

Modern day Oak Ridge Bombers

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on May 26, 2009)

As promised last week, before we get to the Oak Ridge Pioneers (the second professional baseball team in Oak Ridge), I want to tell you about a modern-day Oak Ridge Bombers team. I think you will enjoy learning about this team of high spirited young nine-year-olds!

When part one of the series on the Oak Ridge Bombers of 1948 was published, Greta Ownby sent me an e-mail telling me about a modern-day Oak Ridge Bombers team saying, "They are an adorable group of nine year old boys (yes, one of them is my son!). We named this tournament/travel team the Oak Ridge Bombers in honor of the team you wrote about in today's column."

So, let me tell you what I have since learned about these young baseball players and then we will look at the Oak Ridge Pioneers. If you have ever had a youngster who enjoyed baseball, you will identify with this story. My oldest grandson is a baseball pitcher and has just begun to collect baseball cards.

Speaking of baseball cards, I must tell you that Jack Bailey, who is the inspiration for these stories about the early Oak Ridge professional baseball teams, has the most complete collection of baseball memorabilia I have ever seen. He would really like to learn more about the early Oak Ridge history of baseball.

If you know anything about these two professional teams from a first-hand basis, he would appreciate a contact. As he is an avid collector, he would also love to acquire any type of memorabilia that may exist relative to the two professional teams, the Bombers and the Pioneers.

He would like to find baseballs, programs, uniforms, caps, or anything else that could be connected to these teams. If any readers have such memorabilia or know of anyone who does have some, please contact me (draysmith@comcast.net or 482-4224) and I will put you or them in touch with Jack. Thanks for helping a friend learn more about Oak Ridge history and find collector's items.

Now let's look at the modern-day Oak Ridge Bombers baseball team.

Greta Ownby helped me collect this information. She is obviously proud of the team and especially her son, Jacob, who is one of the members of the team. When asked what he liked best about playing on the Oak Ridge Bombers, Jacob replied, "sliding in the mud." Get the idea you might be in for an interesting story about this team?

There are eleven boys on the team. They are nine-years old. The "Bombers" are a tournament team playing in the Knoxville area. They will also play one tournament in Kentucky early this summer.

The team is primarily funded by the parents. However, some financial support has been provided by Y-12 Federal Credit Union and practice field space has been provided by Len Hart Construction Company.

These young boys are no strangers to one another. Many of them have played together for the past four years on various team sports ranging from baseball to basketball, football and soccer. Often they have been on opposing teams, but this is the first year for all eleven to play baseball together on the same team. On the Bombers, they are strong teammates even though they have been opponents in other sports and past years. They all pull together to form a winning combination. The coaches are obviously proud of their efforts.

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So when forming this new team with all these boys, the coaches wanted to name the team something special. While searching on the internet and brainstorming for a suitable name, they happened to talk to Marcus Caldwell, whose grandfather had actually played baseball for the Oak Ridge Bombers. He told them some about the 1948 team and by getting the boys engaged in the process and doing further research on the internet, that name came to be selected for the team.

That was just the beginning of things regarding the name chosen for the team. When the *Historically Speaking* column of May 12, 2009 was published, there was their namesake being featured in the newspaper. That brought about some excitement for the boys, coaches and parents and caused Greta to send that e-mail saying she sure would like to tell me about this modern-day Oak Ridge baseball team named for the original Oak Ridge Bombers.

The coaches liked the idea of the boys learning more about their team namesake. Jim Ownby, head coach of the team said, "Baseball is a sport steeped in tradition. It seemed right to name our group after a team that played in our community in its earliest days."

So, the boys really got excited about their historic name and actually did their own research on the internet. I am told they "read with interest the first story" written about the team in the *Historically Speaking* column. Now, you got to know it made me proud when I learned that!

The season so far has been hampered by rain during the spring and the boys have only gotten to play three games, two of which they won. They have done well against teams with older and bigger boys significantly more experienced than the Bombers, yet they have held their own in these tough games. Their spirit is strong!

When asked what they liked best about playing baseball on the Oak Ridge Bombers, some of the responses were as follows. Austin Brummitt said, "getting dirty," Charlie Held said, "I like bunting," Ian Campbell said, "pitching," as did Craig Repogle, Sam Turner said he liked, "getting to play first base." All of them said the thing they did not like about playing baseball was, "striking out!"

The parents like the team atmosphere that is being developed by the coaches and the players. They are pleased with the development, both physically and mentally that comes from being a part of the Oak Ridge Bombers. The tournament play is challenging as the teams they have played and will play are quite competitive. The upcoming games will give the team some significant challenges to overcome.

Head Coach Ownby said, "The boys are doing really well. They are a team of nine year olds that have been playing mostly ten and under tournament divisions. We've seen some big boys and our guys have played them hard. They don't give up and we (the coaches, parents and grandparents) are proud of them."

So, like their namesake, the original Oak Ridge Bombers, these boys are facing challenges and winning games against some pretty stiff competition. And in the midst of all the excitement of baseball practice and games these boys are having fun while learning the importance of effective teamwork.

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Left to Right Front Row: Logan Williams, Sam turner, Ian Campbell, Craig Replogle and Jacob Ownby;
Left to Right Back Row: Jayven Booker, Austin Brummitt, Caleb Martin, Johnny Stewart, Jaylen Mitchell,
and Charlie Held



The Oak Ridge Bombers having fun!