

Baseball: Leaven in Human Relations

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With leadership given by a principal, a Denver community council planned and carried out a program which, while it featured baseball, brought about better human relations in the school community. Mayme A. Sweet is supervisor, Department of Instruction, Denver Public Schools, Denver, Colorado.

LAKE COMMUNITY NIGHT at the Denver Bears Stadium was no ordinary event. Not only did the Bears win a 7-6 game from the Omaha Cardinals in eleven innings, but they played to an audience of 5000 persons, the largest Saturday night crowd in the history of the stadium. The Bears played a good game; but the crowd and the high spirits were largely the results of careful and long-range planning by the Lake Community Council.

Because of changing population movement in the area, several outbreaks between racial and religious groups have occurred in the community and in the school. Concerned about these antagonisms, the principal of the school, Harry Nicholson, invited representatives of the various groups to meet with him monthly as a council to study the problem. Several projects and much deliberation have taken place in the community as a result of the work of the council. But the proposal by Mr. Nicholson which struck an all-time high was the following: "Since this is a neighborhood of baseball fans, with the Denver Bears Stadium right in our own community," he suggested, "what would you think about having a Lake Community Night at one of the Satur-

day night ball games? In addition to bringing the various groups together in a recreational activity, we would be encouraging our boys to participate in baseball and perhaps even to get into one of the boys teams."

"Great!" was the reaction of the council members. They immediately started to plan ways of setting up the project so that there would be wide community participation and heightened community feeling. The decision was unanimous that the leagues, both major and minor, which admitted no racial or religious barriers in the selection of players, would be a perfect instrument for helping to soften the barriers and rifts in the community.

Robert Howsam, owner of the Denver Bears, and Andy Cohen, manager, were interviewed on the project. They became sold on the idea, and the project was launched.

Two Phases of the Program

The school for its part decided on two projects. First, there would be a contest to build up enthusiasm among the young people. Open to all students, the contest would center on a baseball quiz designed to discover the pupils who knew most about the game.

A feverish excitement pervaded the school as teachers joined with pupils in coaching for the test. Baseball talk was everywhere. Rules of the game were discussed; the history of the Bears was read; and the names and positions of all players were learned. There was discussion of the local ball teams for boys as well as of the major and minor leagues. To increase knowledge of baseball, "Around the Diamond," a thirty-minute technicolor film, was shown. Questions designed to stump the contestants were solicited for the question box.

The baseball quiz included twenty-five questions. The six boys and girls getting the highest scores would participate in an oral elimination test. The high-scoring boy and girl in the oral test would be designated, respectively, Mr. Baseball and Miss Baseball. They would also receive ten tickets to future games and a certificate for their proficiency. Miss Baseball would be interviewed at the pre-game broadcast; and at the game Mr. Baseball would sit with the team. The other winners would be known as runners-up, and they would each receive an autographed baseball from the players. The winners would be announced at the Adoption Program.

A Team Is Adopted

The Adoption Program was the second project of the school. One week before the Omaha-Denver game, the Bears would be formally adopted by the Lake Student Council. "Never have we had such a wonderful assembly," said Connie Shedler, who won the contest and became Miss Baseball. "Everyone simply sat on the edge of his chair!"

Manager Andy Cohen had brought seven of his players to the program. They sat on the platform with the winners of the baseball quiz, community leaders who were promoting the project, Jack Carberry and Chet Nelson, sports editors of the two city dailies, and the principal, Mr. Nicholson, who presided at the ceremony.

Mr. Nicholson, who played the role of judge, charged the Denver Bears to produce evidence of why they felt they were worthy of adoption and support by the Lake community.

Mr. Howsam accepted the charge and called on the players to prove themselves. One after another they went to the mike. Bill Bruton showed how to steal a base, and Roy Isringhaus demonstrated the kind of balance a batter should have. Alberto Osario, recently from Puerto Rico and unable to speak English, received hearty applause when he greeted his compatriots in the audience with a Spanish "Hi!" Handsome and popular Danny Holden and Hank Williams presented the awards to Mr. Baseball and Miss Baseball. Andy Cohen, assuming his vaudeville manner, told a couple of stories and led the audience in singing, "Take Me Out to the Ball Game."

"You have seen the evidence," said the judge, addressing the audience. "If you wish to adopt this team, the Denver Bears, will you stand?"

The audience stood en masse. The judge then charged the student council, "Now that these men have given proof of their ability, what responsibility are you willing to assume?"

To this question, the student council president, Albert Stanley, replied that "the school will give its loyal support,"

and as proof of his integrity he purchased the first ticket.

This concluded the program. As the pupils made their way to their next classes, some lingered around the stage exit. Mr. Nicholson, anticipating this, ushered the players to the gym, where the pupils soon congregated to talk with the players and to secure their autographs.

The next day, Philip Rossman, president of the West Colfax Improvement Association, offered to make it possible for all boys and girls at Lake who were ten years or older to attend the game on community night, whether or not they could afford to buy tickets. Teachers in contributing schools, parents and friends volunteered to be responsible for ten or twelve children. (Admission to children under ten, if accompanied by an adult, was free.)

Collaboration in a Community Effort

It was a great day. Said Chet Nelson in his editorial column on the sports page of the *Rocky Mountain News*, "The project was a testimonial to baseball as a symbol of the American way of life. Long live the National Pastime and give us more men like Harry L. Nicholson . . ." whose vision "will take many boys off the street and put them on the ball field."

Robert Gamsay, editor of the *Intermountain Jewish News*, urged the support of Lake Community Night at the

ball games on Saturday nights. He said in an editorial, "We hope there will be a tremendous outpouring of the families of Lake Junior High students at the ball game so that the interracial harmony so evident at Monday's assembly will infect parents and neighbors and that Lake night at the Bears Stadium will become an annual affair to perpetuate and extend the good feeling that has been developed among the youngsters."

Rueben Valdez and Pecos Sanchez, editors of the *Clarion*, a four-page weekly paper that tells "the truth about life of Colorado Spanish-speaking people," and that is "dedicated to the principle that all men are created equal," said in the editions of May 16 and May 23: "The efforts of the good people of that neighborhood have been wonderfully fruitful and the program (to improve intergroup relations) has now expanded to include without exception every family residing in this section of the city.

"Mr. Nicholson, a truly democratic individual, ably assisted by Thomas Borrego, a teacher, and others, have labored incessantly to promote better understanding among the many elements enrolled in that school.

"Lake Community Council and the Denver Bears have collaborated in a community effort that can easily become one of Denver's finest examples of civic pride."

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