



GEORGE ALBANO

Opening day a special one this season

The start of the youth baseball season in this city has always been a big deal ever since the first Little League was started in 1951 and won the World Series in Williamsport a year later.

Yes, the excitement, pageantry and anticipation of another season surrounding opening day ceremonies has always been something to look forward to every year in every league.

But this year, the opening festivities around the city on Saturday will be just a little extra special. And emotional.

Three of the four Norwalk youth baseball leagues — the Norwalk Little League, the Cranbury League and the Rowayton Little League — will stage their opening ceremonies under cloudy skies. But don't expect anything, not even the weather, to dampen the enthusiasm everyone at the three different fields will feel.

In fact, all three leagues actually began playing games this week. But there's still nothing quite like Opening Day on the first Saturday of the season as all the teams march out onto the diamond with their different-colored uniforms and the players are announced.

It sort of like the Yankees or Mets opening on the road, but then returning home for the "official" opening day.

And in Norwalk, Opening Day 2008 will kick off at Veterans Memorial Park on Buschbaum Boulevard at 11 a.m. with the Norwalk Little League christening its second season under its new charter.

You may recall last year's historic season when the Ben Whone National Little League, the Babe Spinola American LL, and the International Little League, all with more than 50 years of history, merged to form a bigger and stronger league.

"We've come a long way in only one year," Larry Halloran, the league's umpire-in-chief last year who has taken over as league president, said. "The league is getting bigger. We now have 30 teams and 350 kids. And that doesn't include our Challenger Division (for kids with disabilities). So that puts us up around 425 kids."

Halloran took over as president for Steve Hefferan, one of the driving forces behind the merger. Hefferan still has a son in the league who will be moving up to Junior Babe Ruth next year, while Halloran still has two sons in the league, and the two figured it would be a smoother transition if Halloran took over this year.

"Steve's still on our board and still does a lot of work. He's a big help," Halloran said. "We have 22 people on our board and everyone is very active. It's a very good board, which is what we need for a league this size."

The change at the top isn't the only thing that will be new this year. The league has unveiled two new baseball fields this season at Vets Park, which were softball diamonds the city of Norwalk converted.

"They're two great, state-of-the-art fields," Gerald Anastasia of the Recreation and Parks Department, noted. "They're the only two fields in the city with grass infields, and they're both fenced in with a scoreboard. Hopefully down the line we'll get lights down there and we can host tournaments."

"There's also a snack bar in the middle, so it's a great place for families to come to seven days a week," he added. "And because the fields are fenced in, the Oyster Festival (in September) will work around them. In the past the softball fields were open and that made for more maintenance for us after the Festival. But we're working good together to make sure they still have plenty of room."

see OPENING DAY B3



Hour photo/BEN GANCOSO
Brien McMahon's Kenny Coppola delivers a pitch during Thursday's game against crosstown rival Norwalk. Coppola worked six innings, surrendering only four hits, and raised his record to 4-0 in the Senators' 6-3 victory.

Norwalk finds a bright spot in loss to Senators

McMahon jumped out front and held on, but the Bears may have found help for their pitching staff

NORWALK

MATTHEW DORAN
Hour Staff Writer

The Norwalk High School baseball team might have found exactly what it needed during Thursday afternoon's game against city rival Brien McMahon: A reliable No. 2 pitcher to back up senior ace Matt Iannazzo.

The way junior left-hander Jon Cohen was throwing the ball, using his sweeping curve and a consistent fastball to shut down the Senators over four innings of near spotless relief, Norwalk head coach Angelo Bruno knows he'd be foolish not to make him a permanent fixture in the starting rotation.

"I found someone who can help us today," said Bruno of Cohen, who was making his first appearance as a varsity player. "I'm very confident in him and I wouldn't hesitate one second going to him after this performance."

The only problem is, the Bears might have discovered Cohen two innings too late.

HS BASEBALL

McMahon	6
Norwalk	3

Cohen, one of the stars of the 14-year-old Babe Ruth team that went to the World Series in Virginia last summer, came on in relief of senior George Savaides with one out in the third. By then, the Senators had already done most of their damage, scoring five runs over the first two innings before holding on behind a solid pitching performance by junior right-hander Kenny Coppola to post a 6-3 non-league victory at sunny Malmquist Field.

Cohen held the Senators scoreless over the final four innings, allowing three hits with eight strikeouts and three walks. But the Senators (8-2) took advantage of three early walks by Savaides (0-3) and a number of miscues on fly balls by the Bears, scoring twice in the bottom of the first before adding three unearned runs in the second to take a 5-0 lead.

Coppola struggled with his control at times, walking seven over six innings, but took advantage of the early run support, getting out of a couple of tough jams along the way. Coppola allowed just four

see McMAHON B3

Whitten wins in his return to Wilton

The former Warriors standout came back to town as the head coach of archrival New Canaan

WILTON

JOHN NASH
Hour Staff Writer

When he wore the blue and white of Wilton High School, Alex Whitten created countless memories on the lacrosse field; many of which he still carries with him today.

On Thursday afternoon, however, he showed up at Tom Fujitani Field wearing the red and black of New Canaan.

"It's time for me to make some new memories here and this is a good start," Whitten said after his Rams escaped with a 4-3 FCIAC victory over the Warriors. "It was exciting. It wasn't really nerves or anxiety, but there was a lot of energy with the guys. I told them there would be some stuff with me coming back here and being the New Canaan head coach, but that's not important. What's important is that we execute well and we get out of here with the win."



Hour photo/JOHN NASH
Wilton's Matt Dunn, right, is checked from behind by New Canaan's Teddy Citrin during Thursday's FCIAC lacrosse encounter in Wilton. Visiting New Canaan squeezed out a 4-3 victory against the Warriors.

HS BOYS LACROSSE

New Canaan	4
Wilton	3

First, however, Whitten had to watch his team try to give the game away.

Charlie Stanton's second goal of the game, coming with 9:24 left to play, had given New Canaan a 4-3 lead.

For the rest of the fourth quarter, however, New Canaan survived seven turnovers on offense as goaltender Fergus Campbell shut the Warriors out for the final

17-plus minutes of the game. "We just couldn't finish," said Wilton attackman Pete Johnson. "We definitely had about six or seven opportunities, right on the doorstep sometimes, and it was either a big save by Fergus, who played great, or us just not shooting in the right places."

Johnson had opened the fourth quarter with a pair of wrap-around shot attempts that Campbell stopped both times.

Then, shortly after the Rams took the lead, Mike Shagi ripped a screamer that clanged off the post.

Shortly after Peter McMahon was robbed point-blank by Campbell's goalie's stick.

With 1:01 left, following a Wilton

see WHITTEN B5

NFL draft prospects getting antsy

Jake Long can sit back and relax while the rest of the draft class waits and wonders

NEW YORK

BARRY WILNER
Associated Press

The anxiety, uncertainty and lack of control that go with being a top NFL prospect can be maddening. Jake Long sits back and laughingly scoffs at it. And why not: Long already knows where he's going, and when.

The Miami Dolphins made the Michigan tackle a very rich young man by signing him to a five-year contract worth \$57.75 million, \$30 million of it guaranteed. He will be the first name announced at Saturday's NFL draft.

"It's a relief and it's comforting to know the contract is done," Long said Thursday. "To know where I will be and where I will play, now I can relax. I can worry only about football and work only on football."

The situation is vastly different for the other 252 players who will be chosen in two rounds on Saturday and another five on Sunday at Radio City Music Hall. From the stud who will go right after Long to the placekicker hoping to be taken somewhere — anywhere — it's a nervous time.

"You have no choice where you go, but of course you get anxious," said LSU defensive tackle Glenn Dorsey, like Long an All-American. "So you go (online) and check out what they get on the team. But you can't get a read on what they'll do."

Virginia defensive end Chris Long and Arkansas running back Darren McFadden also were All-Americans in 2007.

They joined Boston College quarterback Matt Ryan and Ohio State DE Vernon Gholston at a luncheon Thursday, where all but

see NFL DRAFT B4

Trio of unknowns share lead at Byron Nelson

Eight others were in a logjam one shot back of the leaders after Thursday's opening round

ASSOCIATED PRESS

IRVING, Texas — Jesper Parnevik has been so inconsistent that he's willing to take advice from a golfing buddy he refers to as a "complete hack monster."

Something worked Thursday, with Parnevik overcoming gusty

GOLF

wind and a redesigned course to shoot a 2-under 68 in the first round of the EDS Byron Nelson Championship.

That left him only one shot behind Ryan Moore, Mathew Goggin and Eric Axley, whose 67s made them the highest-scoring first-round leaders at the Nelson since 1984.

So what was that tip Parnevik received during a phone call Wednesday night from his friend in Colorado?

"It was really a stupid thing," Parnevik said. "It was the way he

had his left big toe at impact. ... It should be kind of pointed a little bit upwards."

Parnevik was in a group of eight players at 68 that included 10th-ranked Adam Scott, the only player from the top 10 in the world ranking in the field.

Kevin Sutherland, Briny Baird, Shaun Micheel, Ian Poulter and Dustin Johnson and Parker McLachlin also shot 68s.

Only 24 of the 156 players in the field broke par. Masters champion Trevor Immelman, playing for the first time since winning the green jacket, finished with a 78, better than only three other players.