

Inside

Scoreboard
page A14
Obituaries
page A23

Sports



GEORGE ALBANO

Little League in Norwalk enters new era

There's still nothing quite like Opening Day in baseball, whether it's at Yankee Stadium or Calf Pasture. With that in mind, a new era in this city's sports history will be officially ushered in Saturday when the Norwalk Little League holds its Opening Day ceremonies at the beach. Some 56 years after Little League baseball made its debut in Norwalk, and 55 years after this city won the Little League World Series, a new chapter is about to be written. Of course, the "new" league is really the old leagues as Ben Whone National, Babe Spinola American and International, Norwalk's three oldest Little Leagues, merged over the winter to form the new and improved, bigger and better, Norwalk Little League. In fact, the inaugural 2007 season is already under way, kicking off with games Monday night. But Saturday's festivities at noon will really make it official.

I know, rain is in the forecast, but that won't matter. Absolutely nothing can spoil what will be an historic day in Norwalk sports annals. Besides, the long-range forecast for Little League baseball in the city of Norwalk is bright and sunny. "I'm very excited. Everybody is," said Steve Hefferan, one of the driving forces behind the new league in town and its first president. "A lot of people have worked hard and long to make this a reality and it's finally here. "But I always thought it would have to come to this." Hefferan speaks from experience. For the past few years, he was president of the Whone National, the strongest of the three leagues that merged. But Spinola American and Norwalk International had both been fighting dwindling numbers lately, something even the Ben Whone LL experienced back in the late 1980s and early '90s before building the player base back up. With the merger, however, the three leagues came together to form one, strong league. It certainly made a lot of sense. The proof is in the numbers.

"We'll have close to 400 kids marching out onto the field Saturday," Hefferan said. "We have nine teams at the 11-12 year-old level, 10 teams at the 9-10 year-old level, and nine teams at the 7-8 year-old level. "We've also formed a partnership with the Parks and Recreation T-Ball program for four-, five- and six-year-olds," he added. "Gerald Anastasia and Tony Daniello are going to run that and it should be a major improvement over the T-Ball leagues of the past. It's more station-to-station teaching and making it fun." Those kids will be there, too, on Saturday on what promises to be an exciting day. "What we're doing is having games on all three fields at the beach," Hefferan explained. "The city is putting mounds in at the two softball fields so we can play games there, too. "We'll have the 9-10-year-olds on one field, the 11-12s on another field, and the seven and eights on another field. The first game is set for 9:30 in the morning and we'll go all day long. We actually have games scheduled for under the lights at 7:30." That is if the rain holds off. "Believe me, I'm keeping a close look at the weather," Hefferan said. "If it rains, we'll go on Sunday, but I think we'll at least be able to get the 9:30

See LITTLE LEAGUE, A16

Hughes can't help Yanks

The team's top prospect gave up seven hits in four-plus innings as New York lost its sixth in a row

By MIKE FITZPATRICK
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Phil Hughes received a rough welcome to the big leagues from the hard-hitting Blue Jays and a valuable lesson in power pitching from A.J. Burnett. Toronto's hard-throwing right-hander dominated the struggling Yankees and outclassed their prized young prospect on the mound, sending last-place New York to its sixth straight loss in a 6-0 victory Thursday night. Missing injured Derek Jeter,

BLUE JAYS	6
YANKEES	0

Inside

Yankees, Red Sox ready to go at it again
page A22

the Yankees (8-12) are on their longest skid since also dropping six in a row from May 28 to June 3, 2005. They managed only four singles and are percentage points behind fourth-place Tampa Bay in the AL East. Next up, a three-game series at home against the rival Red Sox, who swept New York last weekend in Boston. The first-place Red Sox already have a 5 1/2-game cushion over the Yankees.

Vernon Wells went 3-for-3 with two walks for Toronto, giving him seven hits in his last two games. Frank Thomas drove in two runs, and leadoff batter Alex Rios scored three times and knocked in a run. The Blue Jays have won three straight, all against the Red Sox and Yankees, after losing a season-worst five in a row. Still waiting for Mike Mussina to get healthy, New York called up Hughes from Triple-A Scranton-Wilkes Barre to make his much-anticipated major league debut. He was unable to stop the losing streak, however. Considered one of the top pitching prospects in baseball, the 20-year-old right-hander from California became only the second pitcher drafted in the first round by the Yankees

See HUGHES, A22



AP photo
New York Yankees rookie Phil Hughes delivers a pitch during the third inning of his major league debut Thursday night against the Toronto Blue Jays. Hughes work into the fifth inning and was saddled with the loss. Toronto scored a 6-0 victory.

Trojans blanked by Devils

An improving Weston squad was held in check by one of the top pitchers in the SWC

By STEVE GEOGHEGAN
Hour Staff Writer

WESTON — The Weston High softball team has taken some lumps but it would like to dish some out as the season goes along. The Trojans suffered a 4-0 loss to Stratford Thursday afternoon behind the performance of Carrie Potter, who pitched a one-hit shutout. Weston, which also lost to the Red Devils 6-3 April 18, fell to 3-6 overall with the non-league setback. In spite of their record, the Trojans do have some key victories over SWC league foes Bethel and Brookfield and they've played some of the best teams in the conference already, including defending champ Masuk, Newtown, Bunnell and Stratford twice.

So first-year varsity head coach Dave Lustberg is confident his squad will become much better for having played such stiff competition. "I think we're doing well," he said. "We're improving our play. As we come up against more teams that are closer to our level, all these hard games we've played will give us an advantage and I think those are the games we're going to end up winning." Potter, a junior who is one of the top pitchers in the league, helped the Red Devils raise their record to 6-3. She struck out 12, walked one and hit a batter. "There aren't too many teams that hit her at all," Lustberg said. Stratford scored the only run it would need in the first inning. Nicole Vena reached on an infield error and Yareliz Lopez bunted to the third baseman for a sacrifice. Vena

ended up advancing to third on the play because no one was covering third base. Amanda Aquilino walked and wound up getting in a rundown between first and second. Weston pitcher Arielle Link (1-3) threw out Aquilino at second but Vena scored to give the Red Devils a 1-0 lead. "We wanted to take the out," Lustberg said. "We need to keep the leadoff runner off the bases. If the leadoff runner doesn't get on, then the inning is much easier and we can get out of it." Weston's senior co-captain and leadoff

See TROJANS, A16



Hour photo/MATTHEW VINCI
Weston first baseman Sara O'Donoghue snags the throw to retire Stratford's Yareliz Lopez during Thursday's game. Visiting Stratford defeated the Trojans, 4-0.

hitter Brooke Wilbanks was the only one to get on base twice against Potter. She walked in the first inning and singled to left field in the third. "She's a very good pitcher," said Wilbanks, who is batting over .400. "I just tried to keep focused and do whatever I could to connect with the ball." Wilbanks added that the transition of Lustberg becoming the varsity coach after serving as JV coach for three years has been seamless and she was hopeful the team can step up its play in the next

See TROJANS, A16

Thabeet staying at UConn

The 7-foot-3 center from Tanzania will return for his sophomore season instead of leaving for the NBA

Associated Press

HARTFORD — Freshman center Hasheem Thabeet said Thursday that he will return to UConn for his sophomore season instead of declaring for the June 28 NBA draft.

The 7-foot-3 native of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, talked with coach Jim Calhoun one more time Thursday about the pros and cons of declaring. "I am very excited about next season and returning to UConn for my sophomore year," Thabeet said in a release. "I look forward to continuing my education as a person and as an athlete. We have all been working very hard since the season ended and will continue doing everything we can to get better each day and have a great season next year."



Thabeet

Calhoun had said Thabeet would benefit from another year in college. Most draft analysts had him going late in the first or early in the second round. "We obviously have high expectations for Hasheem in the coming year," Calhoun said Thursday. "He has the opportunity to take it to the next level during this coming summer and heading into next season and can really be a big part of our team achieving success in the future." Thabeet, 20, was 14 when his

See THABEET, A22

Headley, Roda among Sportsmen of Westport honorees

The pair will be among the 10 honorees at the organization's 46th annual Dinner of Champions

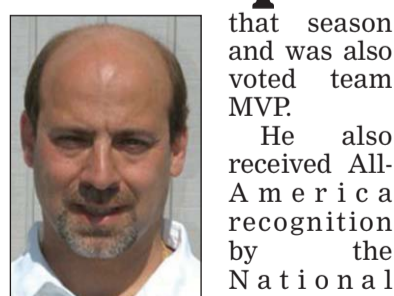
Win Headley, one of the best football players to come out of Staples High School, and Carmen Roda, who's been active as a coach and administrator in the Westport PAL Football program for the last decade, will be honored by the Sportsmen of Westport at their 46th annual Dinner of Champions May 22 at Continental Manor in Norwalk. Headley and Roda will be two of the 10 award winners to

be honored by the Sportsmen that night. Other honorees are Stefanie Goettsche, Mark Cizynski, Mike and Dom Calise, Saul Pollack, Sandy Forehand, Eric Rader and Carol Bieling.

Headley, a 1967 Staples graduate, played three years of varsity football for the Wreckers as an offensive and defensive tackle for legendary coach Paul Lane. He capped his career as a senior in the fall of '66 by being

named All-County and All-State as well as being selected to the New York Giants Tri-State Football Team.

In addition to starring on the gridiron, Headley wrestled for three seasons at Staples, and in 1967 was named All-County and won the state heavyweight championship. Following his graduation, Headley went on to play football at Wake Forest where he was a three-year starter at defensive tackle and as a senior in 1970 helped the Deacons win their first Atlantic Coast Conference championship. In fact, they didn't win another league crown until this past 2006 season. Headley was named All-ACC



Roda

Walter Camp Foundation. In the spring of 1971 Headley was named co-recipient of WFU's Arnold Palmer Award. That summer, Headley found himself in camp with the Green Bay Packers as an offensive guard and made it to the final team cut right before the

start of the 1971 NFL season. He went on to play that season for the Hartford Knights semi-pro football team and in 1972 he played for the Montreal Alouettes of the Canadian Football League. That would mark the end of Headley's playing days on the gridiron, but he was able to stay close to the game he loved through coaching. He served as an assistant football coach at Winston-Salem State University in 1972-73, at Wake Forest from 1973-75, and with Princeton University from 1975-82. Then after a more than 20-year hiatus, Headley returned to the sidelines in 2003 as the offensive line coach and defen-

See HEADLEY, A16