

Clark takes another swing at baseball

The Columbian headline proclaimed the good news on June 7: "Clark moves forward with plan to revive baseball at Clark College."

Bring it on. It can't happen soon enough for this former Penguin right fielder. Let's play ball!

Columbian Sports Editor Greg Jayne wrote: "Beginning with the 2009-10 school year, the school will field a baseball team for the first time since 1992, athletic director Denny Huston said." The Penguin team will compete as a club team its first year against junior varsity teams from colleges such as Linfield and Concordia, as well as play preseason games with other two-year colleges. Following the initial season, baseball will be added to the college's list of 10 varsity sports.

A return as a varsity sport has been difficult. For some reason, baseball team funding has been denied by the Associated Students of Clark College, which administers student fees. College officials have pressed ahead, and seek funding from the public.

The Clark College Alumni Association and Penguin Athletic Club have been pushing for some time to return baseball to the campus. But the stand-out booster for Clark baseball is Randy Myers, a member of the Clark College Class of 1983 and star Penguin pitcher. He had an outstanding Major League Baseball career, pitching for the New York Mets, Cincinnati Reds, San Diego

Padres, Chicago Cubs, Baltimore Orioles and Toronto Blue Jays. Baseball historians note Myers was one of the most effective closers in the 1990s. Myers, Norm Charlton and Rob Dibble were

called the "Nasty Boys," because of their high-powered pitching for the Reds. Cincinnati Enquirer sports writers John Erardi and John Fay termed them "flame-throwing relievers."

Southpaw Myers closed out the final game of the 1990 World Series, a sweep of the favored Oakland Athletics, and was named co-MVP with fellow pitcher Dibble. The Reds manager then, Lou Piniella, went on to the Seattle Mariners, and is now the Chicago Cubs manager.

Tribute to coach

Myers has maintained continuous support and enthusiasm for Clark College athletics. He has pledged \$20,000 in matching funds to raise \$35,000 for equipment and sprucing up an on-campus field for the new Penguin baseball team. Part of Myers' pledge is to have the baseball field named in honor of Vern Kindsfather, a PE instructor and baseball coach at Clark until he retired. Kindsfather, a professional baseball player in Seattle, died Dec. 21, 2008, at the age of 84.

Huston said Myers proposed a

TOM KOENNINGER



baseball fundraising dinner, with a "big-name" speaker to attract additional funds. Huston, quoted in The Columbian article, said Myers thinks "it's a no-brainer."

But the revived baseball program at Clark has no guarantee for 2010-11, according to Huston. Next fall, he will ask for travel expenses (about \$16,000) for the team, and the support group will again seek funding from student fees. This dismal economy will lift, which could bring permanency to Clark baseball revival hopes.

As a member of the Clark College class of 1951, my memory goes back to one year as player and the second as team manager (equipment collector). My chief accomplishment as player was striking out legendary coach Skeet O'Connell in batting practice, but I think he faked it. That year, the team came within one playoff game of taking the state title, losing to Everett. Clark did become Washington state baseball champion in 1956.

The revival would be a good thing for Clark College and the community, attracting students and players who might otherwise get their education elsewhere. One person who commented anonymously on The Columbian Web site said Clark County "has a deep pool of athletic talent that has to go out of the area to play their sport."

On the other hand, a major grump, also anonymous, claimed the story was "another fluff-piece and infomercial disguised as a news story ... a stunt aimed at PR ..." for the college.

I don't believe the grump. Let's give Clark another crack at the bat.

TOM KOENNINGER is editor emeritus of *The Columbian*. His column of personal opinion appears on Wednesdays. Reach him at koenninger@comcast.net.