

Beatrice Daily Sun

Beatrice Bruins host final banquet

By Jane White/Daily Sun sports editor

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For those associated with the Beatrice Bruins baseball team over the past 40 years, the memories will live forever.

The Bruins, a collegiate summer team managed by Bob Steinkamp, celebrated its 40th anniversary year in 2009. It was also the Bruins final season, as Steinkamp announced plans to retire and disband the program.

Sunday night the final Beatrice Bruins baseball banquet was held at the Eagles Club in Beatrice.

"I thought (the banquet) was a huge success," Steinkamp said. "It's a great way to go out."

All proceeds from the banquet will go to the Christenson Field lighting fund as work is in progress to replace the lights at the baseball park.

Steinkamp said the former players who came out made it a special night for him.

"There were a lot of former players here and I was tickled to death to see some of those guys," Steinkamp said. "Some of them I haven't seen in years. It was really nice of them to show up."

Former Bruin Shawn Buchanan provided the steaks for the banquet meal.

After retiring from professional baseball, Buchanan became the owner of All American Meats in Omaha.

A native of Gary, Ind., Buchanan was a sophomore at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln when he came to Beatrice to play.

Buchanan played on the 1989 Bruins team, which also included Shane Halter, who went on to play in the Major Leagues.

Once Steinkamp asked him to play in Beatrice, Buchanan said he wanted to do it.

"It was a great experience," Buchanan said. "There was a lot of good baseball and some really good, quality people."

Buchanan said there's a lot of Bob Steinkamp stories which could be told.

"But just his voice in general states the case for him," Buchanan said, smiling. "He's a great guy."

Halter was living in Omaha and headed to Seminole Junior College when he answered Steinkamp's call to play.

"I love baseball so much, it wouldn't have mattered who came up and talked to me," Halter said. "But Bob was so passionate about what he did. He sold it very well.

"The next thing I knew, I was here."

Halter said Steinkamp always had a way of selling the Bruins program to prospective players.

"That's why he got players like Joba Chamberlain or Sean Buchanan," Halter said.

Halter said the one thing he "loved" about Steinkamp was his passion for the game of baseball.

"He is as passionate about the game of baseball as I have been my entire life," Halter said. "He made Beatrice a name in baseball."

Halter said Steinkamp's family, including his mother Frieda, who Halter stayed with in Beatrice, has been

“great” to him.

“If I had the opportunity to come back here and play again, I’d do it in a heartbeat,” Halter said.

Current University of Nebraska-Omaha head coach Bob Herold played for the Bruins in 1980 after he had finished his professional baseball career.

Herold said he’d planned to go to Colorado Springs and play that summer, but the team there folded so he spent the summer with the Bruins.

“It was a great summer,” Herold said. “They treated me great. It was the total package here. As soon as they bring you in, you’re part of the family.”

In 2008, Herold had the opportunity to send one of his college players to Steinkamp for the summer.

Evan Porter, who had completed his college eligibility with the Mavericks, ended up being the Bruins shortstop and MVP in 2008.

“It was one of the most fun summers of my life,” Porter said. “Not just baseball-wise, but my host family, the Deweys, they made it worthwhile, as did Bob.”

After listening to other former players praise Steinkamp during the banquet’s program, Porter said

“everything” that was said about him was true.

“He really takes it to the next level when it comes to doing things for his players,” Porter said.

Porter said Herold told him Steinkamp was a “character of the game” and a “heck of a guy.”

“I found both of those things to be true, too,” Porter said.

Former Husker and professional player Anthony Kelley played two years for Steinkamp in 1981 and 1982.

“I loved it,” Kelley said.

Kelley said even being from Chicago and an African-American he never felt like an outsider in the Beatrice community.

“You felt you were part of a family here,” Kelley said. “You’re not just playing on the team, you’re family.”

Kelley said he keeps in touch with a number of his former Bruins teammates.

Like many of the players, Kelley has many stories about Steinkamp.

“My favorite story about Bob was when we’d go on road trips,” Kelly said. “I got a chance to ride with Bob a lot, but I made the mistake of playing radio trivia with him. We were driving down the highway playing name that tune. I just knew I could beat him at that. When a song came on and we tried to name the tune the fastest, I never won a game. He won every single one of him. Never play radio trivia with him.”

Joba Chamberlain, pitcher for the 2009 World Champion New York Yankees, played for the Bruins during the 2004 postseason and the entire 2005 season.

Chamberlain said he will always remember Steinkamp’s love for baseball and his players.

“I’ll remember the love he had for the game and the love he had for all of us guys who came through here and played,” Chamberlain said. “His passion for the game and his passion for the kids. The attention to detail. For 40 years, he’s made sure every kid is taken care of.”

Because Steinkamp has touched so many players, Chamberlain said, there’s many Steinkamp stories circulating the country.

“At every level in baseball, there will also be a story somehow related to Bob or the Bruins,” Chamberlain

said. "That says a lot for the man."

While many people came from across the country to play for Steinkamp during the Bruins 40-year history, many homegrown players were also part of the program.

Beatrice native and former University of Nebraska-Lincoln pitcher Doug Tegtmeier was one of those.

Tegtmeier said he played for the Bruins in 1988 and then "off and on" for a couple more years.

"I grew up here and the Bruins always did camps," Tegtmeier said. "The Bruins were the closest thing we had to big league baseball."

Steinkamp helped put some "drive" into Tegtmeier's career, the former professional player said.

"He wanted me to be better," Tegtmeier said. "He supported my career. He helped me with scouts.

"I got to play four years of pro baseball because of Bob Steinkamp's help and connections."

Tegtmeier said Steinkamp wasn't a "motivational" guy.

"He just took what people were and helped them to become better," Tegtmeier said. "He made you better by allowing you to become better."

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