

30 Years of Making Memories: OBA Kicks Off Another Season

Orinda celebrates program with proclamation

By Clare Varellas



Nearly 600 young players, parents, and community members gathered to celebrate the Orinda Baseball Association's 30th season on March 1.

Photo Andy Scheck

Standing at a podium before 600 excited parents and young baseball players on the morning of March 1 at the annual Opening Ceremonies event, Orinda Baseball Association board president Brent Bamberger announced the slogan for the league's 2014 season: "Go make a memory."

According to players, parents, and coaches involved in the OBA, it will not be difficult to do so in the coming months of batting practice, base runs, and games. As Orinda Baseball Association begins its 30th season in the Orinda community, 360 players ranging in age from 7 to 14 gathered with their families at Wagner Ranch, eager to start the season.

"It's my favorite sport. They're my favorite league," said 11-year-old OBA player Ben Levy. "Anything can happen. A batter can strike out, hit a pop fly to outfield, infield, or hit over the wall, and you always have to pay attention if you're on the field."

Levy is one of thousands of Orinda boys and girls who have participated in OBA, and who have grown to love the game of baseball

as a result. A private, volunteer-run baseball association, OBA was founded by previous Orinda Youth Association president Bob Hegarty in 1984, who had a 7-year-old son playing baseball at the time. Hegarty saw the need for a more "committed" alternative, with more practices and more games. Choosing to make the association a part of the Protect Our Nation's Youth (PONY) nationwide baseball program, he also wanted to establish a league in which the distance between bases varied between age groups and the coaches, not the parents, guided the players.

"I wanted a program that was committed, not necessarily more competitive, but committed, where you would have the teams chosen on a fair and equal basis, and then you would have some 15-20 practices before the first game," said Hegarty.

Thirty years later, the 2014 Opening Ceremonies event, albeit impacted by rainy weather, promised another successful season. Players and their families purchased food and

raffle tickets in the morning, then listened to Bamberger present information regarding the program's goals for the year, new improvements and additions to fields and equipment, and the recipients of last season's association awards in the auditorium. Players participated in a mini-parade marching through the building to music in their teams.

The ceremony concluded with Orinda mayor Sue Severson presenting a proclamation honoring OBA for 30 years of service in the Orinda community, then throwing the first pitch of the season.

Despite the weather, the event was considered a success by OBA board members, who are accommodating more players than ever before this season. According to Bamberger, the registration count has gone up every year over the course of the association's existence.

"I think baseball brings out a lot of life lessons: not getting too high on successes and not getting too low on failures, and I enjoy providing that platform for kids as much

as I can," said Bamberger, who joined the board in 2006 and is in his second year as president.

Players, of course, love the excitement of the game, and many look forward to returning every year. But for parents, the value of the OBA experience exists on a deeper level. They say OBA teaches players the importance of respect and passion.

"The respect that they teach the kids to have for the game and for their teammates, even if baseball isn't what [my son] does, is always a good thing to learn," said parent Scott Bammmer, whose son, Grant, is 8 years old.

And after hours and hours of practices and games, their baseball skills improve too. Bammmer said that last year at Major League Baseball spring training he met Brett Jackson, one of the many previous OBA players to achieve major successes in baseball in high school, college, or professional leagues. Jackson plays for the Chicago Cubs.

Whether players stop playing in grade school or they go on to the MLB, to encourage camaraderie and

friendship remains a tenet of OBA values. Hegarty says that OBA has only changed for the better since he initially founded it, but that fostering lifelong relationships between players has always been a constant.

"I've found over the years that for the kids that played OBA and stuck with it through to 13 or 14 years old, when they get out of high school, they go all over the United States to college, and when they come back to the Bay Area, the guys they hang out with are the guys they played OBA baseball with," said Hegarty. "That's true connection."

Levy hopes to be a professional player when he is older, though he acknowledges that it will be difficult. But as he looked toward his teammates across the playground, he said with a smile that his favorite part of playing OBA was forming new friendships.

"You get to meet new people," said Levy. "There are different teams, and they always have new combinations of different players on different teams. It's amazing."

Lamorinda Boys' Basketball Teams Advance to State Tournament

By Michael Sakoda



Buster Souza



Andrew Zolintakis



Drew Anderson

Photos Gint Federas

The NCS playoffs wrapped up Saturday, and the brackets for the CIF State Tournament were announced with all three Lamorinda schools qualifying.

Both Campolindo (22-7, 11-1 DFAL) and Acalanes (17-12, 5-7 DFAL) advanced to the semifinals of the NCS tournament on March 5, and were eliminated—Acalanes by eventual champions Bishop O'Dowd, 68-36, Campolindo by El Cerrito, 70-59. Miramonte lost to Campo for the second time this season in the quarterfinals.

Acalanes played O'Dowd close in much of the first half, but struggled to find any sort of offense in the second, scoring a mere 11 points in the final 16 minutes of play.

"I'm proud of my guys," said Dons' head coach Bill Powers. "Buster [Souza] plays his heart out...Matt Thomas is playing the way he should have been playing all year."

Thomas was spectacular in the Dons opening round game against San Marin, scoring 24 of his game-high 29 in the first half.

"I'd been struggling leading up to (that) game, but this is the playoffs," Thomas said. "It's a whole new season."

With Souza dominating the paint, Joey Hewitt and Matt Thomas shooting the lights out, and the improved passing of point guard Zack Kisner, Acalanes won't be an easy out as the No. 6 seed in the CIF Tournament. The Dons host No. 11 Christian Brothers tonight, March 12.

On March 5, Campolindo battled the Marauders of El Cerrito throughout the game, jumping out to a 6-2 lead early, behind the brilliant play of point guard Andrew Zolintakis who scored all 10 of his points in the opening quarter.

With 4:57 to play in the first quarter, though, El Cerrito went on a 16-6 run, taking an 18-12 lead, and never looked back. The Cougars trailed 25-38 at halftime, and 42-50 after three quarters.

Late in the fourth, Campo went on a 9-2 run, cutting El Cerrito's lead to eight, but moments later Zolintakis fouled out, and consecutive turnovers on the following possessions led to Marauder buckets crushing the Cougars' hopes of a comeback.

Campolindo was paced by Chris Hansen with 19 points, 10 rebounds and Zolintakis with 10 points.

But the Cougars lost more than the semifinal game. With 5:51 to play in the third, junior standout Matt O'Reilly broke his arm after being fouled driving to the basket.

"To lose (a guy) like that...an All-Star caliber player, made (El Cerrito's) lead really difficult to overcome," said Cougars' head coach Matt Watson after the game.

As for filling his shoes in the CIF Tournament Saturday when the No. 2 Cougars host the winner of Aragon and Vanden, Watson says it will depend on matchups. "It's going to come down to who our opponent it is—Do they have size? Quick

guards?—because we can go a couple different directions...we have four or five guys who can step into that starting role."

Miramonte (16-12, 6-6 DFAL) grabbed the 12th seed in the CIF tournament after being knocked out of the NCS in the second round 72-65 by Campolindo on Feb. 28. They will visit No. 5 Fairfield tonight.

Fairfield will have their hands full with senior forward Drew Anderson, the Mats' star quarterback in the fall and now the focal point of the basketball team's offense, who is averaging just over 20 points per game to go with 12 rebounds.

"We just (planned) on staying ready to play," said Mats head coach Drew McDonald.