

My Comments on Cooperstown Dreams Park – Jeff Stern

I have been to Cooperstown Dreams Park 6 times: 1997, 1999(10U), 2001, 2005(10U), 2007, 2008.

Finals twice, Sweet 16 twice, 24th twice.

Opening Ceremonies on Saturday will feel like the longest day of your life, it isn't. The Ring Ceremony on Thursday is.

Even the most hardened 12 year old is humbled by the Hall Of Fame

Being on Field 3 at 9:00 Thursday night to watch the fireworks is better than being in the stands. Or, if you are like me, once I was out of the finals, I left after the ring ceremony.

"Uncle Lou" gave the same speech in 1997 and 2001 when my teams lost the Championship game. I have used it ever since that time.

Moms and siblings are the best pin traders once the games start, they really get into it and will track down all 104 teams if they have to. Always remind the players that they are not there to trade pins (NIKE slogan from the 1996 Olympics: I'm not here to trade pins).

Best Coaches gift was the engraved bats with all the players' names.

I used to recommend stealing a foul ball for each kid on the team. That was when the balls had a 4 color logo on them, now it is a black stamp with the CDP logo.

Make sure you have good shoes; it's a lot of walking.

There aren't as many critters walking around at 2:00 AM on the way to the bathroom as there used to be.

We tried to put up towels on the windows and doors to keep out the early morning light, but they stopped that. Cooperstown is further east than Atlanta, so sunrise comes EARLY and the bunks are aligned so that the windows are on the east and west side.

One time the sprinklers went off during our game and although he was down by 9 runs in the 3rd inning, the other coach wanted the game to be called and to start it over. He did not get approval for that.

Pick two kids per game to give pins to the umpires. The umpires eat it up and it's even funnier when the other coach thinks you are trying to get in good with the umpires so he starts scrambling looking for pins.

In another game we were hitting well against a Little League team, the coach was going to replace his 3rd pitcher with his #1, a girl. In a wonderful New York accent she looks at him and says "I'm not pitching to them, are you kidding?" and then she turned her back on the coach.

Lou tells this story every year:

A team from Tampa had a very difficult tournament. They only won a couple of pool play games and lost in the first round of elimination. The coach asked the kids as they packed up to give him "ONE" word that describes the Cooperstown experience. One young man said "Joy". The coach said that's nice, why did you choose that word? The boy said, "We give Joy to those who play against us".

TIPS FOR THE PLAYERS (my comments mixed with a players notes)

WHAT TO TAKE IN YOUR CARRY-ON BAG IF YOU'RE FLYING: DO NOT attempt to carry on your bat bag because 1) it is too big to fit in the overhead compartment or under the seat, and 2) it contains your bats which can be mistaken for weapons. What starts out as a fun trip to Cooperstown might end up as a visit to the penitentiary. Seriously, think about what YOU CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT in the event your checked luggage and bat bag get lost.

In 1999 and 2005 I drove the players equipment up in my van. They were to put all their baseball gear in the bat bag, and my van and I went to Cooperstown. The thought was that as long as the player got there he could play baseball. We could always find something to wear until they found his luggage. In 2011, the players equipment will travel by van with the Coaches.

From a player: "Here's what I took on the plane: fielder's glove, catcher's mitt, cleats, sliding pants and cup, belt, batting gloves. I also brought my iPod and headphones, game boy, and some books, which came in handy on the drive from the airport to Cooperstown. The flight is only about two or three hours. You're going to be excited and with the drink and snack cart thing it goes by pretty fast. The drive from Albany to Cooperstown is boring and takes about 2 1/2 hours. I would have slept, but my little brother made it hard because he kept yelling "moo" and "baaabaaaa" every time we passed cows and sheep (which was about every two minutes or so). There are lots of farms in up-state New York."

From a player: "CHECK-IN- They give you about five minutes to park your car by your cabin and unload all of your stuff. It's pretty chaotic and there are tournament people walking around threatening all the parents if they don't move their cars out of the way. Decide what you need help with and let your mom or dad do that and you do the rest. My suggestion is to get help making up your bunk. I used a fitted sheet and sleeping bag and brought my own pillow and pillowcase. My mom did this for me while I unpacked my clothes and stuff into the footlocker. You can put a lock on the footlocker, but the lock I brought ended up being too fat to fit through the hook on the footlocker's lock. If you're going to get a lock, get one with a combination so you don't have to worry about carrying a key around with you. Memorize the combination and practice using it. Also, get a skinny lock so you can be sure it fits through the hook on the footlocker lock. Make sure

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a coach knows the combination, or has an extra key, just in case. This last time, no one locked his footlocker and we had no problems.”

An even better idea is for one person who may be driving to take all the bat bags, why trust the air lines. Also, the Head Coach needs to check in on Friday; the rest of the team can come by on Saturday. Friday night is crazy since not everyone is checked in and other coaches don't care about their players just running around making noise until all hours. Plus, the kids would have to get up early Saturday morning if they want a shower so they can change without all the parents being able to walk through the bunks. When the schedule comes out, think about when you are going to do pictures. It helps to be one of the first to check in and get the time you want. We require the players to check-in by 11AM on Saturday, they may come by Friday after 7:00 PM since the coaches should have checked in by then.

From a player: “FOOD: The food is OK. Think school cafeteria, hospital quality. Be prepared to eat it for breakfast, however, Doubleday Café in Historic Cooperstown is awesome! Get your parents to check you out as much as possible and eat there for lunch and dinner! There is also a snack bar and while you're in the park you can get food at the concession stands. Bring snacks like Powerbars or other energy bars for between games or in the dorms at night (although technically I don't think you're supposed to). Someone got us a disposable Styrofoam cooler for the dorm and we kept it full of bottled waters.”

Keep your team hydrated. You can now buy ice on site. You are not supposed to have snacks in the bunks, but we filled up two foot lockers with snack food. We require each kid to bring a case of water, a case of Gatorade, a weeks worth of salty snacks and a weeks worth of sweet snacks.

From a player “SHOWERING: Bring a swimsuit to wear while you are showering, unless you don't mind being naked in front of fifty or so complete strangers. It is a group shower. Also bring flip-flops that can get wet. You're not going to want your bare feet touching the shower floor, trust me. I can't be sure, but I think some kids take care of bathroom business down the drains (#1, of course) while they're showering. Here's what else you'll need for the shower: a mesh bag with a drawstring for carrying your toiletries. This is so you can hang it on the showerhead while you're in there. Also, if it's mesh it won't collect water and get the cabin all mucked up. Bring liquid soap (this is to avoid your bar of soap dropping onto the same yucky floor you don't want your bare feet to touch), shampoo, toothbrush in a case and toothpaste (most kids brush their teeth in the shower), and deodorant (if you haven't started using it yet, now is a good time...the cabins are not air-conditioned). It is a good idea to have a can of jock-itch spray with you. What's jock itch you ask? If you get it, you'll know it, and Fast Actin' Tinactin will be your best friend. Bring at least two bath towels, one to use while one is in the laundry.”

We hang a clothesline in the back of the bunk between the last two beds. Let the players hang their towels and bathing suit from it. Dryness is very important at Cooperstown. We bring diaper rash cream because someone will get “bucket butt.”

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From a player “PACKING FOR THE TRIP: Bring lots of shorts and tee-shirts, especially stuff with your team name on it, athletic shoes, socks, underwear, swimsuit, sweatpants, sweatshirt, jacket, flip-flops, one pair of nice pants or jeans and a nice shirt, in case you go out for a nice dinner or to church. Bring all the things mentioned earlier, toiletries, bed linens, towels, a lock (if you want to), pins and a towel with your name on it to pin your trades on (I carried all my pins and the towel around in a big zip lock bag so I wouldn't drop any), hand-held electronic stuff that you like, a book, playing cards, and **DON'T FORGET YOUR BASEBALL EQUIPMENT, CLEATS, SLIDING PANTS, CUP, AND BELT. ALSO, REMEMBER TO PUT YOUR NAME IN OR ON EVERYTHING YOU BRING!** Have mom mark your clothes, towels, equipment, and anything else you take. Leave a black permanent marker so you can put your name in the stuff that was issued: jerseys, sox and cap. Don't count on getting your regular jersey number you get what you get. We didn't mark the socks, but our coaches tied the pairs together as we stuck them in the laundry bags so we wouldn't lose any to the sock-eating laundry monster that lurks in washing machines.”

From a player: “OPENING CEREMONIES AND SKILLS COMPETITIONS: Opening ceremonies take place on the field in the big stadium where the championship game is played. When I played in the tournament that was the only game played in the stadium, but the Around-the-Horn Competition is held there too. Opening ceremonies are long. Every team is introduced and marches into the stadium with their banner. I can't remember everything they did, but you will sing the National Anthem and hear about the history of Cooperstown Dreams Park and the tournament. After the opening ceremonies they have the skills competitions. All the competitions, Around-the-Horn, Golden Arm, Homerun Derby, and the Home to Home Base Running Race are held at the same time on different fields. Like I said earlier, Around-the-Horn is held in the big stadium. Here's my advice. No matter how much you practice, you're going to be a little nervous because there are thousands of people in the stands and all the other players watching you when you do it, but it's really fun and exciting! Just keep focused and concentrate on catching the ball, come back to the base (target in the outfield) if you have to, stay relaxed and make a good accurate throw. Don't rush and don't worry so much about your time. The team that ends up winning is the one that does the drill the cleanest. Stay calm and think about this. I can't remember which team ended up winning the Around-the-Horn when I was there. I can't remember my team's time, I can't even remember if anyone dropped the ball or made a great throw. I remember what it felt like to be there and how fun it was to compete. “

We did not compete in 2007 or 2008 as 12U, and no one cared. They don't give you enough time to get loose. In 2007 5 Georgia 12U players from different teams were hurt before they played a game. Only 1 or 2 teams have won the week and Around the Horn. It truly is long and boring. The Home Run contest is done with a single wheel machine at about 35 MPH... The last two years, since dinner was before 6PM, I ordered pizzas to be delivered to one of the concession stand at 7:30 PM. I picked them up and went to the parents' tent and just waited for the team to show up. They were hungry and we never had any left over.

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From a player: “ENTERTAINMENT OFF THE FIELD: Remember you’re there to play baseball. Don’t be disappointed if you don’t have a lot of free time to run around. There is an arcade and a snack bar, but I really don’t remember spending much time there. Our coaches didn’t want us to play video games until we were done with games for the day. If you’re not playing a game, chances are you’ll be at the batting cages, throwing with a teammate, finding a place to take grounders, or pin trading. When we had free time we went to Historic Cooperstown. There’s Double Day Field, there’s the Major League Hall of Fame Museum, a wax museum, and tons of shops, and places to eat. If you love baseball as much as I do, you will be in heaven. If you’ve saved up any money of your own, Cooperstown is a great place to spend it.”

As soon as we get the schedule we look to see when we can go to the Hall of Fame and when we can send the kids off to their parents.

From a player: “CLOSING CEREMONIES: I’m not going to tell you anything about Closing Ceremonies except for this. Shake hands and say thank you when you get your ring. Even if your ring is just a little bit too big for you, give it to your mom or dad to put in a safe place until you get back home. A story from someone who knows: “Mine was too big and even though my mom offered to hold it for me I wore it. I don’t know when it slipped off my finger, but I looked down at my hand while riding up the escalator at Hartsfield Airport and realized I had lost my ring. I was in shock. I couldn’t even speak and I started to cry. My dad and I ran back to the gate and they let us on the plane to look for it. We searched the bathroom and even looked through the trashcan and couldn’t find it. We reported it to lost and found at the airport, but it never turned up. When we got to our house, my mom called the Dreams Park and it turns out I wasn’t the first kid to have this happen and I’m sure I won’t be the last. The Dreams Park people sent me a new one for \$85.00, but I still felt terrible for days. Cooperstown is such a fun week. I’d hate for any one of you to feel as bad as I did when I lost my ring so be smart about it.””

Teams march into opening ceremonies in alphabetical order. Teams march into closing ceremonies in reverse alphabetical order. Our name starts with EAST, good for Saturday, bad for Thursday.

Take a PINK and BLUE highlighter, print out your schedule and use the highlighter to show kids (and coaches) which colors uniforms to wear for each game.

Have players hang their extra towels from the sides of the top bunk, gives them a sense of privacy when drying off. And if they don't want to use the Tinactin, or diaper rash medicine, they need to dry themselves off.

They now provide box fans for the bunk, we brought our own. 3 fans are better than 1.

If you are checking in Friday night, remember that the parents are allowed into the Bunks Saturday Morning. A coach in 2005 was a bit upset having to walk through throngs of people to the shower, and then trying to change back in the bunkhouse.

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Use your catchers bag to sneak in Pizza's from Pizza Hut, it's cheaper than concession pizza. I bought pizza 3 out of 5 nights each year.

Remember that everyone makes it into the bracket, so, be good to your players, let them have fun for 7 games. Don't lose your cool during the Pool games; there is a fine line between serious and psychotic. After lunch Thursday you can become the maniac, win at all costs coach, then you are playing for the big trophy. Keep track of your position in the standings, Top 11 can be undefeated, top 30 is where you want to be. I have seen teams win 5 on Wednesday and then run out of steam on Thursday morning (8:30 AM comes early).

If you are in the sweet 16, Wednesday night SUCKS. The other 80 coaches have stopped caring and let their players run around until those of us in the sweet 16 get ticked off and start yelling at coaches. Beaver Valley Red (has won last few years) let's their players go to their parents house Wednesday Night. We'll do the same.

If you take extra uniform socks, they can't have any visible logos on them like UA or Nike, they must be plain Red or Navy.

Lou, who runs the place, will talk to parents for hours. He does not want to entertain the coaches or players; his money is in the parents.

Buy the shirt with the teams listed as soon as it comes out, once it is gone, there are no more. Have a parent buy one for the coaches (if they want it) since the parents will spend more time near the sales tent than the coaches.

Don't expect a little rain to hold up anything. During the season we use my voice mail as a "hot line" so that parents could call and get the latest game information. We did the same thing in Cooperstown since most people have free Long Distance and no roaming any more.

Don't upset the photography lady. She demanded in 2008 that we take pictures with our gloves; I did not want that and told her so. She told the umpires we were jerks and to watch out for us. So, they treated me like I was a jerk starting with the first pitch.

Worst schedule is a 10AM game and a 4PM game. That means lunch in between and getting the kids off their feet.

In 2005 one of our parents made a pin towel for each player and coaches.

The 2 years we made the Championship game were the 2 years we did not have a night game until the championship game. The lights suck and the fence is 4' high (not 8'). Never has the advantages of playing at East Cobb been so obvious. The Outfielders need to be reminded that they can't play it off the wall.

Little League teams are great to play, they can't hold runners.

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Best beer/wine bar in Cooperstown is The Double Day Inn; their shirt has the slogan "A Beer Town with a Baseball problem".

The 60/90 field at Cooperstown (Doubleday Field) is always open, wooden stands with cleat marks from the ages.

We did not let the players run wild around the compound, in between games they were to stay off their feet if we stayed at CDP. One of the parents felt that letting the kids run around free was part of the experience, we felt that keeping them focused on Baseball was more important.

The only record the Mudcats hold from 1997 is in 11 games, we gave up no home runs, of those 11 players, 9 started HS playing baseball (one played golf, the other wrestled), 8 were playing Varsity sports as Seniors, 4 members of that team were on college scholarship in 2003 (3 baseball, 1 wrestling).

2008 Cooperstown Packing List – For EC Astros

Bat Bag packed with everything you will need for game day.

- All of your Mitts (outfield, infield, 1st base, catchers).
- Bats.
- Catchers pack ALL your equipment.
- White Baseball Pants – 2 pair, no stripe
- Sliding Pants
- Catchers/Pitchers bring your cup.
- Orange Belt & Orange Sox
- Red Belt & Navy Belt for Cooperstown
- Red Sox & Navy Sox for Cooperstown
- Trainers
- Cleats
 - If you are getting new cleats make sure that they are worn in, we don't need blistered feet, so bring pack old ones with your clothes.

Packed and brought with you in a soft sided bag:

- Blue, White, Orange East Cobb Shirt
- East Cobb Hats
- Sneakers (for when we aren't playing baseball)
- Sandals for the shower - keep athlete's foot away, and no cut feet on the way to the shower
- Bathing Suit for the shower & Pool
- Shampoo, Soap (liquid is better), Toothpaste, Toothbrush, DEODORANT, vitamins, allergy medicine, drinking cup
- Extra glasses or contacts and extra saline solution
- A baggie or something to carry the stuff to the bathroom
- Bath Towel & washcloth
- Sleeping Bag or Sheets & Blanket (or both)
- Pillow
- Sleeping clothes
- Walking around clothes (shorts, T-shirt, sox, underwear, etc.)
 - Players will wear shirt/hat from East Cobb or Georgia.
- Something to keep their pins in. I would use a golf towel or hand towel.
- Sweat Shirt and/or Pullover

There is a "storage bin" for each player.

OPTIONAL:

Extra Baseball pants
Dollar Bills for the Pepsi Machine
Quarters for the Arcade
Game Boy/iPod and Extra Batteries (or similar)
Something to read
Sweat Pants & Sweat Shirt
Kodak one-use camera (and hope for some good pictures)

Please Remember: There is no Sports Authority in Cooperstown, and Wal-Mart is 90 minutes away...