

Season Re-Cap **BIG TRAIN '04**

2004 Clark Griffith Collegiate Baseball League Champions



Big Train Dog Pile

The Bethesda Big Train won the Griffith League championship for the first time in our sixth season. Bethesda defeated the Herndon Braves three games to one in the league playoffs before losing to the eventual champion and runner-up at the All-American Amateur Baseball Association (AAABA) championship in Johnstown, PA in early August. The Big Train led the Griffith League in hitting with a .266 batting average and an on-base percentage of .356. Bethesda's pitchers set a new all-time Griffith League record with a team earned run average of 2.08, including nine shutouts.

Once again, the Big Train was a box office success. Despite numerous rainouts, Big Train fans turned out in amazing numbers to cheer on Bethesda's 2004 Boys of Summer. 16,000 fans came to watch the Big Train, including ten standing-room-only crowds of 750 or more.

The 2004 season started with a Sunday June 6 nail-biter as rightfielder Nick Cleckler (Lipscomb) knocked in catcher Trey Cuevas (Southern Mississippi) in the bottom of the eleventh inning for a 5-4 victory over the visiting Reston Hawks. After a doubleheader split the next day, Bethesda fell behind 5-1 against the Baltimore Pride, and it looked like a mediocre start for the 2004 Big Train. Manager Derek Hacopian turned to Keith Moreland, a recent graduate of St. John's College High School, to stop the bleeding. Moreland did his job and so did the offense to pull out a 10-6 victory and set the team on course for its championship season.

A Saturday June 12 doubleheader sweep of the previously unbeaten Herndon Braves before a standing-room-only Povich Field crowd gave the Big Train a 6-1 season start. The Big Train moved into first place to stay the next night when Adam Redd (Virginia Tech) and reliever Keith Moreland (UNC-Charlotte) combined on a three-hit shutout victory over the previously unbeaten Fauquier Gators.

Catcher Michael McKenry (Middle Tennessee State) launched a lead-off ninth inning blast far over the centerfield fence to give the Big Train a 4-3 victory over the Herndon Braves on Saturday June 19. He did it again four nights later leading off the bottom of the eighth inning to defeat the Silver Spring-Takoma Thunderbolts 4-3 and give Bethesda a record of 11-2.

On Wednesday June 30, the Big Train traveled to Virginia to play the Vienna (formerly Arlington) Senators with a two game lead in the standings. The Senators had beaten the Big Train six straight games over a two year period, five by a single run. In the bottom of the seventh inning, the Senators scored twice to come from behind and take a 3-2 lead. With two outs and a man on in the top of the eighth inning, the left-handed swinging Brian LaNinfa (Mississippi State) came to the plate. Two outs, then two strikes. LaNinfa battled the count full and then blasted a shot deep into centerfield to score the tying run. Three batters later and the Big Train had a four run lead and a three game advantage in the standings. Back in Virginia the next night, the Big Train pounded the Senators 8-1 behind another sensational performance by starter Chris Rhoades (Towson).

On Saturday night July 3 in Herndon, the Braves (13-7) delivered notice that the season was far from over with a 6-0 win over Bethesda (16-5) to pull within 2 1/2 games at the season's mid-point. Each team won five games over the next week until the Train ran off the track on Tuesday July 13 in an ugly 9-1 loss to the Thunderbolts at Blair High School. The next night, Bethesda lost the first game of a doubleheader allowing the Braves to pull within a game and one-half. Once again, Keith Moreland stopped the bleeding. He retired 22 Baltimore Pride batters in a row and recorded the fourth no-hitter in Big Train history.

Two losses to Vienna set the stage for a must win when red-hot Herndon, winners of 18 of its last 20 games, came to Povich Field on Saturday July 24 just a game behind first place Bethesda. Montgomery County na-

**Bethesda
Big Train
Griffith League
1999-2004
Regular Season
Record Under
Manager
Derek Hacopian
(150-90 .625)**

1999
23-14, 2nd place
2000
29-11, 2nd place
in both rounds
2001
20-20, 3rd place
2002
27-14, 2nd place
2003
22-18, 5th place
2004
29-13, 1st place



*Michael McKenry (Middle Tennessee State)
tied for the Griffith League Home Run Crown.*



Chris Rhoades, Keith Moreland, Casey Baron & Adam Redd contributed to the best team ERA in Griffith League history.

tive Casey Baron's (Paint Branch HS/Maryland) gritty 118 pitch complete game 1-0 shutout win was just what the Big Train needed.

On Wednesday July 28, Bethesda (27-11) stood just one game in front of Herndon (25-11) with four games left to play. The Braves pulled percentage points ahead Thursday July 29. The game that ultimately gave the Big Train its regular season championship came on Friday night July 30 when the relief tandem of Russell Durfee (Springbrook/Duke) and David Hayes (Florida Atlantic) and outstanding fielding by centerfielder Jonnie Knoble (San Francisco) combined to lead a come-from-behind 4-3 win at Povich Field. The Big Train finished the regular season with a 29-13 record, a single game ahead of Herndon at 28-14.

In game one of the best-of-five Griffith League playoffs to determine the league representative to the AAABA in Johnstown, PA, the Big Train bats were hot in an 11-3 romp at Povich Field. Herndon evened the series at a game each with a 3-2 win on Tuesday August 3. Drew Carson went 5-for-5 with a two-run home run, a double and three RBIs, as the Big Train rolled to victory over the Braves, 9-3 on Thursday night August 4 at Povich Field. The Big Train survived a ninth inning Herndon rally when relief pitcher Russell Durfee forced a ground out with the tying run on second to defeat the Braves 5-4 Friday afternoon August 5 at Herndon High School. The win clinched the CGCBL Championship Series for the Big Train three games to one. Adam Redd (Virginia Tech), a three year Big Train veteran, struck out 11 and allowed only two earned runs to get the victory. Justin Martin (Florida Atlantic) hit a three-run home run in the first inning. Drew Carson homered, scored three times, and was named CGCBL Championship Series Most Valuable Player after going 12-for-18 in the four games.

The Big Train nearly pulled off a major upset to begin the AAABA on Monday afternoon August 9. The Big Train scored in the top of the ninth to take a one run lead over the defending National Champion Maryland Orioles. But the Orioles won the game on a

two-out, two-run walk-off home run in the bottom of the ninth inning. On Tuesday, the Big Train fell 2-1 to New Orleans at Point Stadium to be eliminated from the tournament. Ultimately, Baltimore defeated New Orleans for the AAABA crown.

"Our championship season was a complete team effort, and no one symbolized the concept of team effort better than Jonnie and Greg," said Manager Derek Hacopian in naming Jonnie Knoble (San Francisco) and Greg Lemon (Salisbury) as the team's Most Valuable Players for 2004. "These two guys represent everything that is great about this game. They are all hustle, all the time. A championship team needs leaders on the field and in the dugout. Jonnie and Greg were our leaders all season long."

Centerfielder Jonnie Knoble from Sandy, UT led the Big Train in hits with 42 and stolen bases with 17. "The other teams knew that a fly ball anywhere near centerfield was an automatic out," explained Hacopian. The speedy Knoble made just a single error while displaying extraordinary range. Second baseman Greg Lemon from Wilmington, DE was equally proficient with the glove, making just two errors out of 210 chances. Lemon had 41 hits and 16 RBI during the regular season.

Hacopian named Keith Moreland (UNC-Charlotte) as the Big Train's Most Outstanding Pitcher. A powerful right-hander from Silver Spring, MD, Moreland had the second best earned run average in the Griffith League at 1.16. Moreland was 6-1 for the Big Train, striking out 41 while walking only 15 in 46 innings pitched. "Keith has the size, the arm, and most of all the work ethic that takes pitchers to the next level and beyond," according to Big Train Pitching Coach Brian Fitzgerald, a former big league pitcher with the Seattle Mariners.

First baseman Brian LaNinfa (Mississippi State) was named Most Outstanding Hitter by Hacopian. The left-handed slugger from North Venice, FL had the league's third best batting average at .333. He had 41 hits, 14 of them for extra bases. LaNinfa led the league in walks with 24 and on-base percentage at .436. *Baseball America* rated LaNinfa the second best pro prospect in the Griffith League.

Virginia Tech's Adam Redd, a veteran of three Big Train summers, won the team's Hustle Award. A right-handed hurler from Dumfries, VA, Redd had a 3-1 record with a 1.19 ERA in the regular season.

Big Train catcher Michael McKenry (Middle Tennessee State) was named Most Valuable Player for the Maryland All-Stars in the Sixth Annual Joe Branzell All-Star Game played July 2 at Shirley Povich Field. McKenry tied for the league lead in home runs for the season with seven, a new high for a Big Train player. McKenry led the Griffith League with a .566 slugging percentage. *Baseball America* rated McKenry the fourth best pro prospect in the Griffith League.

Bethesda Big Train MVPs

1999 – Gregg Davies
1B/OF, Towson

2000 – Pat Boran
3B/SS, Princeton

2001 – Casey Gilvin
OF, Kentucky/
Morehead State

2002 – Byron Binda
RHP, Coastal Carolina
Gus Hlebovy
RHP, Kent State

2003 – Mike Costanzo
3B/RHP,
Coastal Carolina

2004 – Jonnie Knoble
CF, San Francisco
Greg Lemon
2B, Salisbury



Jonnie Knoble



Greg Lemon