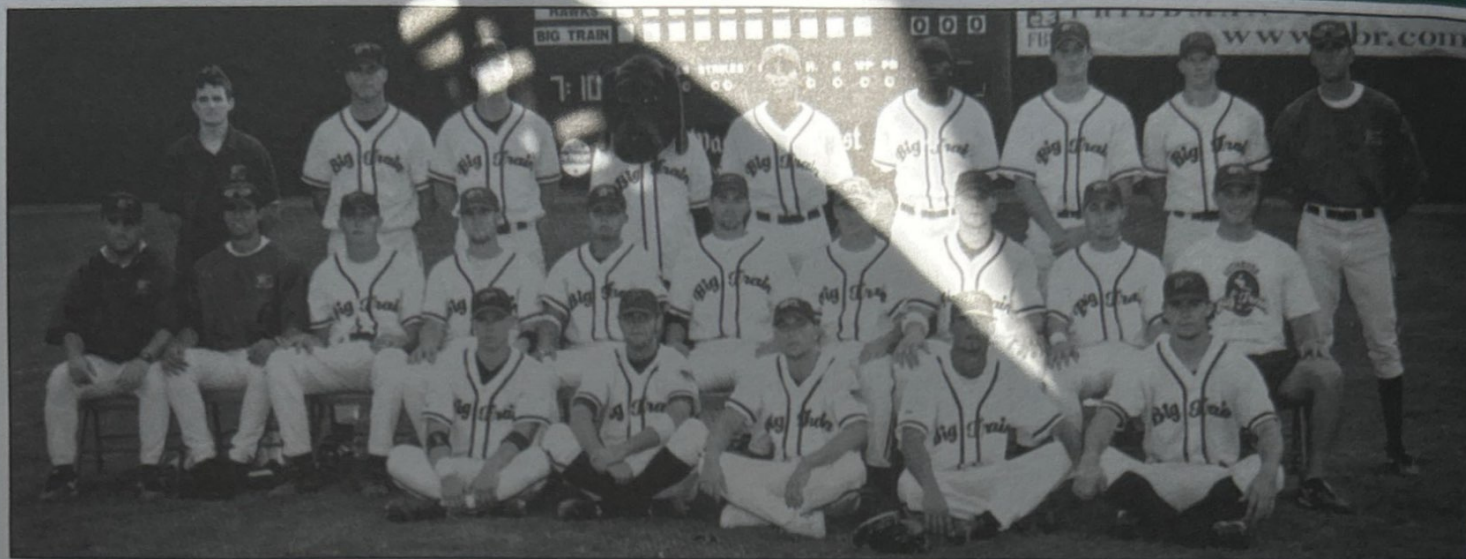


Big Train Baseball 2002: EXCITING FROM BEGINNING TO END!



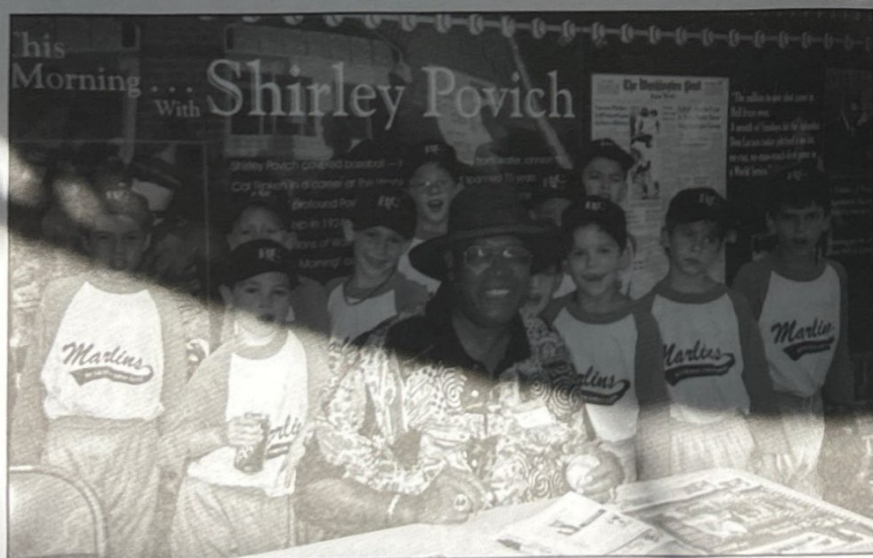
2002 Bethesda Big Train

Bethesda Big Train fans got their money's worth in 2002 with a season full of exciting games and late inning heroics. If you like classic pitchers' duels won in the last inning, Povich Field was the place to be in June and July of 2002. Fifteen of the Big Train's 27 wins were by a single run, including 11 of the Big Train's 17 wins at home at Shirley Povich Field. Seven of the season's home victories were won in the home half of the final inning. The Big Train lost only four of our 21 games at Povich Field where the team played before crowds averaging 650 fans per game.

It was the year of the pitcher as Bethesda pitchers finished one-two-three in the Clark Griffith League in earned run average. Byron Binda (Coastal Carolina) with an ERA of 1.16, Matt Foster (Naval Academy) with an ERA of 1.43, and Gus Hlebovy (Kent State) with an ERA of 1.45 won a combined 16 games for the Big Train. The team's 2.40 ERA led the league as did the team's .963 fielding percentage. Big Train hitters, with a combined .255 batting average (fourth in league), scored only 145 runs (fifth in league and 55 less than the Arlington Senators) in 41 games. But with the game on the line at Povich Field, the Big Train bats delivered night-after-night.

Our Boys of Summer couldn't seem to carry the Povich Field magic with them on the road. The team that compiled a masterful 17-4 home field record was a mediocre 10-10 on the road, finishing second to the Arlington Senators in both the June and July Rounds of the Griffith League. The Senators went on to Johnstown, PA and won the championship of the All-American Amateur Baseball Association (AAABA) for the fourth time in five years.

The excitement started on opening night when Aaron Battle (Texas/Arlington) scorched a line-drive walk-off RBI single down the right field line with one out in the bottom of the ninth to give the Big Train a 2-1 victory over the Baltimore Pride. The next night, Battle did it again. Trailing the Silver Spring-Takoma Thunderbolts 2-0 in the bottom of the ninth, Chris O'Dell (Kentucky) hit a pinch hit two-run home run to tie the game. Battle's blast won it, 3-2.



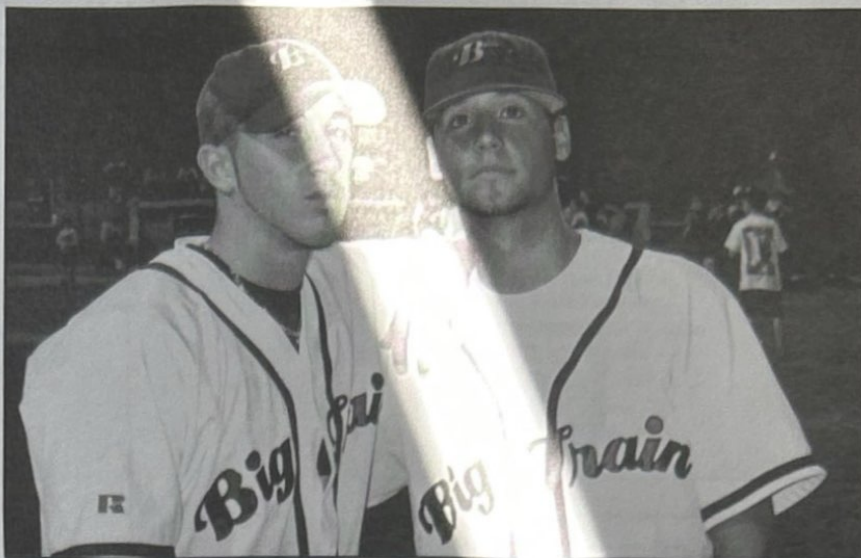
Chuck Hinton visited Shirley Povich Field July 17, 2002

A three game losing streak in the season's second week, including an extra-inning loss at Povich to the Reston Hawks and a 5-2 loss to Arlington on the road, put Bethesda in fifth place with a record of 5-5. A six game winning streak capped by a complete game one-hit shutout by Ben Oregia (Kent State) defeated the Baltimore Pride and set up a Sunday June 23 doubleheader between the league's top two teams. Arlington crushed the Big Train 9-2 in the first game and scored twice in the top of the last inning to win a 2-0 thriller in the nightcap to take a commanding lead in the league's June Round.

In July, the Big Train won 12 games and lost 6, but must have set some kind of record for scoring efficiency. Ten of our 12 league victories in July were by a single run. The other two were comparative blowouts – 2-0 and 4-0. Bethesda beat Reston twice at home in July in the bottom of the ninth when Reston pitchers walked in the winning run. Again, a remarkable ability to win close games and win at home were offset by mediocre play on the road. Bethesda started poorly, and a July 8 loss to Reston on the road left the Big Train in third place with a record of 5-4. An awesome pitching performance by starter Byron Binda and reliever Jake Hurry, his Coastal Carolina teammate, helped defeat first place Arlington 3-2 on the road on July 10. The next night, the Big Train knocked off the then first place Baltimore Pride 1-0 behind another outstanding pitching performance by Gus Hlebovy. But losses on the road to Reston and Germantown allowed Arlington to clinch the July Round and take the league championship without the need for a playoff.

Naturally, the home season ended with a thriller. Arlington had clinched the Griffith championship, but pride was on the line. The Big Train needed a win on July 20 to split the season series at three games apiece. Starting pitchers dominated the game for eight innings before a Saturday night standing-room-only crowd of 834. Bethesda's Matt Foster allowed only two hits and no runs as Bethesda led 2-0 on two unearned runs. Arlington's Risley St. Germain (Southeastern Louisiana) held the Big Train hitless through five. In the top of the ninth, Foster tired. Arlington scored three runs to take the lead. In the bottom of the ninth, Casey Gilvin (Kentucky) faked a bunt and slashed a high one-hop double over the first baseman's head scoring Derek Hutton (Florida Atlantic) all the way from first with the tying run. Nate Jagers (Middle Tennessee State) won the game with a walk-off RBI single.

Arlington, with a 3-3 record against the Big Train, won nine straight games to capture the AAABA championship. The AAABA rules allow teams to pick up players for the championship. Arlington selected Byron Binda and Matt Foster. Binda was the winning pitcher in two of the nine post-season games and Foster was the winner in one. Gus Hlebovy won a game in Johnstown playing for his former team from Youngstown (OH).



Most Valuable Players: Byron Binda (Coastal Carolina) and Gus Hlebovy (Kent State)

Big Train Manager Derek Hacopian named pitchers Binda and Hlebovy Co-Most Valuable Players. "Byron and Gus anchored an outstanding 2002 Big Train pitching staff," explained Hacopian. "Both throw hard, have good sliders, and have a bulldog mentality on the mound. Without a strong offense this past year, we really needed to have pitchers like Binda and Hlebovy keep us in games and give us a chance to win. They did just that, helping the Big Train come out on top in many close games. They are winners." Binda, from Stafford, VA, led the Griffith League in earned run average for the second year in a row and was named the league's Most Outstanding Pitcher. He led the league in wins as well with a 6-0 record. He struck out 52 batters in 54 innings of work. Hlebovy, from Campbell, Ohio, had a record of 6-2 with two saves.

Hacopian gave Co-Most Outstanding Hitter awards to David B. Hughes and Derek Hutton. "David B. Hughes was a consistent hitter for the Big Train all summer," explained Hacopian. "Hughes is an aggressive hitter who finds a way to get on base." Hughes, from Indiana University and Elizabethtown, KY, hit .339 this summer, the highest Griffith League average by a Big Train player in the four year history of the Bethesda franchise. Hughes had 41 hits in 35 games.

"Derek Hutton was a Big Train sparkplug at the top of the order," said Hacopian. "Hutton had the quickest hands of any Big Train hitter. It showed in the way the ball jumped off his bat. He has the potential to play at the next level." Hutton, from Palm Beach Gardens, FL, hit .327 for the Big Train. With eight doubles and three triples, Hutton registered a .458 slugging percentage. Aaron Battle, from Arlington, Texas, led the team with 18 runs batted in.