



**GREG JAYNE**

*Commentary*

# Freeman at his best building baseball

**W**e all should be so fortunate.

At the age of 60, Don Freeman's professional life is as vibrant as ever. After nearly 40 years in the coaching business, his chosen profession remains engaging and interesting.

The lesson, perhaps, is that being a coach sure beats working for a living.

"As long as you like what you're doing, why stop?" Freeman wondered. "I like being around the kids."

So there is Freeman, spending his days between the lines on a baseball field. There he is — with a shock of white hair flowing from under a blue Durham Bulls cap and with the tan of somebody who works outside for a living — trying to make something out of nothing.

Because Freeman is busy putting together Clark College's first baseball team in 18 years, molding a group that started with about 70 players into one that will take the field in the spring.

The man seems to fit the job. Freeman coached Prairie High School for 20 years, guiding future major leaguers Richie Sexson and Alan Embree. For the past three years, he has been the head coach at Heritage High.

Now Freeman has a new challenge.

"They kept asking and asking," he said of Clark College officials. "Finally, my wife said, 'Why not? What do you have to prove in high school?'"

"I think we can develop a program that the talented kids in Clark County will consider."

Clark College has revived the baseball program that was mothballed in 1992, fielding a club team last spring with the intent of competing at the varsity level in 2011. And it is renovating the on-campus facility that will be known as Vern Kindsfather Field.

"By the time it's done, it will be about a half-million dollars — none of it coming from the school," Freeman said.

And yet, through all the excitement of building a program from scratch, the project is only the second-most interesting job Freeman has undertaken this year.

In August, he coached the U.S. Women's National Baseball Team at the World Championships in Venezuela. With a team of former college softball players and women who had played high school baseball, Freeman led the Americans to a bronze medal.

"Venezuelans are absolutely

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nutso on baseball," Freeman said, citing attendance figures as high as 18,000.

They also, in some cases, are just plain nutso.

"We had armed body guards around the hotel," Freeman said. "And they had a police escort for us. They said that would make us feel safe, and I said, 'If it was safe, we wouldn't

need this.'"

Not that he would trade the experience.

"What an awesome way to see the world doing something you love to do," he said.

That love has taken Freeman to Australia on 16 occasions, to Europe several times, to Venezuela three times. And now it has him back in Clark County, starting from scratch.

"I like the talent, but I don't have anything to compare it with," Freeman said. "We have some very good players, but I don't know.

"I kind of figured I would be coaching another five years, and I figured it would take five years to get this thing going."

Yes, even after a lifetime of coaching baseball, Don Freeman sounds like a man who appreciates his good fortune.

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