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A Special Report: Upper Big Branch Disaster -- A Deeper Look

By The Register-Herald and the Bluefield Daily Telegraph

Eplings hit one out of the ballpark

Miners' season a smashing success

By Dave Morrison
Sports Editor

West Virginia Miners' owner Doug Epling wore a big smile Thursday night as the team was getting ready to take the field for its season finale.

A well-deserved smile.

To say the outcome on the field didn't matter wouldn't be entirely true. The Prospect League's newest member is, after all, in the midst of trying for dear life to hold on to a playoff spot.

The Miners were shellacked by Chillicothe, 12-0, in a game that was 5-0 going into the eighth when West Virginia, trying to save arms for that playoff push, used position players on the mound to finish the game.

Not exactly Dean Wolosianski or Chris Marlowe.

Still, the vibe around the stadium was more than enough to make up for what transpired on the field.

A new record 2,168 fans showed up Thursday night.

Heck, even Brian Mannino, the Chillicothe manager, felt it. And was darn near apologetic for the outcome.

“The crowd was great and these guys love playing in front of a crowd,” said the Paints’ manager. “You almost wish it would have been a closer game. It was a great atmosphere tonight. And I think it’s great for the community, what they’ve done here.”

What was going on in the stands at Miners games this season is as good a story, if not better than, what’s happening on the field.

I put it like this: What the Eplings have done, in short order, is akin to what Jim Justice did in bringing the PGA to The Greenbrier.

They got in the game late, assembled a fine roster, and, yes, they are playing for a playoff berth in Season 1.

The record crowd pushed the Miners’ final attendance to 24,676, or 811 fans a game.

That’s eighth in the 15-team Prospect League.

The word is getting out and I look for bigger, better things next season.

Credit Doug Epling, who had a vision and he made it a reality.

Linda K. Epling Stadium speaks for itself.

Already the team is going to host the 2011 Prospect League All-Star game next season.

And West Virginia Conference Associate Commissioner Will Prewitt was on hand to announce that the WVC will play its 2011 and 2013 conference championship at the place we in the sports department respectfully refer to as The Ep.

This all bodes well for the Miners’ future, which, knowing the Epling family, is what they had in mind all along.

If you didn’t make a game this season, you missed out.

First, and foremost, it is a family atmosphere. No drinking. No tobacco. When the Miners say “family atmosphere,” it is just that.

There are contests galore, and you really feel like a part of the community when you go to a game because, odds are, you’re going to see somebody you know.

Unlike some Prospect League teams, the Miners do not have an official beer. And they won’t sell their souls to have one, either.

The outside of the stadium is, per choice, filled with Scripture fitting a ballpark.

The bottom line, it has been a great inaugural season for the Prospect League newbies.

I hate seeing the season end, but I’m looking for even bigger things in the future.

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