

Baseball Never Fades Away

By Ralph Chetley

Even though the World Series has ended it still remains as one the favorite pastimes for sports. The players signing rumors begin to pop up, along with a month of rest and relaxation before training for the next season.

I had the pleasure of meeting one of these warriors of the ball field, who was a student of the training regiment. Ivanon Coffie is a retired player who still works out and has been giving his experience and talent back to local youth who want to become better players.

Coffie was born and raised in Curacao, which is an island near Aruba. Softball was a favorite sport of his mother and aunts, where their talent rubbed off on Coffie at a young age and helped him excel in skills on the diamond. Growing up, baseball was one of the favorite sports, played on weekends, and one of the highlights of the week.

Following the lead from fellow countryman Andru Jones (of the Texas Rangers) Coffie tried out for one of a few professional teams and eventually signed as a free agent with the Baltimore Orioles in 1995. One of his best memories was his Major League debut in 2000, starting third base and got his first hit in that same game. The stadium's full capacity and the spirit of the fans for any player can be awe inspiring, as it was for him.

Since Coffie is a Dutch national, he was asked to play for the Netherlands in world competition. He was a played in the Baseball World Cup in 2003 in the same year he signed with the St. Louis Cardinals, following with the next year when he played

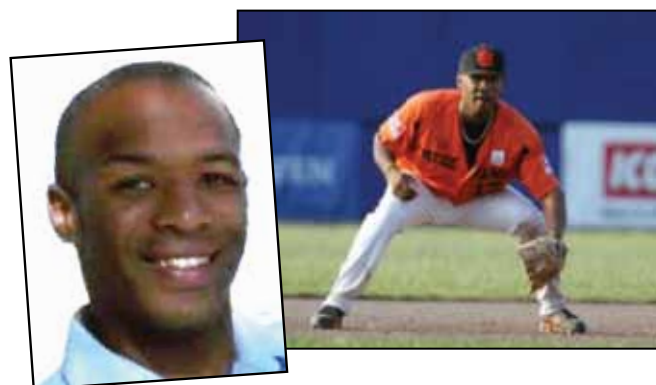
at the 2004 Greece Olympics. Other teams he played for include the Houston Astros and the Chicago Cubs, along with the Dutch national team, playing in 2005 World Cup Championship and the European Championship where he won the MVP Award.

Some of his baseball heroes were Don Mattingly for batting and Ozzie Smith in the field. One big thrill was to play and spend time with the Ironman, Cal Ripken. You can imagine the tandem these two players brought to the game. This mentoring and friendship helped Coffie learn how to stay healthy and be productive consistently on the field.

Have you ever noticed that some baseball players have specific habits or superstitions? Coffie commented that he had good habits and a few routines, but mentioned that habits are from working hard, and keeping up with good practice routines. Baseball superstitions are more of other habits that are not a part of training, such as wearing the same socks or shirt for a sign of having good luck.

Coffie enjoyed a lifetime of playing and traveling on all levels of baseball, but also had the good sense to know when to quit, including his priorities in his personal life. Now that he retired, found that his love for the game, he wanted to continue helping others. When practicing at a batting cage in Brunswick, was asked about his skills, looked like a natural, was asked to instruct local youth ball players.

It is a gift to be able to play at the major league level, and even greater talent to be able to coach a team in some capacity. Coffie had turned down offers with several professional teams, but found that he can give much more on a one on one basis, or with teams on occasion. Being an instructor is something not many



can bring to the youth wanting to know the game better.

Working with kids at this level, with the professional type of structure of training that is needed, helps a young prospective learn the game faster, also breaking natural bad habits. Every day coaches know the game with strategy, but very few know how to correct or teach some of the essential mechanics of baseball.

After talking with Ivanon Coffie, I learned a few things about the game I was never taught years ago. This is the guy I would want to instruct my son, when he was growing up and learning the game. Mr. Coffie is currently involved with instruction at Premier Baseball/Softball Academy in Valley City, Ohio which is just west of Brunswick. He can also be found on his website, www.ivanoncoffie.com. Play Ball!

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