

Bay Area Ballplayers grand slams its way into Moraga



Owner Steve Hammond in front of batting cages

By Vera Kochan

If you build it, they will come.

Moraga Shopping Center now has its own high-tech field of dreams. Bay Area Ballplayers, located in the retail space vacated by Hallmark nearly six years ago, is a year-round program that trains athletes to reach their full potential. Located at 1460 Moraga Rd., Suite H, the

5,000-square-foot facility has completely repurposed the space once occupied by birthday card stands and rolls of wrapping paper. The main entrance lobby is located a few doors away from Loard's Ice Cream.

Bay Area Ballplayers owner Steve Hammond is no stranger to the sport. "Baseball has provided incredible opportunities and experi-

ences in my life," he said, "and my goal with Bay Area Ballplayers is to instill in the next generation the tools and skills that will help them reach their potential."

Hammond played football, basketball and baseball at Alhambra High School in Martinez, followed by pitching for both Sacramento City College and Long Beach State's baseball teams. In 2005, the left-hander was eventually drafted in the sixth round by the Milwaukee Brewers, moving up from the minor leagues to AA in just one year. He was traded to the San Francisco Giants in 2008 and played AAA ball there for one and a half years. Unfortunately, shoulder, hip and lower back injuries eventually released him from his

contract in spring of 2010.

"Rather than this be the end of my journey, I tapped into the resiliency I learned in college, as well as seeking out the best sports performance coaches and physical therapists I could find," Hammond said. "Over the next six years, I went on a whirlwind tour playing ball in six countries, including three years in Japan, before my elbow finally had enough, and I needed Tommy John Surgery in 2015". He is proud of the fact that he "went from being an unrecruited high school player, to pitching more than 1,400 innings over 11 professional seasons."

Bay Area Ballplayers caters to both male and female athletes. Although there are batting cages on the premises, Hammond stressed that his facility is not just for baseball and softball players. Besides coaching in the Moraga Baseball Association and the Orinda Baseball Association for the past three years, Hammond has also worked for lacrosse and soccer camps. Even adults wanting to brush up on their athletic skills are welcome. Coaches of players as young as T-ball age through high school are encouraged to bring their entire team in for group training.

While the lobby's check-in area and store are manned by adults and high school students, Hammond personally oversees most of the athlete training programs with the help of an additional team of experienced instructors working in the baseball and softball section.

"Coming up through high school I never had any training facility to work out in until college and that took me to another level," Hammond stated. "I want to provide that

to young kids."

The facility is equipped with functional barbells, dumbbells and a training machine for weight training; medicine balls, sand bags and a speed sled for power training; squat racks for strength training; battle ropes for conditioning; rings, TRX and pull-up bars for upper body strength not to mention, a full 70-foot batting cage, plus four hitting stations and a pitching station with radar gun.

Some of Bay Area Ballplayers' many training programs include individualized athlete assessment, strength training for sports performance, mobility and flexibility, nutrition assessment with an individualized meal plan, mental skills training, time management and goal setting and baseball skills tracking along with power development.

The lobby has a seating area for parents to hang out while their kids are in training. Also, within the lobby is a mini-shop where apparel and hats are sold, along with sports equipment such as bats, batting gloves and baseball gloves. Gift certificates will also be available. A commercial refrigerator is stocked with sports drinks, water, protein bars and other healthy snacks.

Hammond chose to open his business in Moraga so that people didn't have to drive long distances to get the type of services and training that he offers. And, while coaching in the Moraga and Orinda area, his vision came true. "The game has given so much to me that I feel it's my purpose to pay it forward," he said, "and provide the next generation of athletes with the opportunity to chase their dreams!"

Photos Vera Kochan

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Bay Area Ballplayers lobby

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