

Field of Dreams: 'We've always called it the crown jewel of Snowden Grove'

By Chris Van Tuyl
Wednesday, April 9, 2008

The glee belonged to the kids.

The blue belonged to the University of Memphis baseball team.

And the Field of Dreams is always going to belong to the city of Southaven.

Everything Monday night -- including the smell of popcorn in the air -- meant one thing: Opening Day 2008 is not too far away.

"We've always called it the crown jewel of Snowden Grove," Southaven Mayor Greg Davis said, referring to the field located in the city's Snowden Grove Park. "It just gives everyone an opportunity that may not otherwise get a chance to be involved in team sports, have fun and get on a ball field. It's quite a success story for Southaven."

Sign-ups for the complex to serve handicapped and mentally challenged children were deemed a hit by Parks and Recreation director Gary Roberts.

"I was very, very happy (with the turnout)," he said. "Making the kids happy -- that's what we're all about." While the first games aren't scheduled until April 22, most of the league's participants showed they're actually in midseason form, running the bases with members of the U of M squad. When that excitement ended, it was time for the Tigers, who played host to Mississippi State Tuesday at AutoZone Park, to sign some autographs.

"It's very humbling for our players and it's a great life lesson," Memphis coach Daron Schoenrock said. "They're blessed with a lot of tools that they take for granted every day, but it's an awesome thing to see the smiles on the kids' faces when our guys interact with them."

Leading home run hitter Trey Wiedman was there. So was Matt Yokley, who leads the Tigers in saves. Not to be outdone was Brach Davis. As Memphis begins the second half of its season, the 2005 Southaven graduate wasn't really focusing on his impressive strikeout-to-walk ratio. The sophomore southpaw was doing his best to "outrun" youngsters to third base.

"I really enjoy coming out and doing this," Davis said. "This is just awesome. It makes you feel really good as a person to be out here, helping these kids out, showing them about the game of baseball and watching them enjoy the game of baseball."

Continuing in the spirit of giving, the Tigers came equipped with donations: T-shirts from adidas, plus gloves and wristbands courtesy of Louisville Slugger.

Home plate was then utilized for a special check presentation by the Northwest Mississippi Association of Realtors. The amount of \$1,161.25 was to go to team uniforms and end-of-the-year trophies.

"Everything is volunteered, everything is donated," said Mayor Davis, "so these families get to come out here with no financial expense and burden, because they have to deal with enough on a daily basis."

As opening day approaches, the current plan is to have two games every Tuesday night at 6 and 7:30.

"It's great," said Roberts, "because we don't charge anybody. We'll have nights out here where it will be free snow cones or free hamburgers. Some other sponsors have got aboard and they actually don't come up with the money, but if they feed the kids, that's just as good."

