



BEST SCHOLARSHIP GOLF TOURNAMENT

Lavelle returns to Valley 'to give back'

Ex-Liberty standout is one of the most successful high school coaches in Virginia.

By **KEITH GROLLER**
Of The Morning Call

The more than 30 former professional athletes who participated in the fifth annual BEST Scholarship golf tournament Monday at Green Pond Country Club may no longer be in the prime of their careers.

But they've still got good timing. Everyone was off the golf course and in the banquet room when heavy rain began falling.

Nevertheless, the pop-up shower did nothing to dampen the spirit of camaraderie experienced throughout the day as the golf outing, along with Sunday's reception at the Sands casino, raised more than \$20,000 for BEST

(Building Education Support Teams), which provides funds for local kids to go to college who otherwise would not have the chance.

Baseball Hall of Famer Andre Dawson appeared at the reception but didn't golf. There were still many recognizable former big leaguers on the course such as Lee Smith, Paul Blair, Steve Braun, Joe Charboneau, Ron Hansen and Bill Gullickson.

And there was a guy who felt right at home.

For the first time, former Liberty High standout Gary Lavelle participated in the event that benefits kids from the Bethlehem Area School District as well as Allentown, Phillipsburg, Easton and others in the region.

Lavelle pitched in the big leagues for



Former San Francisco Giants pitcher and Liberty High School standout Gary Lavelle hits an approach shot during the BEST Scholarship Celebrity Golf Tournament at Green Pond Country Club on Monday.

CHRIS KNIGHT/SPECIAL TO THE MORNING CALL

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three different franchises and in 13 different seasons from 1974-87, compiling 80 wins and 136 saves.

He may not look exactly as he did on his baseball card, but he still has baseball keeping him connected to the game he has always loved.

Lavelle is head coach of Greenbriar Christian Academy in Chesapeake, Va., where he has won 11 state championships.

He said next year will be his last, but he's hardly eager to take off a baseball uniform for the last time because he's worn one almost his entire life.

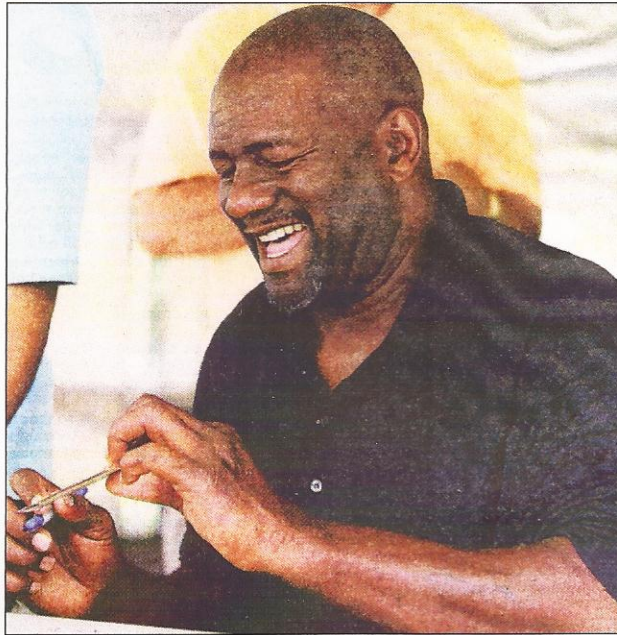
Lavelle, who will turn 65 in September, remembered playing Connie Mack baseball for Elmer Dillard on the Southside Taggers and for high school coaches such as Bernie Fritz and Ray Salabsky.

"Those guys shaped my baseball career because they just wanted to help kids," Lavelle said. "It's guys like them who helped guys like me get to play, and that's why I want to give back."

Lavelle, a lefty, was a starting pitcher in the minor leagues and became a reliever once he got to the bigs in the age before specialization.

"Back in my day, a reliever came in for three innings, not three outs," he said. "Now, they figured out that it's better to have guys for each inning. It makes it tougher on the hitters. If I had to get just three outs, I'd have a lot more saves. The game has evolved like everything else."

Lavelle never got to a World Series. The closest he came was as a member of the 1985 Toronto Blue Jays, who had a three games-to-one lead over the Kansas City Royals in the ALCS. The Royals came back to win that series and also overcame a 3-1 deficit to beat the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series.



CHRIS KNIGHT/SPECIAL TO THE MORNING CALL

Former Chicago Cubs pitcher Lee Smith, a seven-time All-Star, signs autographs during the BEST Scholarship Celebrity Golf Tournament at Green Pond Country Club.

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Since most of his career was spent in San Francisco, Lavelle said he has enjoyed watching the Giants win two of the last three Fall Classics.

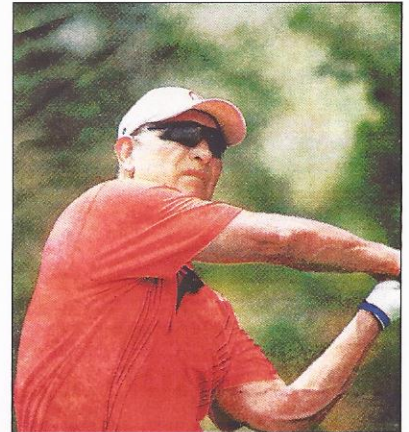
"They got hot at the right time both years," he said.

Lavelle said there was nothing hot about playing games at Candlestick Park, the Giants home during his career.

"Compared to Candlestick, the place they play at now [AT&T Park] is like a dream," he said. "Candlestick was always cold and windy. You had to learn to take advantage of the bad conditions."

Lavelle, who spent five years in the Yankees organization as a pitching coach, provided some good stories on a day when more negativity hit MLB. The steroids scandal continues to taint the game, with the Ryan Braun suspension the latest blow.

"Steroids were never illegal back when they started the first investigation, but it has become such an issue about players gaining an unfair advantage," Lavelle said. "Baseball had to do something about it, and I'm glad they are. It needed to be addressed to level the playing field."



CHRIS KNIGHT/SPECIAL TO THE MORNING CALL

Steve Braun, who played on the St. Louis Cardinals world championship team in 1982, tees off.

memories of their time in the Lehigh Valley.

"It's always good to come back here," he said. "I got to know Billy Staples [one of BEST's co-founders] when I was with Trenton in the

Yankees organization. When he told me about this going on here, I said I'd do anything I could to help. It's great to be back."

keith.groller@mc.com

Even in coaching high school baseball, Lavelle sees the selfishness and emphasis on the individual rather than on the team.

"As a coach, I try to impart some concepts about being a team player and give the kids things that will get them to the next level," Lavelle said. "Kids today are playing baseball all the time. With club and travel ball, it's non-stop. The kids are great. I enjoy working with them. The parents can be another story. I try to take them with a grain of salt."

"I have one cardinal rule, and that's that I am going to play the best nine players and the kids have to earn their spot on the field."

Certainly, Lavelle earned his place in local sports history. He and his wife, the former Regina Spinosa, will have always have fond