

beyond the practice

Mike Davis: Batting for Austin's Oak Hill Leagues

By KAT HINSON, AUSTIN BAR ASSOCIATION

“There are only two seasons – winter and baseball.” — Bill Veeck

For millions of people, the beginning of April marks the beginning of the best part of the year — baseball season. For Mike Davis, a partner at Slack & Davis, it is no different. Since Davis was a small child, baseball has played a significant role in his life.

“There was just one game — it was on Saturday — and it was the game of the week, and it was always the New York Yankees,” remembered Davis. “I had this little wooden rocking chair, and I’d sit next to my great-grandmother’s rocking chair, and we’d watch the Yankees every Saturday. I’ve been a New York Yankees’ fan since.”

And while Davis played baseball as a boy, he pointed out that as his teen years progressed, “there were cars and girls, and my baseball career kind of waned.”

As an adult, Davis started playing softball around age 18. Although he has taken time off now and then, he still plays, and is now in a local “over 60” league.

In 1989, Davis’ son Ty began playing T-ball with the Oak Hill Youth Sports Association. First as just a team helper, by the time Ty was six or seven years old, Davis was serving as an assistant coach. Assistant coach turned into head coach, which turned into a position on the league’s board, which evolved into president of the Oak Hill Youth Sports Association. Davis’ term as president was ending just as Ty was finishing his last year.

After 10 years of constant baseball activity, Davis thought he “was kind of done.” Until ... A friend had a son in T-ball, and Davis agreed to help him coach the team. Then the league president at the time contacted Davis about the league’s need for a Bronco commissioner. Davis agreed to serve. The next year, the league needed a Pony commissioner. “The next thing I knew, I was the Pony commissioner.” And 13 years later, he is still the Pony commissioner!

One of Davis’ favorite aspects of being involved in the Oak Hill baseball league is watching kids start in T-ball, progress through Pony league, and often continue playing in high school and college. As Davis watched Ty and his friends go through this progression, he realized that the Oak Hill Pony League could help the players better transition between league and high school play.

“These guys who have been playing since T-ball have been playing against each other — the same people — for 10 years,”



said Davis. “In high school, they were going to be playing kids from other places and travelling to other facilities.

“I started talking to some of the surrounding youth sports associations, particularly some of the smaller ones. So we put together an interlocking league where Oak Hill and four or five other youth organizations started playing each other.”

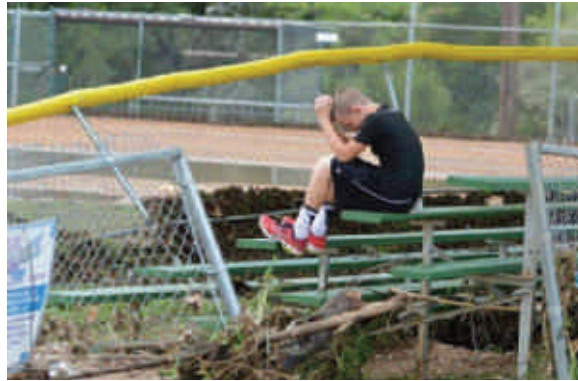
For players who had played against virtually the same people for years, this was a fun and educational experience. “The kids were playing against different teams with different players,” said Davis. “They were getting a taste of what it’s like to go on the road, to play at somebody else’s home field, against different fans, different umpires, maybe even a little different rules.”

Davis’ concept provided those players who continued to play ball in high school a preview of the experience. “Everybody liked it,” said Davis. “It solved some of the boredom factor, and it’s a good experience for the players.”

For in-league and home games, Oak Hill teams have long played at the Oak Hill sports complex. However, in October 2013, massive floods hit South Austin, completely destroying the entire complex.

“It devastated the fields,” said Davis. “For whatever reason — the time of the rain, the force of the water — there was just massive debris. When it came through, it took out fences, bleachers, poles, and scoreboards. It covered the fields in silt

continued on page 20



Opposite: Mike Davis at bat playing in the 2012 World Masters in Las Vegas. Top row: Massive flooding in the fall of 2013 destroyed the Oak Hill sports complex. Middle and bottom rows: Rebuilding efforts by the community restored the complex to its former glory with new batting cages, repair to Pony field for which Mike Davis is the commissioner, new Pinto field scoreboard sponsored by Slack & Davis, and new playscape. AFTER photos by Traci Anderson.

Mike Davis: At Bat for Oak Hill Kids

continued from page 18

and tore up the grass. It did a number on us. We had to pretty much rebuild the entire complex."

Heartbroken kids didn't know how they would finish out the season and couldn't imagine how their fields would ever be back to normal. In response, the Central Texas baseball community rallied to help.

All the neighboring leagues really stepped up to the plate.

"All the neighboring leagues really stepped up to the plate," said Davis. "We started getting contacted by commissioners and board members from the other leagues offering their fields to finish out our fall season."

In the midst of the outpouring of support and efforts to rebuild, the biggest star has been the Round Rock Express.

"The Round Rock Express sent their field-maintenance specialists out to look at the field," said Davis. "They worked up a plan for what it was going to take to get the field fixed and ready to play."

"When our fundraising came up short, they got together and came back and said, 'We're going to do it anyway.' And they have! They've put down new grass, new turf, did the dirt work, and the field dressing."

In addition to everything being replaced, improvements were also made. Getting 1,000 kids and 2,000 parents in and out of the complex in one day had always been a huge challenge. The Round Rock Express helped the league come up with ideas for traffic flow and managing the number of people.

With Davis' full support, Slack & Davis has contributed annually to the Oak Hill league. For last year's 20th anniversary, the firm wanted to do something special for the league. About that time, the floods hit, and the firm found out that the fields' scoreboards were all severely damaged or destroyed. In honor of Slack & Davis' 20th anniversary — and in honor of baseball — the firm sponsored one of the new scoreboards.

After 25 years, "People ask me, 'Why in the world are you still doing this?'" said Davis. His reply? "I really love baseball. I've always loved baseball. It's been great to me and my family."

Davis' son Ty played all the way through the Oak Hill league, then played at Westlake High School, was all-state, played four years at Vanderbilt, then was drafted and played a few years in the minor leagues.

"It's really neat to go to a local high school's baseball game and look out there on the field, and you know the second baseman used to play at Oak Hill, the right fielder was an Oak Hill player, and the pitcher for the other team was an Oak Hill player," said Davis. "Some of these kids may go on and play college baseball. It's neat to follow their progression and say, 'I remember when they played at Oak Hill.'"

"I mean, I'm not just totally crazy. I enjoy watching these kids progress, and I enjoy seeing what they can do."

While baseball great Nolan Ryan said, "It helps if the hitter thinks you're a little crazy," Mike Davis is not even a little crazy. His love for the game and his commitment to the kids of Oak Hill proves he's a very sane man. • AL



Top: Mike Davis standing far left in the Classics Senior League. **Middle:** The restoration of the Oak Hill sports complex included commons areas for families and teams with new sidewalks and park benches. **Bottom:** Pinto field restored for Spring games. Facility photos by Traci Anderson.