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Sports

Stories by Fred Jeter



James Haskins/Richmond Free Press

TJ's Braxton a standout on, off field

Miles Braxton, left, is into high averages. That goes for batting averages and grade point averages.

Few hit a baseball and/or hit the books as hard as the Thomas Jefferson High senior.

The 6-foot-4, 215-pounder is a four-year starting first baseman for coach Harold Henry, a shining light in the accelerated International Baccalaureate program — and a music man, to boot.

Heading into the final week of the regular season, Braxton was hitting .371, after hitting .313 as a freshman, .405 as a sophomore and .355 a year ago.

"I've never had anyone quite like him," Henry said. "He's a wonderful, hard-working kid."

Academically, he carries a 4.72 GPA (on a 4.0 scale), is fourth of 193 seniors, taking many Advance Placement and college credits. He scored 1,780 (of a possible 2,400) on the SATs.

Braxton will attend the University of Virginia on a virtually full academic scholarship as one of the top 5 percent of incoming freshmen. He plans to major in mechanical engineering.

And that's not all.

Wedge between classes and the baseball diamond, he's a gifted and versatile musician, capable of playing the tuba, clarinet, tenor saxophone and piano in the school orchestra.

He's also played sax and clarinet in the All-City Youth Band, and he's a tuba section leader for TJ's marching band.

The South Side resident, also a basketball regular this past winter, says he has "three parents," George and Karen Braxton, and Kelly Harris Braxton (stepmother).

There will be no baseball this summer unless he can find a field to play on in Beijing, China.

On June 25, he will fly out of New York City for the Youth National Security Language Institute. In China, he will study Mandarin for six weeks at Normal University.

Braxton's baseball roots can be traced to the Richmond Little League at Byrd Park, where he began as a tag-along friend of next-door-neighbor Daniel Pinson.

Pinson now stars for Trinity Episcopal and will attend the University of Virginia on a baseball scholarship.

TJ assistant coach Brent Butler said Braxton would be an asset even if he weren't so gifted.

"I've never worked with a kid like Miles," said Butler. "What stands out is that he is so positive, even when things aren't going well for him. He keeps the spirit up."

Braxton will be sorely missed at TJ, not only on the ball diamond, but in class and the music room and even the hallways.

City slickers

Thomas Jefferson High is enjoying an undefeated baseball season ... well, sort of.

While the Vikings were 5-12 overall starting this week, they are 5-0 against fellow Richmond city schools.

In those games, TJ waxed its foes 56-3. Junior Sam Irwin, normally the catcher, showed he can pitch some, too, May 14 in a 12-0 and 10-0 sweep of John Marshall.

Irwin went the distance in both, firing a no-hitter and 1-hitter, while fanning a combined 16 and earning the nickname "Sudden Sam the Strikeout Man" for the way his fastball breezed past hitters.

TJ hopes its city domination continues at the Conference 26 tournament set for May 27, 29 and 30 at Hopewell High and the Petersburg Sports Complex.

The semis and finals are at Petersburg. Richmond's five schools will be joined by Petersburg and Hopewell, with the champ advancing to regional play.

"I don't care who you ask ... you won't find anyone with anything bad to say about Miles," said Henry.

In conclusion, about the only way the word "average" can be applied to Braxton is if it's preceded by "way above."