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7801 N. Central Drive
Lewis Center, OH 43035
740-888-6000 • Fax: 740-888-6001
Dublin365mag.com

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PRESIDENT AND PUBLISHER

Bradley M. Harmon

EDITORIAL

Editor: Julianne Hohbach

Contributors: Kathy Lynn Gray, Andrew King,
Lisa Proctor, Sarah Sole and Jarrod Ulrey

PHOTOGRAPHY

Chief Photographer: Joshua A. Bickel

Contributor: Lorrie Cecil

DESIGN/PRODUCTION

Production Manager: Rebecca Zimmer

Design: Annie Steel

Web Producer: Scott Hummel

ADVERTISING

Director: Doug Dixon

Retail Manager: Heather Kritter

Classified Manager: Terri Tribbie

Account Executive: Diana Carilli

Marketing & Promotions: Annie Steel

CIRCULATION

Home Delivery & Business Distribution

Customer Service:

888-837-4342

Retail advertising:

614-583-5793

advertising@dublin365mag.com

Classified advertising:

614-785-1200

Editorial:

740-888-6000

editorial@dublin365mag.com

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From the Editor

Saunders Brings Coaching Clout

BY JULANNE HOHBACH

THOSE WHO FOLLOW high school baseball know the name Tim Saunders. He's a local coaching legend, not only in Dublin but also in national circles.

He has a 545-358 career record as a head coach and helped make Dublin Coffman's stadium the envy of schools across the country. Four of his players were selected in Major League Baseball drafts. He worked with USA Baseball and was inducted into the National High School Baseball Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

But on July 19, while at a sports camp in Massachusetts, he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage that sent him to the emergency room and left him recuperating for 11 days in the intensive-care unit. He was cleared to return to work in September, the same month he celebrated his 58th birthday.

ThisWeek Community News sportswriter Jarrod Ulrey caught up with Saunders now that he's back on the job to talk about his coaching career and the health scare that sidelined him over the summer. His story is compelling, even if you're not a baseball fan. "League of His Own" starts on page 12.

Did you know Ohio's first poet laureate is a Dublin resident? Amit Majmudar was appointed to the post in December by Gov. John Kasich. Majmudar, who works as a diagnostic nuclear radiologist, will serve in the role through 2017.

ThisWeek Community News reporter Andrew King visited Majmudar at his home to learn how he balances a career in medicine with his work as a published author and time with his family. Find out how the boy from suburban Cleveland, who spent a few years in India, parlayed a lifelong love of writing into a state-level appointment in "Poet in Motion" on page 16.

We hope you enjoy this issue of the magazine. I'm sad to say it will be the last installment of *Dublin365*. ThisWeek Community News launched the 365 franchise in Westerville in April 2015 and expanded it to Dublin in May 2016.

Don't worry, we'll still provide plenty of local news—as we always have—in *ThisWeek Dublin Villager* and on ThisWeekNews.com.

It was a privilege to oversee these publications and I'd like to thank our team members, who dedicated themselves to putting out the best magazines possible, as well as local residents and advertisers for their support.

As always, thanks for reading.



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LEAGUE OF HIS OWN

In 29 seasons, coach Tim Saunders has won many games, as well as the respect of students and colleagues.

BY JARROD ULREY

PHOTO BY JOSHUA A. BICKEL

SAUNDERS
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"When I made a decision,
I stuck by it. I didn't wander
too far away from my dream
and what I wanted to do.
Sometimes you know."

TIM SAUNDERS
DUBLIN COFFMAN HIGH SCHOOL
HEAD BASEBALL COACH

TIM SAUNDERS has had plenty of time to think the last few months, and it shouldn't surprise anyone who knows him where his mind has wandered more often than not.

One of the coach's biggest joys has been helping to transform the Dublin Coffman High School baseball field into one of the top facilities at this level, not just in central Ohio but throughout the country. The ballpark has been a particular source of strength since mid-September, when he was able to resume going there regularly.

Saunders, who spent 11 days in intensive care over the summer with a cerebral hemorrhage, loves the building process—not only of Deck Webb Memorial Stadium, but also his baseball program. He'll begin his 30th season as the Shamrocks' coach in the spring.

"They finally cleared me to drive short trips, so I'd come to the field and just sit in the dugout, and that was a relief," Saunders says. "It was nice being able to make plans, like I need to improve (certain things) for the field itself, or even for the program, just things I want to do."

The 58-year-old has become almost synonymous with Dublin baseball over the past three decades. He took over as the Shamrocks' coach when the district had only one high school and built winners at the league and district levels, even after Dublin Scioto opened in 1995-96 and Dublin Jerome followed in 2004-05.

Saunders, who has a career record of 545-358 as a head coach and led the Shamrocks to the 2001 Division I state title, has traveled internationally with USA Baseball and has been elected to four Halls of Fame.

Through it all, he found a calling at Coffman that also includes being a physical education and health teacher, mixing a style of quiet toughness with hard work and an ability to connect with students.

His wife of 28 years, Janie Saunders, describes him as "unflappable."

"That temperament has served him well over the years," she says. "The joke among the baseball community is that no matter when you drive by the field, he's always there. He's had opportunities to go elsewhere, but he likes teaching. He makes great connections with all kinds of kids."

"He never stops. I think he'll coach until he's using a walker. He likes the kids, and he likes the game."

Major Leaguers

One of the greatest success stories for Saunders came via a 6-foot-4, 215-pound

potential superstar—and former knucklehead, as he calls himself.

Doug DeVore was raised by his mother, Doris Curley, and Saunders was perhaps his greatest male role model. The 1996 Coffman graduate reached the majors and had a 50-game stint with the Arizona Diamondbacks in 2004.

"I grew up just with my mom, and Tim sort of is the main reason baseball worked out for me," DeVore says. "Looking back personally, there's never been anyone who was more influential. He was tough when I needed it. I still remember the lessons he taught me about staying disciplined. Even way after high school, Tim Saunders has been the rock, and he's like that with everyone."

DeVore earned a scholarship to play for Indiana University—where Saunders had served as an assistant coach in 1986 and '87—and signed with the Diamondbacks in 1999 as a 12th-round selection.

He'll never forget what happened when Saunders and longtime Coffman assistant Scott Sutherland watched him play against the San Diego Padres in 2004. "For some reason I was struggling," DeVore says. "Scott and coach Saunders had been there between batting practice and the game, and (Saunders) says, 'Well, I haven't seen you play in a long time but you look like you're locking up your hips.' Sure enough, I fixed it and hit the ball really well, just missing a home run by about 2 inches."

DeVore, who recently moved back to central Ohio and hopes to run a baseball training facility, is one of four of Saunders' players to get drafted. Bart Hunton was selected in the 46th round of the 2001 draft by the Cincinnati Reds, and his brother, Brock Hunton, was picked in the 32nd round in 2002 by the Boston Red Sox, but neither was signed.

Austin Cousino, a 2011 Coffman graduate, was chosen in the third round of the 2014 draft by the Seattle Mariners and now is with the Los Angeles Angels' organization.

Among the most famous players to come through Dublin's program is Kent Mercker, who was the fifth pick of the 1986 draft by the Atlanta Braves and played for 18 seasons in the majors. Saunders coached Mercker, a 1986 Dublin High School graduate, for two summers when he played for the Worthington American Legion Post 239 baseball team.

Saunders broke into coaching in 1981 as an assistant at Portsmouth High School, which went 28-4 and earned a Class AA state runner-up finish. He then led Meigs High School in Pomeroy to a

36-47 mark in four seasons, including winning league titles during his final two years.

He took over at Dublin High School, as Coffman was then known, in 1988 and has led the program to 10 league titles, including five in a row from 1991-95. The Shamrocks reached a Division I regional final in 1999 and a state semifinal in 2000.

After Coffman beat Hamilton 6-5 in a state semifinal in 2001, Brock Hunton tossed a complete game to lead the team to a 6-0 win over Maumee in the state championship game, finishing with a 26-7 record.

"We've always had great groups of kids, but that was a special group because we went to the final four in 2000 and had almost everybody back," Saunders says. "We started out 5-6 that season (but) we won 17 games in a row to end the season. The kids found ways to continue to win."

Living a Dream

It was as if life unfolded exactly the way Saunders expected after graduating from Olentangy High School in 1977.

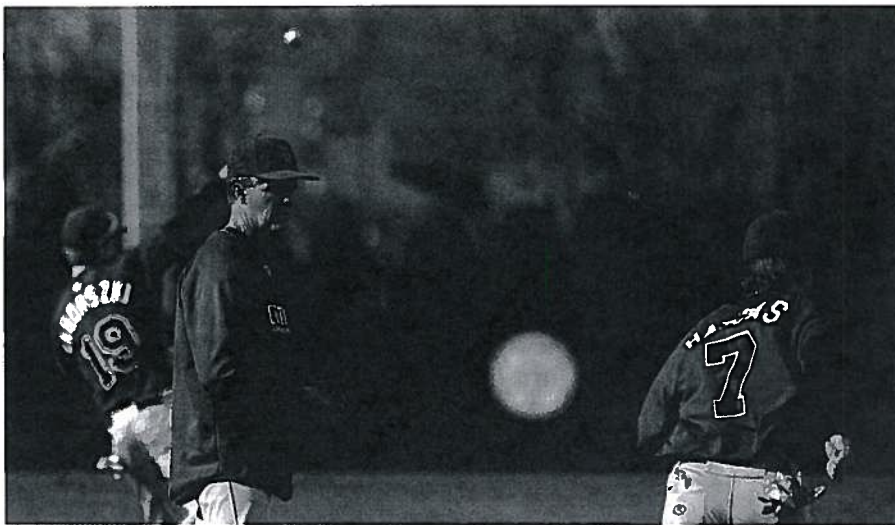
One of six children born to Robert and Shirley Saunders, he seemed to know part of his calling and future from an early age. With extended family in Gallipolis, Saunders elected to play baseball and get a teaching degree from the nearby University of Rio Grande. He was the first member of his immediate family to attend college.

"I remember in second grade, I said I wanted to be a physical teacher," Saunders says. "In seventh grade, I started saying I wanted to go to Rio Grande. I had aunts and uncles who lived in Gallipolis, but the first time I was ever on campus was for freshman orientation."

"When I made a decision, I stuck by it. I didn't wander too far away from my dream and what I wanted to do. Sometimes you know."

Before Saunders' local coaching career took off, he made a two-year stop at Indiana University that would change his life on a personal level. That's where he met Janie Armington, who had been on a swimming scholarship to the University of Tennessee before transferring to Indiana to be closer to her hometown of Indianapolis.

She was majoring in journalism and doing promotional work with the Indiana athletics department, including the baseball program, for which he was an assistant coach. After Saunders got the Shamrocks' coaching job, Janie worked in public relations for a few years before becoming a teacher at Coffman 22 years ago.



FILE/THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Saunders watches as his team takes the field in April 2014.

She teaches journalism at Coffman, where their daughter, 2013 graduate Shelby Saunders, played basketball, and where their son, 2015 graduate C.J. Saunders, played baseball, basketball and football. C.J. is a walk-on for Ohio State University's football team as a defensive back, and Shelby is a senior at Indiana.

When his children were young, Saunders began getting opportunities to extend his footprint beyond central Ohio. He served as an assistant for the USA 16-and-under national team, which won a gold medal in the world championships in Fairview Heights, Illinois, in 1997. The following summer, he was an assistant for the USA 16-and-under team that won gold in Jupiter, Florida.

Then in 2000, he was named the USA Olympic Development Coach of the Year after taking over the 16-and-under national team and leading it to a gold medal in the Pan-American Games, where it beat Cuba 2-1 in the final in Monterrey, Mexico.

"He might have had a vision for the roles he's taken regionally and nationally, but I didn't even think he'd do anything like work for USA Baseball," Janie says. "I think he would say that (the honors and opportunities have been) humbling. It was nice that his work was recognized because he does work really hard."

Saunders, who worked with USA Baseball for about 15 years, was elected to the Ohio High School Baseball Coaches Association Hall of Fame in 2004, the Central District Baseball Coaches Association Hall of Fame in 2005 and the Olentangy High School Athletics Hall of Fame in 2010.

He got perhaps his greatest honor in

2011, when he was inducted into the National High School Baseball Coaches Association Hall of Fame in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Along the way, one of the highlights was coaching his children, including C.J. in the Coffman baseball program. "Sometimes (I'd be traveling) six weeks or seven weeks and when the kids were 2 or 3 that's a long time, but I did my thing and the time we spent as a family was quality time," Saunders says. "I would encourage anybody to teach your sons or daughters, and it's really a blessing if they're a good athlete. It doesn't have to be a bad thing."

For Mike Ulring, who coached with Saunders for 13 years and is in his eighth year as Coffman's principal, Saunders the man might be even greater than Saunders the coach. "I don't think I'd be where I'm at today without Tim Saunders," Ulring says. "He's a better husband, father and teacher, and baseball coach is down on the rung."

Reality Check

Saunders has worked the last seven summers in Becket, Massachusetts, at Camp Greylock, an all-boys sports program he joined at the encouragement of former longtime Indiana head baseball coach Bob Morgan.

It was there that his life took an unexpected turn. On July 19, Saunders experienced a sensation he describes as someone pouring molasses on his head. As pressure built, his skull filled with blood. After trying to take a shower to "just massage it out," he realized he needed help. He crawled to the door of his room and called for a groundskeeper who was cutting the grass to help him get to the emergency room. "My head

felt like it weighed 150 pounds, and I had trouble getting dried off and getting my clothes back on," Saunders says. "Basically one of the veins in my brain sprung a leak."

In 2000 Mercker, then 39, had endured the same thing—a subarachnoid hemorrhage—so Saunders was familiar with what was happening. "I get emotional talking about it and reliving it," Saunders says. "They ended up drilling a hole in my skull and put a drain in my brain. (Mercker) stayed in the hospital for 11 days, and seven weeks later (he had his) next start. Mine took a little longer."

Doctors expect a full recovery for Saunders, who celebrated his 58th birthday and returned to Coffman in September. "It took me nine weeks for them to release me to go back to work," Saunders says. "I didn't know this, but doctors said that for every day you're in intensive care, you lose seven days of strength. I had tubes all over me and monitors everywhere. Your body is not ready to do everything because you've been lying around for a long time."

Thoughts of Spring

When people ask Saunders why he didn't remain a college coach after the Hoosiers went 92-28 during his two seasons as an assistant there, he talks about the perils of the recruiting process: sometimes driving far away to watch someone play and then being forced to make a decision.

Saunders would rather be at the ballpark teaching. "He gives back a ton, and most of it is not for gain for himself," Janie says. "It's making the field better, working at clinics, giving lessons. He just gives. He's a pretty good guy."



"I still remember the lessons he taught me about staying disciplined. Even way after high school, Tim Saunders has been the rock, and he's like that with everyone."

**DOUG DEVORE
COFFMAN GRADUATE
AND MLB PLAYER**

"Our whole family has enjoyed really good friendships over the years, and so many parents worked hard to help Tim build the program."

Sutherland, who has been Saunders' assistant for the last 17 seasons and is Coffman's intervention specialist, is another person who followed in the footsteps of his former coach. He went on to play for Rio Grande as Saunders did, and after Saunders suggested he might make a good teacher, Sutherland got his teaching license.

It's that ability to connect that Sutherland says might be Saunders' greatest attribute. "Tim's a very good communicator," Sutherland says. "He's been doing it for so long and is such a good manager of the game. He kind of keeps practices fresh. He'll do anything for anybody and has got the biggest heart."

As Saunders prepares for another year, the thrill of building the program remains. The Shamrocks are coming off a season in which they went 14-15 overall. They haven't won a league title or made a district championship game since 2011, but the optimism that next spring could be different still fills him. So, too, does the satisfaction of being a mentor.

"I enjoy just seeing the game played well, teaching the kids the fundamentals of catching and throwing, and watching a well-played game," Saunders says. "Sometimes you have to take a person who's real confident but is not very good and put them back in their place. You don't have to be mean about it. A lot of people say they want to play college baseball but deep down they may not because it's a lot of work."

A low work ethic is foreign to Saunders, who knows his time as a teacher likely will end within the next few years. His plan includes being around for as many seasons as possible at Deck Webb Field, which in 1998 was voted the national high school field of the year in the large-school division by the American Baseball Coaches Association. "Retirement is not for me," he says.

"We have a lot of major projects I want to do," Saunders says. "I talk to a lot of people that say they want a field like that, but you can't do it in one year. Everybody looks at the big picture, and it looks so massive at the end. Plant these trees this year, and if you can't afford all of them, plant a couple of them. Before you know it, you'll have a lot accomplished."

Jarrod Ulrey is a sportswriter for *ThisWeek Community News*.



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