

Nats continue to lose, but four students win with dream jobs

by Juliet Mullins

Jobs in high school are hard to come by. Many students resort to scooping ice cream, greeting customers or serving fries. But four Whitman juniors have landed the ultimate fantasy job: watching Major League Baseball. Mike Bernhard, Grant Horton and Tim and Ben Freeman are groundskeepers for the Washington Nationals and get paid \$40 a game to do minimal work and watch their favorite sport from front row seats.

The boys' job includes raking fields, taking down the screens from batting practice and rolling out a tarp when it rains. However, in nice weather their workload is light.

"We really don't do much if the weathers fine," Tim says. "We just sit there. If some trash blows onto the field, we'll run out and get it or we'll change the bases every once in a while."

The eight to ten groundskeepers who work each game must arrive two hours early, and stay until the game ends.

On sunny days, they sit in the groundskeepers' lounge, fitted with couches and a plasma screen TV, before they watch batting practice, take down the screens from the infield, sit in their front row seats to watch the game and rake the field every third inning. When there's heavy rain, they have to cover the field with a 500-pound tarp.

"The difficulty of the job varies immensely from game to game," Ben Freeman says. "When I worked I had to do minimal work because of the nice weather. On rainy days, we have to cover the entire field with a huge tarp, sometimes multiple times per game."

Covering the field with the tarp is the only difficult work the boys have to do. On May 16, rain came down hard, and rolling out the tarp became even harder. Although this entertained the crowd, the tarp crew had a miserable



PHOTO COURTESY GETTY IMAGES

Junior Michael Bernhard, center, covers the field with a tarp at Nationals Park May 16 to protect the it from rain.

time trying to pull out the tarp as rain piled onto it. The groundskeepers were having so much trouble with the tarp that several fans, out of pity, came down onto the field and helped pull it out. The entire crowd was in hysterics watching the groundskeepers suffer with the canvas in the pouring rain (see YouTube "Tarp Problems at Nationals Park" to watch Bernhard and Ben Freeman in action during the fiasco).

Though one would think that an interesting and entertaining job such as this would be nearly impossible to come by, the four boys landed the job through a combination of luck and inside connections.

"I got the job through a connection I had with one of my counselors on a teen tour I went on over the summer," Bernhard says. "He'd had the job for a while and asked if I wanted him to hook me up."

Bernhard soon told the Freemans about the tarp crew position and after a few emails they too became members of the Nationals' grounds crew.

In addition to free front row seats, the boys also get the opportunity to meet players. Bernhard has worked the most games and has met Christian Guzman, Ryan Howard, Albert Pujols, Julian Tavarez, Chase Utley and Ryan Zimmerman, among others. The other groundskeepers haven't had the same luck, partially because of the rules.

"We're actually not allowed to talk to the players unless they talk to us first," Tim says. "And we're not allowed to get autographs at all—that's the cardinal sin of it."

The Groundskeeper Code of Conduct also states that groundskeepers must "stay out of dugouts and bullpens unless on a specific task," but Tim admits to breaking this rule on one unforgettable occasion.

"We all went into the Cardinals bench, because at the time it was empty," he says. "We drank their Gatorade and ate their sunflower seeds and bubble gum."

Although the boys already have many memorable experiences, they are relatively new to the profession. They are the youngest—and some of the most inexperienced—of the groundskeepers, who range from high school students to men in their mid-fifties. As a result, they often don't work the high-profile games.

"There are a lot of groundskeepers so there's sort of competition to get games," Tim says.

Despite this obstacle, the boys are still thrilled with their new job.

"I was never a big Nats fan, and I still wouldn't consider myself one," Bernhard says. "I just love baseball, love the players, the game, the strategy. I mean, I get paid to sit in the front row and watch baseball for three hours. How cool is that?" ♦

Freshman Jackie Barnes squashes national competition

by Emily Mashek

Every day for at least an hour, 14-year-old freshman Jackie Barnes voluntarily locks herself in an empty white room. While this unique afterschool retreat may seem like a strange environment to spend an afternoon, it is actually a squash court—Barnes' second home.

Barnes' parents Connie and Rod, who are also her coaches, introduced her to squash when she was nine years old. Connie says it was only natural that Jackie started playing since she spent so much time with her parents at squash courts.

After Jackie lost all of her games in a highly ranked squash tournament, her mother was unsure if she had the drive to continue playing. But it was a turning point for Jackie, who decided that squash was going to be her athletic focus.

"Many parents think these types of losses are demoralizing for the child," Connie says. "I have seen it be the opposite so many times, where it becomes the platform for the child to really adopt the decision to strive to improve."

Jackie's experience and hard work

finally paid off in Philadelphia this April, when she won the U.S. Silver National U-15 squash title, her greatest accomplishment thus far.

"I was still pretty shocked for a while afterwards when I won because I was ranked about eighth out of the 29 girls in my draw," Jackie says.

Before the tournament even began, Jackie told herself she would be happy if she got at least sixth place. But after surpassing her own expectations and winning the tournament, her ranking shot to 25th in the nation in the girls U-15 division.

To keep up with the tough competition, Jackie practices every day at her squash club in Bethesda. However, on days before big tournaments, she focuses on strategies and mental components of the game instead of physical practice.

"I don't play as hard as usual so I'm not tired," Jackie says. "I usually just get more advice and watch other players play."

Jackie's parents run most of the tournaments in the tri-state area. She has played in New York, Pennsylvania and Baltimore. In addition to several U-15 tournaments, she

has also played in three adult tournaments, two of which she won.

The lack of team play in sports like squash or tennis can be isolating, but Jackie prefers squash to other sports because she likes depending on herself.

"You just have to do your best," she says. "Sometimes we do make teams [at practices] and each team plays each other, but I like it individually."

Over the winter, though, Jackie got the opportunity to play with teammates. As a captain, she led the Whitman squash team to the Division I title in the Sport & Health Interclub Varsity League program.

"The Whitman team was a lot of fun because we all got together and played other schools," Jackie says. "There were about 20 people on the team and we practiced one to two hours a week."

After high school, Jackie hopes to play in college, and possibly professionally. But for now, she's focusing on developing her game instead of planning for the future. Her first step of action? Playing—and beating—her parents.

"If I played my parents, my mom and



PHOTO COURTESY JACKIE BARNES

Freshman Jackie Barnes ranks 25th in the nation in the girls U-15 division.

"My dad would probably win," Jackie says. "But in six months, I might be able to beat them." ♦

The Spectator

Statement of Policy

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