

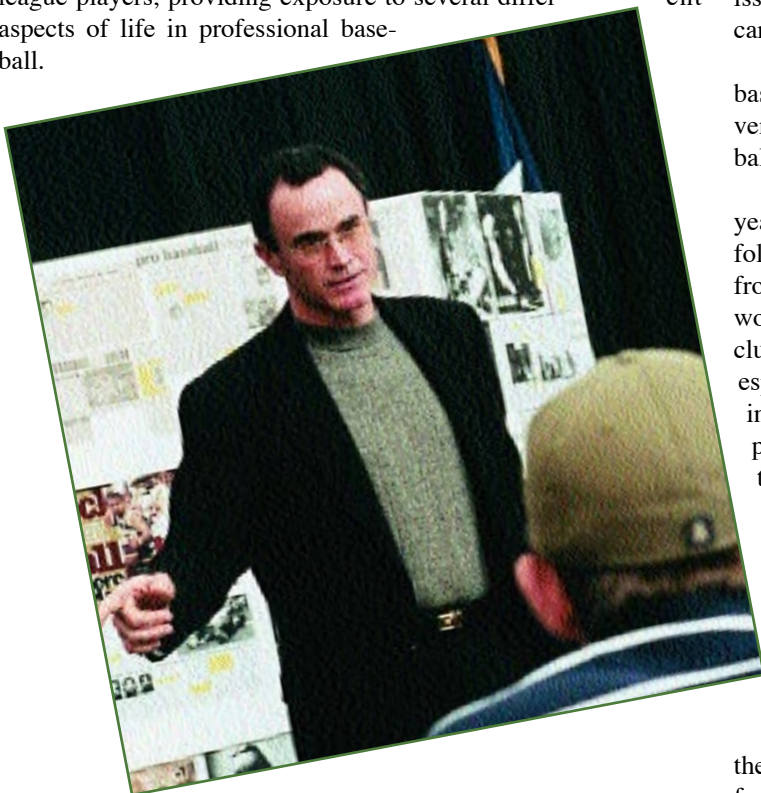
# PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

by Rich Rice

**The Texas Rangers host a Prospect Development Camp each year to help their young players become major leaguers both on the field and off.**

The movie Bull Durham was a story about a veteran minor league catcher brought back to the Single-A level to groom a promising young pitcher. While Crash Davis may have done more than enough mentoring for Ebby Calvin LaLoosh, the Rangers have taken a decidedly different approach in preparing their young players for events that may lie in their futures.

On February 8, the Rangers opened their fourth annual Career Development Program at The Ballpark in Arlington. The program serves as an educational tool for the organization's new minor league players, providing exposure to several different aspects of life in professional baseball.



**A former major leaguer himself, Rangers' Director of Player Development Reid Nichols started this program for the team's prospects four years ago.**

The minor league players that participate in the program from year to year have usually signed the previous season or are new to the organization. Players are brought to Arlington for a week's worth of activities and during that time live with front office employees and their families. The time spent in the Metroplex allows players an opportunity to prepare for unpredictable situations, work out in a major league facility and meet people in the front office they would not normally encounter.

Reid Nichols, the Rangers' Director of Player Development, initiated the program four years ago. It continues today with the help of members of his department.

"(The program) is just something that's kind of evolved,"

Nichols said. "Major League Baseball had been doing a similar program for a year or two before we started doing it, and we learned from them. They even sent somebody in to learn a little bit from us. It's kind of a finishing school for our players."

The program run by Major League Baseball, however, is only for those players who have been added to the 40-man roster for their respective teams. The Rangers felt that certain issues needed to be dealt with at an earlier time in players' careers.

"All of our players are just coming into professional baseball, so we're addressing it at a young age to try to prevent some of the problems you see happening with younger ballplayers," Nichols commented.

A typical day for the 19 players who participated this year might include an early-morning arrival at The Ballpark, followed by two or three presentations touching on anything from dining etiquette to financial planning. An afternoon workout was usually preceded by lunch in the visitor's clubhouse courtesy of Joe Macko. The workouts proved especially important, as several organizational coaches and instructors were present during the week to help players prepare for spring training. Evenings gave the players a chance to unwind and prepare for the next day's activities.

The families that house the players during their time in Arlington provide a support base to make them feel welcome throughout their stay. Brenda Whittenberg, who is a legal assistant with the Rangers, has participated in the program in each year of its existence. She has enjoyed the experience of hosting players and feels there is a lot to gain from the friendships that develop.

"The families get no assistance whatsoever, they just get the benefit of having these kids live with them and become fast friends," she said. "You get really close in a very short period of time."

This year Whittenberg played host to two new members of the organization, Julio Volquez and last year's number one

**"We're addressing it at a young age to try and prevent some of the problems you see happening with younger ballplayers."**

# PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

draft pick, Scott Heard.

"Scott is such a poised, mature young man," Whittenberg stated. "It's hard to believe he's 19 years old. The words of advice he gave my son were really special. It was like my son was talking to a much older young man when in essence they are five years apart.

And Julio was as sweet as can be."

Heard was a highly touted prospect out of Rancho Bernardo High School in San Diego, where he was a three-time all-state catcher. Despite the level of attention he received throughout high school, Heard was impressed with the program and felt he gained even more from it.

"Every organization is different and they think certain needs are met in different ways," he said. "But to look at

our organization and our career development, it's really a plus. Everybody here is first class."

Nichols feels the players enter the program with a strong understanding of its importance.

"This is a privilege for them to be here, and they know it. They recognize it and they enjoy it," Nichols commented. "They get to come to a major league stadium and workout at a major league facility. They know that there are just a few of them and with all of our roving instructors here they get one-on-one atten-

**"This is a privilege for them to be here, and they know it. They recognize it, and they enjoy it."**

tion."

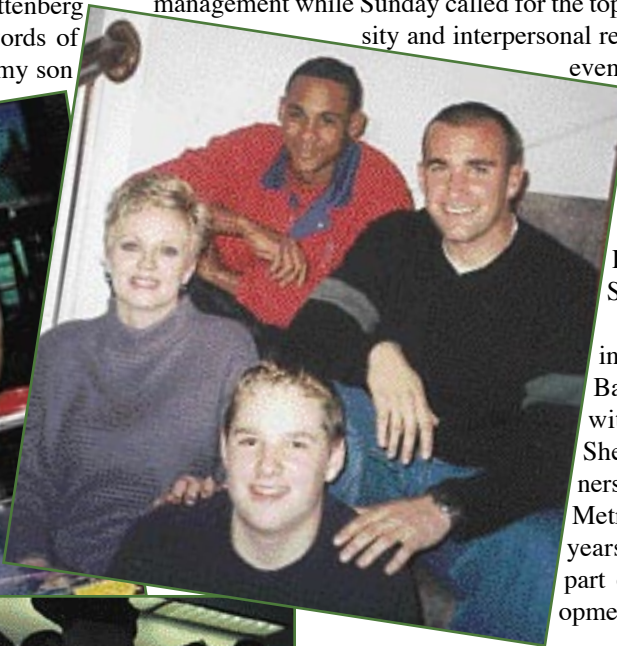
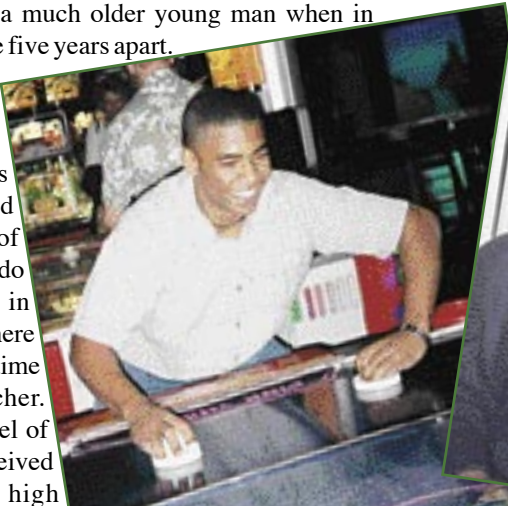
The players' weeklong stay began on a Thursday night, when they all gathered at The Ballpark's Museum Auditorium for an introductory meeting with Rangers President Jim Lites, Executive Vice President and General Manager Doug Melvin, as well as Nichols and others. Players were given the week's schedule and told what to expect from the program.

Friday morning, the first full day began with presentations from Conditioning Coordinator Frank Velasquez, Performance Enhancement Counselor Don Kalkstein and media consultant Lisa LeMaster.

Saturday involved seminars on both club finances and money management while Sunday called for the topics of cultural diversity and interpersonal relationships. Sunday

evening was one of the bigger highlights of the players' week, as they got to take in a hockey game between the Dallas Stars and the St. Louis Blues.

The next morning was spent in The Ballpark's Gold Club with Susan Huston. She has taught manners and etiquette in the Metroplex area for 30 years, and has been a part of the career development program since its



**Above: Brenda Whittenberg and her son Drew (front), hosted Julio Volquez and Scott Heard.**

**Top Left: Edwin Encarnacion tried a little air hockey at Game Works in Grapevine Mills Mall.**

**Lower Left: Prospects and their families took in a Dallas Stars game on February 11.**

inception. Though she originally instructed young girls on etiquette, recently she has dealt exclusively with corporations and businesses.

Her involvement with the Rangers' program consists of seminars in professional image impact, as well as social and dining etiquette.

"Fifty-five percent of your image is your clothes," Huston said. "I show the players that for the amount of money they're making now that they can go out with \$900 and put together a wardrobe that will make a better impression. You have to work on your image.

"I make them more aware of how visually people judge them. It's not always fair, but it's something that happens."

Or as Crash might put it, "Think classy, you'll be classy."

Huston then turns the discussions from creating a positive

# PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

image to social etiquette.

"I think nearly all of these players when they get to the major leagues and have bigger incomes, they're going to be investing and be businessmen," Huston noted. "They need to know how to conduct themselves and not be rude and not to be perceived as that. Eye contact, proper introductions, all those various things make a big difference when you meet people for the first time."

The last thing Huston covers for the program is dining etiquette. Think you have problems knowing which is the salad fork at nice restaurants? Imagine if you were a teenage baseball player. Huston takes care of that.

"We actually showed them a complete seven course meal so that they really understand when they get in that situation and have a bunch of different forks in front of them," she said.

The sessions with Huston were followed by a lunch with the team's front office employees and included a presentation by Reid Nichols. The staff was then given the opportunity to ask the players questions.

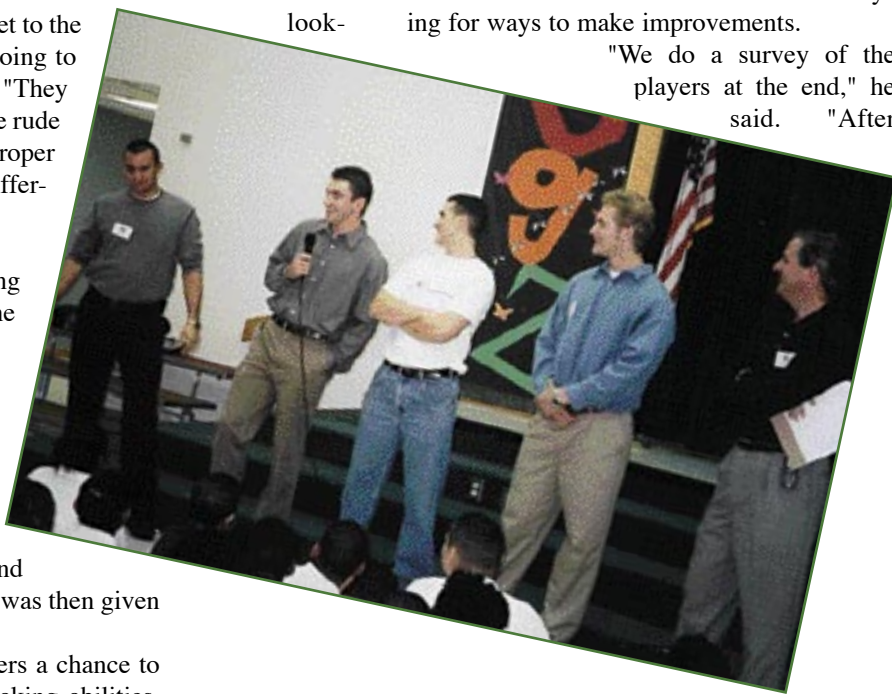
Valentine's Day on Wednesday gave the players a chance to hone, or in some cases discover, their public speaking abilities. They were given this opportunity through speaking engagements at Arlington area schools that were arranged

**"They need to know how to conduct themselves and not be rude and not to be perceived as that."**

by the Rangers Community Relations Department. Students at the schools asked questions and made it an enjoyable experience for everyone involved.

As things came to a close on Thursday, this year's participants were given a questionnaire to evaluate the program and make recommendations for its future. Nichols and his staff are always looking for ways to make improvements.

"We do a survey of the players at the end," he said. "After



**Scott Heard, Matt Meisenheimer, Randy Truselo and Jason Botts joined Rangers' television broadcaster Bill Jones at an appearance for Sherrod Elementary School fifth and sixth graders.**

every session we have the players fill out a sheet explaining whether they liked it, if it helped and what we might be able to do better. Then we try to make adjustments according to the feedback we get from the players and the staff."

On Thursday afternoon, the Life Skills portion of the program took place, where actors present various scenarios to players in an effort to make them look at different ways to handle complex situations.

"There are 10 to 14 skits that the players participate in, but they don't know what it's going to be until they're in it," Nichols explained. "They have to make decisions and then see what the consequences are of the decisions."

Heard felt the Life Skills skits made for one of the best activities of the week.

"In all the skits everyone was funny, but it was still kind of serious and you still had to think for yourself and make decisions," he said.

That night, the farewell dinner was held before players and staff left the next morning to Port Charlotte, Florida, for spring training. The dinner for participating players and families is a time to relax and enjoy, but also gives players a chance to put



**Consultant Susan Huston gave instruction to the young players on everything from dressing right to which forks to use during dinners.**

# PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

some of the skills they were taught throughout the week to use.

"The evening is kind of a culmination where we have a reception and a dinner," Nichols said. "It's a nice dinner where we invite the host families. The players get to put everything they've learned to practice."

For the families, spring training means a time to say goodbye to their most talented guests. That does not necessarily mean the relationship ends. Whittenberg keeps in touch with several former program participants, including Juan Piniella, who was at Tulsa last season.

"Juan is a good, wonderful kid," Whittenberg said. "For some reason we have stayed in touch. My son and I

go to Shreveport and Round Rock when Juan is playing in those cities. We talk maybe 2-3 times a year. I also believe that Scott (Heard) will be one of the ones that will stay close to us."

Heard spoke highly of the program and the people involved.

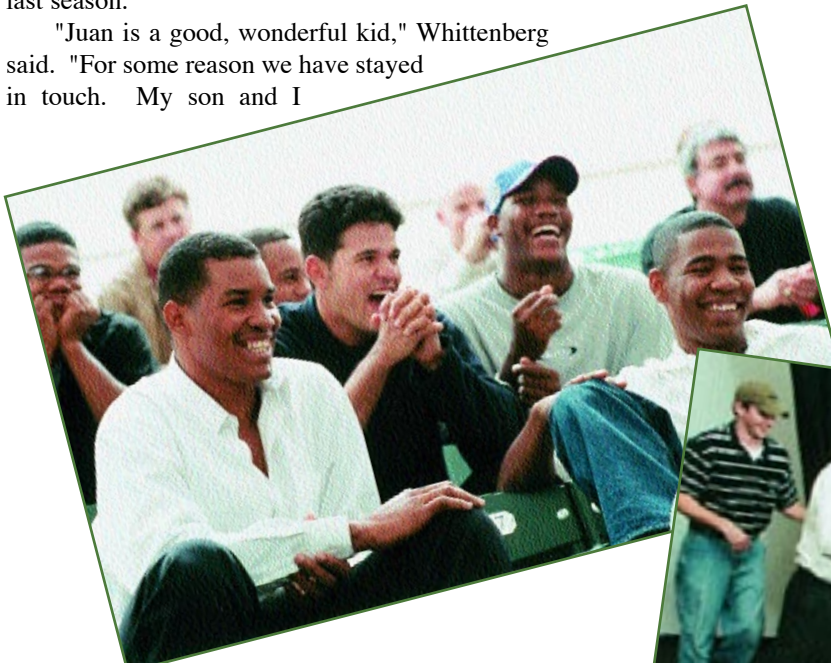
"I had an opportunity to meet everybody," he said. "Brenda knows a lot of people and I got to meet people in the office, people in player development, people at the Stars. I really enjoyed it, and the staff was really nice. I thought they did a great job."

Nichols is pleased with the success of the program thus far and says the feedback has been nothing but positive.

"After a player's been out of this awhile, I sit down and talk to them, and they still say the career development program really helped them."

**Left: Although the information throughout the program is serious, the subjects are presented in a humorous manner, which keeps the prospects entertained and interested.**

**Below: During the Life Skills Class, actors are brought in to reenact situations the ballplayers could face. To drive home the point, the prospects get involved in the fun as well.**



**Left: Time to head to Port Charlotte for spring training. (left to right) Brian Oliver, Chris Russ, Branden Pack, Reynaldo Garcia, Greg Runser, Scott Heard, Ernest Villegas, Layne Nix, Jason Botts, Travis Hughes and Jason Bourgeois pose for one last picture at DFW Airport.**

**"I really enjoyed it, and the staff was really nice. I thought they did a great job."**