

Wife makes dream come true for Tiger fan

By Jim Hughes
staff writer

SOMEWHERE NORTH of Cloud 9 rests the state of euphoria. Just north of there rests Tom Erhart, a Rochester resident who still is flying high after his experience in the Tigers Fantasy Camp.

Erhart, a baseball standout at West Bloomfield High School from 1969-71, experienced the dream of his life, thanks to the generosity of wife, Pamela, whose Christmas present to her husband of nine years was a chance to play against the 1968 world champion Detroit Tigers.

"My feet still haven't touched the ground," said Erhart, who returned to his Rochester home last week after seven days in Lakeland, Fla.

Now the Erharts will be busy finishing the basement of their home, which will be decorated with Tiger paraphernalia, most of which came from the Fantasy Camp. Tom brought home baseballs, pennants, caps, programs and just about anything suitable to be autographed by his 1968 heroes.

The *creme de la creme* of the souvenirs, again, can be attributed to Pamela. Campers going to the Lakeland were asked to write a short piece called "Why I'm Going to Lakeland." Pamela submitted the piece before Tom knew of his gift. The best literary work earned an Al Kalline Hiltnerich & Brandyville Louisville Slugger bat — the real McCoy.

THE FANTASY was completed when Pamela's poem was selected as the winner.

"It's going to take a lifetime to pay her back," Tom said. "I'll probably be a lot of small things over a long period of time. It's hard for me to imagine how I'm going to pay her back, but I'm sure she'll have a couple ideas over the next few years."

Pamela, who said she gave Tom the gift because "he was driving me nuts with baseball, baseball, baseball," recalled the phone call she received from her husband after he won the Kalline bat.

"He said, 'I won, I won. I'm indebted to you for life.'"

people in sports

Tom might have paid Pamela back by taking her along.

"It's his fantasy," Pamela explained. "What would you want to take your wife for?"

For Tom, it is the proverbial dream come true, and something he found arduous to explain. After describing the trip as incredible, fantastic and unbelievable, he was finally able to put it all into words.

"Most people never get the chance to experience their fantasy. For me, the '68 Tiger Fantasy Camp was a dream come true, and the memories will last forever."

"NOW I FEEL like the '68 Tigers are my friends as well as my idols."

Erhart, who has the same 6-foot, 155-pound frame as he was an all-league and all-county pitcher and outfielder at West Bloomfield, developed a friendship

with former Tiger relief pitcher John Hiller.

Hiller's tips paid off. When Erhart pitched in the game against the '68 Tigers, Hiller was one of the batters he faced. Erhart came on with two runners aboard and no outs. He got Dick Tracewski to fly out to left, then got Hiller to bounce back to the mound for an inning-ending double play.

The next inning, he faced Dick McLaughlin, Jim Northrup, Kalline and Willie Horton. Each of the Tigers ripped Erhart for hits.

"I came back to life after that," Erhart said. "I was a pitcher in the Tiger camp, appearances in the Saturday double-header had to be limited. Hitters had one at-bat while pitchers were allowed to throw six batters."

DURING THE week, Erhart said he was ripping the ball pretty efficiently,

so when his turn came to bat in the game, he was feeling pretty confident.

"I popped out to shortstop," he said with a sheepish grin. "Hank Aguirre jammed me up and in twice. The first one I fouled off. All week I was ripping the ball. Before the game I said 'I'd rather strike out than pop out.'"

The Tigers won both games, 13-5 and 15-6.

"I really think they could have beat us 30-0 both games if they wanted to," Erhart said. "It's amazing watching them play. They can still do it."

"Everything was amazing. When they played the Star Spangled Banner before the game, it was quite a feeling. It made me feel like a big leaguer."

The highlight of the week came during an intrasquad scrimmage when Erhart made a diving catch of a line drive in center field. As he returned to the dugout, Kalline, who made those plays look routine during his days with the Tigers, shouted, "Great play. That's the play of the week."

Erhart, who says he's been a Tiger fan — "and not a fair weather fan" — all his life, had dreams of playing big

league baseball as a youngster. His dream then wouldn't have been playing in a fantasy camp, but playing with the likes of Kirk Gibson, Alan Trammell and Lou Whitaker.

"When I was in ninth grade (when the 1968 Tigers won the championship), I probably thought I'd be part of the 1964 team," Erhart grinned. "It was shortly after that when I realize I was not going to be a big leaguer."

SO THE NEXT best thing was the fantasy. The toughest part was coming back to reality.

"It's still hard to believe I'm not supposed to be going to practice in the morning," he said. "When I get up, I feel like I should be there. At work now, it's great because people ask me about it and I get to relive it each day."

The Fantasy Camp was the second of its kind. It was Erhart's first, and despite the thrills experienced, it was his last.

"That was a once-in-a-lifetime thing," he said. "I couldn't imagine doing it again."

"What could top it?"

Alma gridders gird for Finland Arctic Bowl

By Scott Adler
staff writer

For sports teams there are away games and then there are away games. Alma College definitely has an away game.

Come June, the football Scots will be travelling across the Atlantic to play in the Arctic Bowl in Finland against the Finnish Northern Lights. Alma will also play the Finland National All-Stars three days later.

Taking the trip will be a number of athletes from Oakland county who played on Alma's fine 1984-85 squad. The Scots, chosen among 500 NCAA Division III schools by the Athletic Enterprises of Sarasota, Fla., were 7-3 last year and had the No. 1 team offense in the country at 465.1 yards per game.

It isn't going to be easy for the Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association (MIAA) runner up, however. Not only will they have to adjust to the time zone and the weather (about 50 degrees) but, according to NCAA rules, the Scots can start practice only 10 days before the game.

YOU MIGHT SAY they're Fin-nished before they start.

Not so, says sophomore receiver Joe Molnar, a 1983 graduate of Troy Athens.

"We're not going to travel that far just to lose," Molnar said. "It matters to win. But everybody is so excited about going over there we really haven't talked about it. Our timing won't be as good, but we'll be OK."

Teammate Ric Koler, a freshman from Rochester Adams, agrees that

winning is important even if it doesn't show up in the records.

"It's a matter of personal pride," he said. "Nothing more. We'd like to win."

Molnar thinks his team will get in enough practice despite the time restrictions. The players are working out in the neighborhood now and when practice does start May 21, there will be three sessions a day.

Salem tripped

Livonia Churchill, behind a 21-point, 13-rebound performance from senior Scott Hill, shocked Plymouth Salem Friday night 67-51 in Western Lakes basketball action.

Churchill (6-6) in the league, 7-9 overall got 15 points from Mickey Katschur and another 14 from Mike Hermanson.

Salem (7-5, 9-7) got 21 from Mike White and 13 from LeSean Haygood.

Because the distance between Alma and Finland is not conducive to scouting reports, the players aren't sure what to expect from the Finnish footballers.

"It's kind of hard to say what it'll be like playing them," Alma quarterback and Rochester High School grad Dean Ulrich said. "From what I've heard, they run well, so they might be able to cover us well on defense."

THE FINNS have only been playing football for a few years, but their coaches aren't novices. Both are from the United States and some are from the Grand Rapids area so the offense and defense won't be entirely foreign.

Another difference with the Finnish

team is the age. Many of the players will be older than Alma's. Some may even be as old as 25.

"They'll probably be a lot bigger than us," Molnar said. "But that's nothing new. It's like that every year. We just have to put together."

Falcons beat Western

Continued from Page 1

talk that worked wonders.

"We talked to them at halftime," Roy said. "I'm just glad there weren't any mothers around to hear it."

The score was tied at 59-all heading into the final quarter when the Falcons outscored the Warriors 18-5 for the final margin.

Dwayne Kratt led Farmington (6-7 in the league and 8-9 overall) with 16 points. Bill Robinson had 15 points and 9 rebounds. Greg Feenstra had 14 points. Bruce Kratt scored 11 and Kyle Muts added 11 points and 9 rebounds.

Western (11-15) was paced by Jack Uthale's 12 points.

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