

Blue Devils Hold Opening Baseball Workout; 10 Veterans Returning



Viewing Sports

by
Larry McComb

Butch's Leg Lift

While watching the Beaufort-Clement game in the district tournament in Kenansville, which seems like a long time ago now, I had something brought to my attention which I hadn't observed before but which I found becoming more intriguing as the tournament wore on.

I'm referring to the automatic leg lift of Beaufort star Butch Hassell every time a free throw is taken. Each time an opponent or one of Butch's team mates takes a gift shot, Butch's left leg automatically rises off the floor as the ball arches towards the basket. It's always the left leg and it's always the same movement. The leg comes up and kicks out identically every free throw.

Butch himself says that he is never aware of the leg-lift routine during a game but added that several people have told him about it. "I usually line up at the top of the free throw lane with Pud and Calvin under the basket when the other team shoots, and I always try to get the first step in so as to be in position to cover the area in front of the basket on the rebound," Butch explains.



Butch Hassell
... and leg lift

Beaufort coach Tom McQuinn said that he had never noticed the leg lift either but speculated that it could be a reflex action he has picked up since his near serious injury to his left heel a couple of years ago. At that time Butch came close to suffering permanent injury to the ankle when a severe cut just missed severing the Achilles tendon.

At the free throw line is the only place where Butch does the leg lift, and then only when someone else is taking the free throw. He doesn't do it when he's at the line himself or when he's taking a shot from the floor.

I never paid enough attention during college psychology classes to determine whether the leg lift would be a conditioned, controlled or natural reflex but I do know that watching for it during a game seems to take some of the monotony out of the free throw rituals which occur almost too often in a lot of games. Keep your eye on Butch's left leg at High Point and you'll see what I mean.

Team Faces 15-Game Slate With Opener Set for Friday

The Smyrna Blue Devils, perennial king-pins of county baseball, began spring workouts last Monday with about 16 boys, including 10 veterans, reporting to head coach Jim Parkin.

Heading the list of lettermen returning this year are catcher Curt Nelson, pitcher Braxton Piner, shortstop Dale Lewis, and centerfielder Wayne Davis.

Piner, the crafty southpaw with the fluid motion, was the team's top hurler last year as he compiled a record of 12 wins and only one loss. His lone defeat was a 3-2 two-hitter against Camp Lejeune. Rounding out Parkin's pitching staff this year will be righthander Carroll Hill, 4-2 last year, and Horace Lawrence, also a right hander.

Curt Nelson, the team's leading hitter last year, will again handle all the catching chores for the Blue Devils. Besides being the outstanding backstop in the county last year, Nelson was a vicious hitter, compiling a lousy .360 average.

Returning to cover the short field for the Blue Devils is All-County basketball player Dale Lewis. Lewis was forced to miss most of last season because of a fractured wrist but Parkin expects the big boy to be ready for a full season this year.

One of the highlights of practice so far, according to Parkin, has been the hitting of James Mears. Mears, who was a weak hitter last year, has been rapping the ball farther and oftener than any of the players so far. An infielder last year, James has been moved to the outfield this spring to make use of his hitting.

In centerfield the Blue Devils will again have fleet Wayne Davis, the top defensive fly-chaser in the county last season. Davis was also one of Parkin's top hitters, compiling an average of .285 in 19 games.

For the remaining outfield post two players are battling it out for starting positions, according to Parkin. Grady Davis and Genus Jones, who both saw limited action last year, are the pair. "Of course, on the days that he isn't pitching Braxton Piner will be in the outfield some place," said Parkin. Also likely to see outfield action is Carroll Hill.

Joining Lewis in the Blue Devil infield should be first baseman John Hill, second baseman Vaughn Yeomans and third baseman A. C. Davis. All are veterans from last

State Playoffs Still Scheduled For March 23

As of press time yesterday an official word had been received of a further postponement of the state basketball tournament at High Point.

The latest notice from the office of state athletic director Hap Porchy said that the tournament would begin Wednesday, March 23 and run through Saturday, March 26.

All Class A district tournaments, except the District Two tourney, are scheduled to be resumed this week with finals slated for Saturday night. Pairings for the state playoffs will be made Saturday after the results of the various district tournaments are known.

Board Meets

County commissioners sat as the board of equalization yesterday at the courthouse. By 4 p.m., 24 property owners had appeared before the board requesting adjustment in property valuations.