

Tie games are no fun, but aren't end of the world

COLUMN By LARRY A. HICKS The York Dispatch

Article Last Updated: 07/24/2008 07:02:29 AM EDT

The Central League/Susquehanna League All-Star Game was played under the lights last Saturday night at Horn Field in Red Lion.

It ended in a 6-6 tie after 12 innings.

And yes, some folks left the game thinking (and saying) that "a tie is like kissing your sister," a quote frequently attributed to Alabama football coaching legend Bear Bryant and/or longtime Michigan State University football coach Duffy Daugherty -- so take your pick -- many years ago.

No one seems to recall a Central League/Susquehanna League All-Star Game ever ending in a tie before. It could be a first. So naturally some folks are all worked up about the tie. It's a slap in the face to local fans and players, they say, to play for more than 3 1/2 hours and not have a winner. Something's gotta be done to prevent it from happening again.

To which I say: Phooey.

Oh, don't get me wrong. Ending the game with a winner and a loser should be the desired result. More than 99 percent of the time, that's how it works out.

And yes, it's going to stick in the craw of lots of people on both sides that the game was left undecided. That's OK, too.

Because the game has always been hard-fought between players, coaches and fans of the two local leagues. It's always mattered -- more than a lot of all-star games matter to the players involved.

Because pride is involved. Bragging rights are involved. For many years, the Central League held the upper hand when it came to reputation and player skills. It dominated all-star games and inter-league competitions. That's not the case anymore -- the gap has closed considerably. So when the Susquehanna League wins, it's a feather in its cap. Believe me, it matters.

It also matters when all-stars have the opportunity to play the game under the lights. Why does it matter? Well, because it doesn't happen often. It's different. It's special. It's a playing environment most players never experience at the local level.

Professional players --

major and minor leagues -- play under the lights all the time. In fact, most of their games are played under the lights.

But not local games. It is expensive to turn on the lights, so it only happens on special occasions -- once or twice a season.

Most years, the all-star game is played on a Saturday afternoon. And that's about the only way a game will almost surely be completed with a winner and a loser, although that's not guaranteed, either. But they have a fighting chance. Play until it gets dark -- six hours, at least.

There was a time when the two leagues played their annual all-star game at the old Memorial Stadium on a Saturday night, under the lights. Players looked forward to it because it was the only time all year any of them would play on a lighted baseball diamond.

So it's understandable that players in both leagues would be anxious to play on Red Lion's lighted field on a Saturday night.

You can count on a couple of fingers of one hand the number of lighted baseball fields there are in York County. Horn Field is one of them. Sovereign Bank Stadium is another.

And as long as you play on lighted fields, there are going to be municipal rules, ordinances, etc., having to do with the lights.

Baseball fields have neighbors. And no one wants the lights shining at 2 a.m. because two local teams -- even all-star teams -- are trying to settle a tie game.

In this case, Red Lion Borough says a new inning may not start after 10:45 p.m. on Horn Field. The 12th inning ended at 10:40 p.m. Technically, the umpires could have started one more inning and finished it. That would have added another 20 minutes, a half-hour, maybe even an hour if both teams had scored a lot.

They'd already played 3 hours and 37 minutes.

So they called it a night. Tied 6-6.

It might not have been the perfect solution in some minds. And it did kind of leave everyone hanging, I guess.

But it wasn't the end of the world, either.

A slap in the face? I don't think so.

And chances are -- without any changes being made -- it'll be a very long time, if ever, before it happens again.

Sports columns by Larry A. Hicks, Dispatch columnist, run Thursdays. E-mail: lhicks@yorkdispatch.com.