baseball

backgrounds – Griesbaum, Braun, Dan Cimini of University Liggett schools, Mike Getz, whose family has been involved in east side baseball for several decades, John Hackett, one of the best east side players ever, Mike Stevenson, an assistant coach at Grosse Pointe North, former Tigers trainer Pio DiSalvo and others.

Their teams play as many as 40 or 50 games during two months of the summer, the players learn to play the game correctly and – with Bergman’s driving force behind them – a high percentage of them use the late-summer showcase to catch the attention of college baseball coaches. Bergman accepts 156 players – mostly high school juniors and seniors – to compete and show their baseball skills for three days in August. College coaches are invited and virtually all of Michigan’s major colleges and universities are represented.

Dale Petroskey, the president of the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., has a high school age son who has participated in the showcase and he has seen Bergman in action. “I see Dave walking around, talking to college coaches, saying ‘You ought to really look at this kid, he’s got heart, he loves to play the game, he will give you 110 percent and, believe me, he’s got the grades to go to any school he wants to go to,’ ” Petroskey said. “Dave is the champion for all these kids, although he doesn’t give false hope either. The thing about Dave is that he’s going to tell it like it is. He understands what it takes to play at these different levels and he’s going to make sure the kids get the most out of their ability.”

Gibson, a World Series hero for two teams – the Tigers and Los Angeles Dodgers – has witnessed Bergman perform on two levels – as a Tiger hitter in a difficult role of valued utility man and as a teacher of young players on the amateur level. On the professional level, Gibson saw Bergman at his best in a 17-pitch at bat against Roy Lee Jackson of the Toronto Blue Jays during the Tigers’ pennant drive in 1984. “It’s kind of what defines you,” Gibson said. “It takes a lot. There’s a lot going on and the game can get fast; you have to keep it slowed down. When it gets fast, some people can’t handle it but – hey – that’s fun.” Bergman fouled off pitch after pitch until he got the one he wanted, then deposited it in the seats in right field at Tiger Stadium for an important Tigers victory. “He fouled off 13 pitches and six of them were probably balls,” Gibson said. “I say that kiddingly and it probably wasn’t that many but the fact is, it’s one of the arts of hitting – to stay alive. The more pitches you see, the better opportunity you have to center one, even if it’s a good pitch he throws you but, even more so, if he makes a mistake.”

Bergman has discussed coaching and front office opportunities at the major league level but decided after retiring from the Tigers in 1992 that he had spent enough time on the road. He decided to stay closer to home with wife Cathy, daughters Bria and Erika, and son Troy as well as Sigma Investments and the Redbirds. He stays close to the Tigers organization but clearly has found a way to pass along the knowledge he accumulated during his baseball career via the Redbirds organization. “I don’t know if he anticipated it but I think what

happens with guys like Dave – when you get into it – your passion for the kids takes over and that’s why you expand,” Gibson said. “It’s fun, it’s passionate, it’s rewarding and, with his background, it’s a special service to the community. And you know Dave’s motivation for these kids. He wants to get them into college, to the next step. It’s beautiful.”

It’s difficult to get an exact count on the number of players who have gone from the Redbirds program and their showcase to play college baseball but it is several dozen. Rich Maloney, the Michigan baseball coach, had a former Redbirds player – Chris Getz of Grosse Pointe – on his 2005 team and sees the solid foundation of skills and baseball savvy. But Maloney says Bergman teaches life skills that are just as important. “Quite honestly, I think that’s more important than baseball,” Maloney said. “Honestly, that’s the reason I’m a coach. So many people breathed it into me and now I have a chance to breathe it into young people. That’s exactly how Dave sees it. We see it bigger than the game of baseball. We see baseball as a game that we certainly want to reach our full potential in and we want to play it to the highest level that we can. But at the end of the day we want to develop young men into people that will be productive and make a difference in other people’s lives. It’s kind of like passing the baton…… we’ve got to pass it on to the younger kids and, hopefully, they’ll pass it on to the next generation.”

There are currently five former Redbirds – including Getz and Sean Dobson of Eastpointe – playing professional ball at various minor league levels. Getz is a middle infielder drafted in the fourth round

by the Chicago White Sox in June. He started the season at Great Falls, Mont., was quickly promoted to Class A full-season Kannapolis, N.C., where he hit .304, and says he got a big chunk of his baseball foundation with the Redbirds. "It established how to play the game the right way," Getz said. "I remember Dave always stressing that you hustle on and off the field, you do things the right way because you never know who's watching you. Always play the game the right way."

Dobson is an outfielder who has played two seasons at the Class A level. He hit .273 with the New Jersey Cardinals last season and says he also got his foundation from Bergman and the Redbirds program. "It's really easy to be around him, he makes it easy for you," Dobson said. "He doesn't treat you like he's way above you and he could because of what he's done. That's a big thing for me – the way he treats people. If you didn't know he played major league baseball for 16 years, you'd never think it just by meeting him."

As a player, Bergman says he learned from many major league managers. "I played for Billy Martin (in New York) and that toughened me up," he said. "Bill Virdon taught me discipline. Then in '81 I got traded to the Giants and played for Frank Robinson, who literally taught me how to play the game of baseball. And then got traded to Detroit (in 1984) and Sparky Anderson taught us how to be men."

As a coach, one of Bergman's points of emphasis is an insistence that players pay attention and play smart baseball. He has little patience with careless mistakes on the baseball field, perhaps because he worked so hard himself to get an edge. Although he won batting titles in his first two seasons in the minor leagues, Bergman eventually wound up in the niche of a utility man. He could be counted on as a pinch hitter, a starter and a defensive replacement at first base. And, in that role, there was little margin for error; he had to be focused and ready for whatever he was asked to do. Along with Gibson and shortstop Alan Trammell, Bergman would study opposing pitchers and catchers, looking for a telltale indicator of what pitch might be coming or a pattern of pitches that might be expected at the plate. "I always tried to be one step ahead of the manager, anticipating what might happen," Bergman said. "It was not unusual for me to be three innings ahead of what the manager might be thinking." "And I think because of that, I learned what transpires during a game. I didn't just sit there and watch; I sat there and studied the game. And that's why I think I have a lot to bring to these kids – the mental part of the game."

The home run against Toronto was just one of the highlights of Bergman's career. He also broke up two Nolan Ryan no-hitters. But if you ask him what meant the most to him about playing in the major

leagues, it's none of those highlight reel moments. "This is going to really sound boring but I guess I'm kind of boring," he said, "but I've got to tell you something. In retrospect, reflecting on my career, the highlights of my career truly are being around some of the highest-quality individuals I've ever been around in my whole life and having that major league uniform on my body. That truly is what I remember."

As for his accomplishments in a Tigers uniform, Bergman feels he was fortunate to be "in the right place at the right time." "I'd like to think I did my job in a way that reflected what the people of Detroit are all about. Kind of blue collar. You kind of keep your mouth shut, go out there and play as hard as you can every day. It makes you feel good when people say 'We enjoyed watching you play because you played hard all the time.' I knew when I was in college I didn't have the most talent out there. But my work ethic, I think, got me to the level I was able to get." It's a lesson, an approach, a philosophy Bergman is working to pass on. Thirteen years with the Redbirds so far. With no indication it's going to end soon.

Your financial situation and investment objectives should be reviewed periodically to ensure applicability to your current situation. Please remember to contact Sigma Investment Counselors if there are any changes.

