



**-State convention draws all levels of instructors
-Event in Fairfax attracted five former Major Leaguers, plus youth,
high school and college coaches**

By David Driver

FAIRFAX - Tim DeJohn, an instructor in the Baltimore Orioles' system, gave an impromptu lesson on infield play on the floor of the hotel restaurant late one night.

Michael Cuddyer, a former Silver Slugger winner with the Colorado Rockies, patiently showed his approach at the plate in the ballroom lobby to a former Major League pitcher and some wide-eyed high school coaches.

And the new head mentor at George Mason University, Shawn Camp, chatted with some young coaches about holding runners on base as a pitcher.

Those were just a few of the scenes and unplanned encounters that took place in between sessions at the 2022 Virginia Baseball Coaches Convention at the Fairfax Marriott in Northern Virginia in December.

The event, in its fifth year under the direction of executive director Tim Merry, drew youth, high school and college coaches from around the state. Also on hand were vendors such as Alex Trevino, who is involved in fundraising for schools.

"My goal is to establish relationships and to meet people," notes Trevino, also the new varsity baseball coach at Freedom High in Woodbridge. "Face-to-face is way more important" than virtual encounters or phone calls.

"My first goal is to make as many new friends as I can," says Kevin Graber, who grew up in upstate New York, recently joined the Chicago Cubs as a minor league coach/coordinator and spoke on "Systematic Chaos" in his presentation. "The baseball community is so large but it is also so small. You find that you have connections with people. That is always a lot of fun. As a presenter, I have a certain gospel that I like to spread and that is to put the game in the hands of the players. That reflects back to the day when we were kids and just went to the sandlot and messed around. There were so many great presenters here."

Coaches were able to learn from sessions that ranged from those that played in the majors to Division I college coaches to Division III mentors to youth coaches.

“I try to fill my (mental) bag with things I can do for my kids,” says Kevin Ford, the veteran coach at Chantilly High. “If I can pick up three or four things I call it a success.”

Ford said one highlight was the presentation by Herndon High and University of Virginia product Brandon Guyer, a former Major League outfielder who now stresses the mental side of the game. Guyer was recently hired by his alma mater, Virginia, to share his knowledge on the topic on a part-time basis.

“Guyer was incredible,” Ford notes.

At least four other former Major League players attended the convention and three of them are coaches at schools: Fairfax native and Robinson High graduate Camp; Marion native and former Ferrum star Billy Wagner, the Hall of Fame candidate now at The Miller School near Charlottesville; and Randy Tomlin, who grew up in Madison Heights, played at Liberty University and the Pittsburgh Pirates and is the coach at Liberty Christian.

In addition, Great Bridge High graduate Cuddyer was part of a presentation on hitting as the Norfolk native teamed up with Virginia Tech assistant coach Kurt Elbin. A Silver Slugger winner and All Star with the Colorado Rockies in 2013, Cuddyer is a special assistant in Baseball Operations with the Minnesota Twins – the team that drafted him out of high school.

“I just want to be able to provide information that (coaches) want. I just didn’t want to get up there and talk at them,” notes Cuddyer, who has done nearly 100 videos for USA baseball. “I don’t want to preach something they don’t really care to hear about.”

He is now coaching his son, who is 14.

“No. 1, you have to want to teach,” Cuddyer adds. “You have to want to share the information that you have and not hold back. If you do that, and thoughtfully think how to articulate that then you can do it. You can only do the best you can and it is up to whoever is receiving (the information) to decipher it and what it is they are trying to implement. If you can have tangible resources, whether it is a drill or a saying or thought process, people can decipher it. In order to hit a ball far or to hit a ball hard, you have to be able to move well. Teaching them to move correctly with the intent of hitting the ball hard is a good thing. I think often times as coaches we like to say baseball is a game of failure but very rarely do we allow our players to fail. Coaches need to learn to deal with failure from their players as well” such as positive body language from the third-base coaches’ box.

John Fletcher, after nearly 30 years as a high school coach, is preparing for his second season at junior college Richard Bland. He has attended the last two VBCA conventions.

“My goal last year and this year was to pick up on one, two or three really good things I can take back to my program,” he says. “I told my wife, ‘I want to learn two or three good things and network.’ Being here, there are a lot of guys I know really well. From the sessions, I got a lot

of good stuff about the mental approach on the baseball field. I am big on that, hearing Brandon Guyer talk. I feel I am getting new pieces to add to our program.”

Besides imparted knowledge, the first 10-member Hall of Fame class of former high school and college coaches were recognized during the 2022 event: Ron Atkins, Bill Brown, Jim Cutler, Tom Harding, Chuck Hartman, Paul Keyes, Marty Miller, Mack Shupe, Ron Tugwell and Norbie Wilson. They combined to coach 362 seasons and won a total of 7,190 games. Harding, Hartman and Keyes were honored posthumously.

“I am excited and humbled with this induction,” said Atkins, who coached at J.R. Tucker High and the University of Richmond.

Brown became the head coach at George Mason after serving as an assistant under Walt Masterson, a former pitcher for the Boston Red Sox, Detroit Tigers and Washington Senators. “I was in the right place at the right time,” recalls Brown, noting that Masterson retired suddenly in 1981.

Shupe, a resident of Big Stone Gap, won eight state titles at the prep level with teams in southwest Virginia. He said before his induction that he attended many conventions around the country.

“It is great Virginia now has one; for 30 years I went to all of the national clinics,” he says. “It is the greatest thing to happen to high school baseball” in the state.

“Baseball is a game that has to be played,” adds J.J. Kelly graduate Shupe, who would like to see high school teams play more games. “I think this organization can help get more games on the schedule. Coaching baseball to me is a continual learning experience. All of my assistant coaches played for me, all of them.”

Miller, who also noted he was the athletic director at Norfolk State, was on hand in Fairfax before heading back to Norfolk State for winter commencement ceremonies. December was just the latest of several Hall of Fame honors for Miller in his career as a coach and administrator.

Trevino was there as both a vendor and coach. “I learned a lot,” he says.

He wasn’t the only one.

Editor’s note: Harrisonburg native David Driver, who played baseball at Turner Ashby High, Harrisonburg American Legion Post 27, Eastern Mennonite University and in the Rockingham County Baseball League, is the co-author with Lacy Lusk of “From Tidewater to The Shenandoah: Snapshots From Virginia’s Rich Baseball Legacy.” He was one of the speakers at the 2022 convention, on the history of baseball in Virginia. He can be reached at www.daytondavid.com and [@DaytonVaDriver](https://twitter.com/DaytonVaDriver).