

# North End semi-pro baseball team very professional

Tired of driving to the Kingdome, wasting gas and money to see a good baseball game? Tired of struggling through the crowds? Tired of spending all that money on parking? Tired of all the hassle? If the answer is yes to any or all of these questions, there is a solution.

Right now the Semi-pro baseball season is in full swing and Paintings Unlimited, a North End team, is playing a high caliber brand of baseball almost every week in Hamlin Park. The park is close, uncrowded and has free parking. And the AA team plays in a league only one step removed from the minor league.

Paintings Unlimited is one of only two Seattle based teams (West Seattle is the other team) in the 10 team Western International League. Teams play a 27 game league schedule and about 10 non-league games with the winner and runner-up, determined by a post season tournament, going to regional and national tournaments.

The last three years a Washington team has won the national title inspiring Paintings Unlimited coach, Larry Poe, to say, "It is harder to win on the local level than to win at

the nationals. We have probably the toughest league in the whole country."

Poe began coaching ten years ago on the little league level. He eventually moved up through the age groups and three years ago, when Paintings Unlimited was formed, he accepted the coaching job on the assumption he would only do it for a year.

## SPORTS

"I just sort of fell into the position. I never really played baseball but I have coached it for ten years. Each year I want to quit because it takes up all my summer weekends and I'm not able to get away. But in the spring people start calling me up and ask what is happening with the team and I begin to get the itch to get out there," he said.

Poe's coaching job is made easier due to quality team members. Some of the outstanding players include Art Rangno, the senior member of the team at 37 years of age, who Poe calls one of the best hitters in the league. Another player, Mike Rennie made the All-State and All-National team last year. And Jay

Erdahl is a player St. Louis wants to sign as soon as he is eligible.

According to Poe, players in the league are in transition. They are either on their way up or on their way down.

"A lot of the players could play in the minors but realize they will never make the majors. So instead of traveling to another city they stay in Seattle, hold a steady job and play AA ball. Other players are using the league to get exposure. A majority of the players are college age or a little older and they are playing in the league to be noticed by the pro scouts who come to the games."

An example of this occurred at the beginning of the season when Paintings Unlimited's top pitcher, Mike Kinnunen, was signed by the Minnesota farm club, Orlando.

Even though the league is called a semi-pro league, the players receive no money.

"Years ago they got some money for playing but not anymore. The name just hasn't been changed," said Poe.

Even with the amateur status the players and coaches put in about 25 hours a week and more practicing and playing the game.

Asked where the players come

from, Poe said they are mostly recruited out of the colleges.

"We get the college players and post grads who want exposure for the pros or who are good but not good enough for the pros and just want to play."

The biggest problem the league has is attracting sponsors. According to Poe it costs about \$2000 a year to sponsor a team. This includes uniforms, field rental and umpire fees which run \$28 per umpire per game.

"The league doesn't like to let one team in at a time because it makes an odd number and there has to be a lot of byes. So the league has to let them in by twos. It is hard finding two sponsors at a time. Up until three years ago Seattle didn't have a team. They were all from outside. Then Paintings Unlimited was formed and this year West Seattle came into existence."

Right now Paintings Unlimited has a 9-8 record after going through a slump which saw them go from 8-3 and second in the league to fifth place. Any team with a .500 record is allowed to play in the post-season tournament for a spot in the state playoffs and Poe is certain his team will make it.

"We have just gone through the toughest part of the schedule and the top team, Adairs, is out of the way. The rest of the schedule is easier and injuries have all cleared up. I think we will win most of the remaining games. We were in the same position

last year and we ended up in second place," Poe said.

**HOME SCHEDULE:** Paintings Unlimited v. Eriksson, 6 p.m., July 29 at Hamlin Park; Paintings Unlimited v. H & L Twins, 8 p.m., July 31 at Hamlin Park.



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