



Baseball Gods Get Even

2003 BETHESDA BIG TRAIN SEASON RECAP

Maybe it was the baseball gods getting even after our 2002 Big Train team picked up 15 of its 27 victories by a single run. The 2003 Big Train posted a record of 22-18 with nine one run losses, including four of the five losses at the start of the season and four of the five losses to the eventual league champion Senators. The 2003 Big Train made a gallant effort but could not overcome a five game losing streak at the season's start.

The 2003 Big Train team was competitive in virtually every game, getting blown out only once in 40 contests and outscoring its opponents by 186-148, a margin of 38 runs. In contrast, the 2002 Big Train compiled a 27-14 record while outscoring its opponents by only 17 runs (145-128).

The extraordinary number of early season rain-outs made a mess of the Griffith League's June schedule and led the league president to rule that the traditional June and July rounds would be combined into a single season with the top four teams qualifying for a post-season double elimination playoff. The single season format created a steep mountain to climb for the 0-5 Big Train.

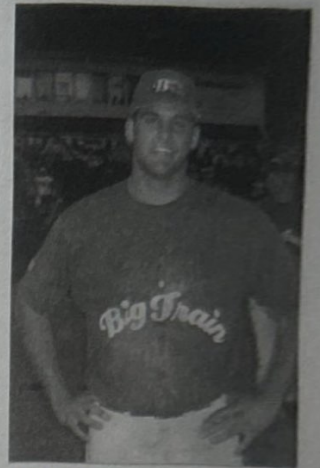
The season's start was excruciating for Big Train fans as the opening five losses were by a total of six runs — 3-1, 3-2, 6-5, 4-3, and 4-3. On June 16, Bethesda won its first two games of the season sweeping a doubleheader from the Herndon Braves 9-4 and 4-2 at Herndon High School. In the first game, Mike Costanzo (Coastal Carolina), Joel Miller (Virginia Tech), Jeff Fontaine (Evansville), Trey Holloway (Arkansas-Fort Smith), and Nolan Mast (SW Texas State) homered for the Big Train. Holloway recorded the Big Train's first win. Brian LaNinfa (Mississippi State) started the second game with a two run home run over the center field fence in the top of the first inning. Bethesda reliever Shay Horseman (Middle Tennessee State) got the 4-2 win when the Big Train scored twice in the top of the eighth on a two RBI single by Mast.



Big Train fans line up for autograph of future Orioles starter John Maine (BT 2000) at July 8 Frederick Keys Night at Povich Field.

Win number three was followed by four straight losses. A June 25 split doubleheader at Germantown's new Ridge Road Recreational Park — an 8-1 blowout win followed by a 3-2 heartbreaking loss — put the Big Train record at a lowly 4-10 in eighth place in the nine-team Griffith League with 26 games to play.

From June 26 to July 6, Bethesda was the hottest team in the Griffith League, winning seven straight and moving from eighth place to fifth place at 11-10. The streak began with a 7-6 eleven-inning win over the Herndon Braves behind an awesome hitting display by lefthanded slugger Marcus Taylor (Middle Tennessee State). Taylor homered three times, including the game winner in the top of the 11th inning. Only one other player has hit three home runs in a single game during the Griffith League's decade-long wooden bat era — Mark Teixeira, now with the Texas Rangers.



2003 MVP Mike Costanzo

On Friday night June 27, Mike Costanzo put his full range of talents on display to lead the Big Train to an 8-4 victory over the Reston Hawks at Povich Field. Costanzo hit a three run home run in the second inning to give Bethesda a 5-1 lead. In the sixth inning, he moved over from third base to the pitcher's mound to relieve starting pitcher David Skoczlas (McDaniel) and pitched three scoreless innings. In the eighth inning, Costanzo doubled and scored the Train's final tally.

The Big Train Saturday night 7-4 win over the Reston Hawks at South Lake High School was powered by Jeff Fontaine who had a double and a single for the Big Train while scoring once and knocking in a run. A rain-out set up a Sunday doubleheader with the Fauquier Gators at Povich Field. At the end of a long and tension-filled night, the Big Train escaped with two important victories, 2-1 and 4-3. In the last inning of the first game, Ian Gibson (Belmont Abbey) doubled and scored the winning run on a single by Matt Clarkson (Arkansas-Fort Smith). J.P. Wechter's (Hofstra) RBI single in the bottom of the 10th secured victory in the nightcap. Reliever Kalen Gibson (Kentucky) got the win.

Big Train first baseman Brian LaNinfa was named Most Valuable Player of the Fifth Annual Joe Branzell All-Star Game played July 1 at Povich Field. The Clark Griffith League All-Stars defeated the Eddie Brooks League All-Stars 6-3.

After the All-Star break, the Big Train defeated the league-leading Vienna Mustangs 9-4 on July 5 before 724 fans at Povich Field. Designated hitter Marcus Taylor led the offensive fireworks with three hits as the Big Train out hit Vienna 13-4. Ian Gibson and Tyler Jones (Mississippi State) each knocked in two runs. The bats stayed hot Sunday night as Ben Grisham (Mississippi State) and Marcus

Taylor combined for five doubles and six runs batted in to lead the Big Train to its seventh straight victory, a 9-1 win over the Reston Hawks at South Lakes High School.

The winning streak was broken July 7 with a 3-1 loss to the Germantown BlackRox at Ridge Road. A 6-0 romp over Reston and a July 9 rainout set the stage for a crucial doubleheader against the Silver Spring-Takoma Thunderbolts on July 10 at Blair High School. A Big Train sweep would have catapulted the Big Train over the Thunderbolts into the all-important fourth place playoff spot. It was not to be. The Thunderbolts won the first game 5-3 and the Big Train suffered its only drubbing of the season in a 10-2 loss in the nightcap.

The next night, the Big Train got back on track as Shay Horseman painted a Povich Field masterpiece striking out 11 in a complete game, two hit shutout to give Bethesda a much needed 1-0 victory over the Herndon Braves that evened the record at 13-13. With a loss at Fauquier and another win at Herndon, the Big Train at 14-14 had little room for error two-and-one-half games out of the fourth and final playoff spot with just 12 games to play. The task became immensely more difficult the next day when the Big Train defense kicked away a superb pitching performance by Big Train starter Noah Tritz (Southern Mississippi) for a 7-5 loss to the Baltimore Pride on the road.

The Big Train bounced back the next night with a 6-5 and 5-1 doubleheader sweep of the Pride at Povich Field. A two RBI triple by Greg Dini (Tulane) in the bottom of the sixth turned out to be the first game's key hit as it put Bethesda ahead to stay. Big Train starter Marcelo Albir (Miami) got the win allowing just 5 hits through six innings. Mike Costanzo pitched a 7 inning complete game, allowing just one run on five hits in the second game 5-1 victory. A win over Germantown set the stage for a home-and-away series with the league leading and defending national champion Senators. The Senators' side-arm pitching ace Cla Meredith (Virginia Commonwealth) scattered six Big Train hits while striking out nine to gain a 2-1 victory for The Senators before a standing-room-only crowd of 815 at Shirley Povich Field. The Big Train's sole run came on a ninth inning blast over the right field fence by Bethesda's designated hitter Marcus Taylor. The Sunday night game at Robinson High School appeared to be a Big Train romp before the defense again ruined another outstanding outing by starting pitcher Noah Tritz for an 8-7 Senators win.

With six games left, the sixth place Big Train could not afford to lose again. Bethesda swept a doubleheader from Vienna on July 23. Mike Costanzo got a complete game 3-0 win in the first game allowing just five hits while striking out 12. Brian LaNinfa's two run home run provided the margin of victory. In the second game, Bethesda won 2-1 behind another clutch pitching performance by Shay Horseman. LaNinfa's bat was the difference, with a clutch two RBI double in the sixth.

Starting pitcher Noah Tritz and reliever Adam Redd (Virginia Tech) led the Big Train to an 8-1 romp over the Gators in Fauquier. On July 25, former Seneca Valley High School star David Skoczlas faced his most important challenge in three years with the Big Train. He ended his Big Train career with a masterpiece, a complete game three-hitter to defeat the Baltimore Pride 6-2 before a Friday night standing-room-only crowd of 844. The win moved the Big Train record to 21-17, two games out of the fourth playoff spot with two games left to play.

The Big Train run at a playoff spot ended on Saturday night July 26 as a listless Bethesda defense booted the ball around and handed the Fauquier Gators an 8-4 win before 810 fans at Povich Field. Ben Grisham was the hero in a final game Sunday win over Reston at South Lakes High School that closed the books on the 2003 season and left the Big Train with a 22-18 record. Grisham hit a lead-off home run and a franchise season record 14th double in the 4-1 win that landed the Big Train just one game short of a spot in the playoffs. The Senators won the four team playoff with a championship game win over the Gators. The Senators won four straight games at the All American Amateur Baseball Association (AAABA) Tournament at Johnstown, Pennsylvania before losing to the eventual champions, Youse's Maryland Orioles.

Big Train Manager Derek Hacopian named Mike Costanzo as team MVP. Costanzo set all-time Big Train season records with a .340 batting average and an earned run average of 0.58. A left-handed slugger from Springfield, Pennsylvania, Costanzo led the Big Train in runs scored with 25 and total bases with 55. As a right-handed hurler, he had a record of 4-1, allowing just two earned runs in 31 innings.

According to Hacopian, "Mike was our best hitter and a big game pitcher. He is a real gamer. Every time we needed it, we could count on Mike for a clutch hit or a key pitching performance. He has the potential to become a Major League third baseman." Hacopian named Shay Horseman, a sophomore at Middle Tennessee State, the Big Train's Most Outstanding Pitcher. A crafty lefty from Clinton, Tennessee, Horseman had one of the top earned run averages in the Griffith League at 1.71. Horseman was 4-1 for the Big Train, striking out 47 while walking only 15 in 42 innings pitched.

Kids Deserve Better Fields!

Support the Base Ball



Sunday, November 21, 2004
Pooks Hill Marriott



The Sixth Annual Big Train Base Ball & Auction will be held on the evening of Sunday, November 21 at the Pooks Hill Marriott. There will be family fun, special guests, great food, and spectacular sports memorabilia. Do all your holiday shopping at the Big Train Auction!

Each year, most of the money we spend to improve youth fields is raised at the Base Ball & Auction. Have a wonderful time at the Base Ball while helping to improve the fields where our kids play. Support the work of the Bethesda Community Base Ball Club by signing up as a sponsor of the Base Ball! Log onto www.bigtrain.org.

This spring, we spent \$55,000 to improve baseball and softball fields for kids from Wheaton to Takoma Park, and from Rockville to Anacostia. Again this year, we invested in Lynnbrook Field (B-CC HS Softball and BCC Baseball), Connecticut Park (Wheaton Boys & Girls Club), Rock Terrace High School (Rockville Baseball Association), and Jeque Park (Takoma Park Babe Ruth). For the third year in a row, we contributed to field improvements for the Fields of Dreams after-school program in the District. Our major investment was a complete overhaul of the infield at Walter Johnson High School. We also contributed to field improvements at Blair High School, Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School, Bethesda Elementary School, Cabin John # 2, and Povich Field.