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Prospect League team to pay tribute to coal miners

'Coal Miner Appreciation Days' slated for Thursday and Friday at Linda K. Epling Stadium

By Jim Workman

Assistant Managing Editor

When the newest entry in the Prospect League established itself in Beckley this year, there was one obvious choice for a nickname, according to general manager Mike Gilligan.

So, the West Virginia Miners were born.

"It was important to pick a nickname that really exuded the state's heritage and reminds us of who we are," said Gilligan. "That's what this area is all about. That's its history. It also reminds us of the importance of mining in our history, where it is now and where it will be in the future. It's the best way for this region to connect to the team.

"Having something that the mining industry can attach themselves to that is very Americana and healthy — in sports and recreation — I think that it's very appealing. We understand the significance of what coal mining means to this state and this region."

In a short two-game homestand Thursday and Friday, the club will host "Coal Miner Appreciation Days", a tribute to their namesake and the industry.

"Any coal miner that is active or retired and shows their certification or identification card at the ticket window will receive a free ticket to either game," Gilligan said. "They can come to both games if they wish. Their family members that come with them will receive 50 percent off the ticket price."

The Miners play the Butler (Pa.) Blue Sox in single games beginning at 7:05 p.m. each night.

"We want the miners to come out and have a good time," Gilligan added. "They'll enjoy Americana at its best, hopefully have a few laughs and bond with their friends and family."

The Miners nickname is not an afterthought amongst the players that come from several different states and college teams.

"We wear a patch on our uniform as a reminder," Gilligan explained. "We wanted to honor the miners that were lost in the (Upper Big branch) accident.

"Every time our players step on the field, the last thing that they see is that '29' (patch).

Hopefully it gives them some inspiration and extra motivation. I hope it reminds them of just how lucky they are to be stepping on a baseball field and not stepping into a coal car for a 30-minute ride two miles underground. We wanted them to wear it close to their heart.”

A “Miner Mike’s Maniacs” promotion will also begin this week, an effort to get fans involved in helping the Miners by rooting along with the mascot.

Miner Mike, the team’s mascot, is decked out in a Miners baseball uniform with a baseball for a head — with a miner’s helmet on top, naturally.

From the looks of him, he could be a cousin to Mr. Red, the Cincinnati baseball mascot.

“We’re trying to create a culture and a ongoing tradition,” Gilligan explained. “There will be a group of fans that Miner Mike interacts with in the first base bleachers.”

The location of the Maniacs was strategically placed.

“It’s behind the visitor’s dugout,” Gilligan said. “There will be heckling and jeering and doing other things — in fun and in good taste. But it will be in the spirit of the game. It will add to the overall entertainment value of what’s going on. The people will feel a part of the team in a unique way. It will be for the fan that really wants to support the team in a vocal and fun manner. Miner Mike will be leading the charge.

“We’re looking to continue to build our fan base that will continue to grow from year one to year two and three and so on. We have had a lot of positive feedback about our overall production of everything around the game outside the chalklines. We want to bring a level of big-time production to the people that come to the stadium.”

For more information, call 304-252-7233 or visit www.wvminersbaseball.com.

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