

Baseball moms go the distance to showcase sons

Written by Jeff Dahn, Perfect Game

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FORT MYERS, Fla – There are undoubtedly thousands of “baseball moms” scattered all across the country. These are the women who go the extra mile to make sure their sons stay involved with baseball and continue to share the same passion they have for the game.

In the cases of Melissa Stickney and Paula Greve, it’s an extra 1,400 miles.

The two moms from east-central Iowa were in southwest Florida last week with their sons Mitch Stickney and Nathan Greve for the Perfect Game National Underclass Showcase-Main Event at the Boston Red Sox 5-Plex Player Development Complex and Terry Park.

What makes their situation unique is that the two moms and two sons are the only members of the traveling party that flew out of the Eastern Iowa Airport in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, two days after Christmas. The husbands and dads – Mike Stickney of Marion and David Greve of Cedar Rapids – stayed home.

These are truly “baseball moms.” Paula’s parents have a home in nearby Punta Gorda, Fla., so the Greve family has made numerous visits to this end of the beach.

“My husband likes baseball, but he doesn’t loooooove baseball. And I loooooove baseball,” Paula said. “It was really never a discussion on who was coming. Maybe if we were going somewhere where I didn’t have family that lives here ... maybe he would have been more apt to come instead of me.

“But if he were here, I don’t think I would get the information at home that I wanted to get.”

Mitch and Nathan are sophomores at Linn-Mar High School and were attending their first out-of-Iowa Perfect Game event. Both participated in the PG 2010 Midwest Underclass Showcase at Perfect Game Field at Veterans Memorial Stadium in Cedar Rapids last August.

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Nathan called the National Underclass experience beneficial and liked the idea of his mom accompanying him to Florida in late December.

“You’ve got to love getting away from Iowa,” he said.

Paula said her husband David isn’t indifferent toward Nathan’s pursuits, it’s just that they share other interests away from baseball.

“He’s a great supporter and he’s always been wonderful, but he just doesn’t understand baseball,” Paula said. “I grew up as the daughter of a man who didn’t have any sons, so I was the son my father never had. I went to baseball games – my dad took me to Major League baseball games all the time. My husband just never had a dad who did that kind of stuff with him.”

Nathan Greve, a left-hander and outfielder, has been playing baseball on the recreational level ever since he was old enough to pick up a bat.

“He was throwing Cheerios at me from the high chair with his left hand,” Paula said, laughing at the memory. “We were like, ‘OK, this is great! A left-handed pitcher already!’ The dog can pick up the Cheerios.”

Mitch, an outfielder, started playing baseball as 9-year-old with the local Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Reds and stayed with the team until he was 13. He moved on to play with the Iowa Bandits and last summer played his first season of high school ball with the Linn-Mar Lions, seeing very limited action as a freshman.

“We’ve pretty much traveled the majority of the weekends throughout those years,” Melissa said.

Melissa’s husband, Mike, is involved with Mitch’s blossoming baseball career and has coached

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him the past, but this Florida trip was for just Mom and Mitch.

"I don't know, it was just decided that I would get to come here and enjoy the – supposedly – warm weather," Melissa said while fighting off early morning frosty temperatures on Wednesday, Dec. 29.

As his involvement in the National Upperclass came to an end, Mitch was appreciative of his mom's presence, but was also missing his dad.

"It's nice (being with his mom) but I would have rather had my dad," Mitch said while his mom stood nearby, smiling. "It's not that my mom's bad or anything, but I'm sure he would have given me advice about baseball and my mom doesn't know as much as he does."

Melissa wasn't the least bit offended and, in fact, was appreciative of everything the National Underclass Showcase offered.

"It's been a good experience," she said. "Obviously, there are kids a year older than us, and you can see the talent that they have, and I think it's a good experience for the boys to see kind of where they're at and how they compare to the other kids."

More PG events are sure to follow.

"We were talking about, 'OK, now that we've done this, what's really our next step and what are our next plans,'" Melissa said. "Both boys participate in (Iowa) wood bat leagues in the spring and the summer, and we're talking about what's the next showcase and what's the next thing on the agenda."

The Greves have the same plan.

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“For us it’s good to really get some feedback from Perfect Game (about) the progress we’re making,” Paula said. “We think it’s a beneficial thing and we’ll do more.”

Both moms praised the special college recruiting seminars “Myths and Realities of College Recruiting” that were presented the night before the National Underclass began. The seminars emphasized the value of getting good grades, which Nathan (3.84 GPA) and Mitch (3.5) have done a good job of so far.

“I thought it was very good for the boys to hear that,” Melissa said.

Paula agreed: “Even their high school coaches can tell them good grades are important, but when they hear that here, there’s a credibility that Perfect Game has with kids that supercedes what we as parents and even some of their coaches can tell them.”