

Woman baseball manager wows the skeptics

By Carol Carpenter
staff writer

Some said, the woman manager of the Bulldogs would strike out.

But they didn't count on Mary McLellann's expertise and love of baseball and kids.

"If you have knowledge of baseball, the kids don't care if you're male or female," said Mrs. McLellann, the first woman manager of a 10- to 13-year-old boys' baseball team sponsored by the Livonia Junior Football League.

"I think the other managers said to themselves, 'We're going to go out and beat her. She doesn't know anything.'"

Mrs. McLellann said with a smile. "Kids on the other teams thought we were no good because we had a woman manager," said Jim Burke, a sixth-grader at Botsford Elementary School. "But we showed them. We beat them."

THE BULLDOGS, on a winning streak after losing their first three games, were riding high on confidence at a recent game at Livonia's Bloomfield Park. The team is 7 and 3 for the season.

While the kids pounded their mitts and raised the dust with their cleats,

"If you have knowledge of baseball, the kids don't care if you're male or female,"
—Mary McLellann

Mrs. McLellann gave them a pep talk.

"These Padres are good," she said. "But we're good too."

She, along with coaches Dave Tarbet and Doug Frizzell, urged the boys to "listen, stay awake, have fun, use good sportsmanship and play like you played the last two games."

"This group was the Bad News Bears at the beginning of the season," said Joyce Barnett, mother of shortstop Ronnie Barnett.

Scott Lawhead, a team member and eighth-grader at Clarenceville Junior High School, agreed. "We just weren't up to it when we lost our first three games and we weren't organized yet. Now we have our stuff together."

Although Mrs. McLellann, 41, got involved in coaching and managing because of her son, Tom, she comes from a sports-oriented family.

MRS. McLELLANN'S mother worked at Navin Field in the late 1930s and the house was full of baseball talk, Mrs. McLellann said. Her mother still takes Tom to every opening Tiger game, even if they have to wrap up in blankets to keep warm.

After coaching the Mets and the Brewers for three years, Mrs. McLellann wanted to try managing her son's team. Because he's such a "sports nut," Tom, 13, from Riley Junior High School, was thrilled, she said.

Active like his mother, Tom finds time to play football, hockey and basketball. He also bowls.

"But I don't play favorites," she said. "We are a team. There are no stars."

If the players make a mistake, Mrs. McLellann doesn't yell at them. They already feel bad enough, she said. "I don't want them in tears."

"The kids are here to learn, have a good time and enjoy what they're doing," Mrs. McLellann said. "I don't want them to win at any cost."

AS A MANAGER, Mrs. McLellann's two biggest disappointments are parents who don't show up to watch the children play-ball and coaches or managers who show poor sportsmanship

during a game.

At the recent Padre game, seven parents sat on picnic tables or lawn chairs as they shouted encouragement.

"Kids need their parents there to give them a pat on the back," Mrs. McLellann said.

Mrs. McLellann shuddered as she talked about the behavior of some managers, coaches and players.

"The Bulldogs are well-behaved players. I won't tolerate poor sportsmanship like rough hand-shaking or vulgarity," she said.

THE TEAM players listen when Mrs. McLellann talks and know she can be tough when she has to.

"She doesn't take anything from us," Scott Lawhead said.

This energetic woman is the mother of five and grandmother of seven. She also carries a 4.0 grade point average at Madonna College where she is studying to become a certified gerontologist.

Her interest in senior citizens is reflected in her 10 years of volunteer work with United Foundation. Recently, she spent almost 30 hours a week helping the elderly put on a variety show at Maplewood Community Center in Garden City.



Coach Mary McLellann calls the signals.

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