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Mr. and Mrs. Mike Moore and daughters.

Photograph courtesy of the Moore family.

MIKE MOORE: EAKLY'S MR. BASEBALL

—By Mona Jean Suter

Oakland A who remembers Eakly

Eakly, America, population approximately 500, a farming community in Caddo County, Oklahoma, boasts of its cotton, its peanuts, and its athletes, in particular its athlete Mike Moore. Around Eakly, 29-year-old Michael Wayne Moore, thought of as Mr. Baseball, recently signed a three-year-no-trade contract with the Oakland Athletics after pitching six years for the Seattle Mariners. He is every aspiring young athlete's dream come true and a hero to many who have watched him grow up. Many said that a kid

from a small town could not become a big-league pitcher. Mike Moore proved them wrong.

Moore, who grew up on an eighty-acre peanut and cotton farm, actually began his trek to stardom as an eight-year-old Eakly Pee Wee pitcher. Because of the speed of his fast ball, his only pitch then, only a few people could be persuaded to be the catcher for Mike. Instead of changing pitchers, Eakly's Pee Wee coaches, Melvin Scott and Lester Clear, who still live in the community, rem-

ember having to change catchers. Mike's first catchers on the Pee Wee team were John Buie and Yancy Snow. Snow, who still lives and works in the Eakly area, remembers well how good a cold pop felt after the game, not just to this throat but also to his stinging hand. He also recalls other bruises ala Mike Moore. Once his eye caught a Moore pitch that ricocheted off the batter's plate when the catcher's mask was not in its proper place. Melvin Scott remembers too but says of Mike, "He had

the best control of any little kid I ever saw."

Sports became a part of Mike Moore's life long before Pee Wee ball, though. His mom's family, the John Rolands, were avid ball players. The Rolands had nine children, and those children even when grown had frequent family get-togethers. Usually their main form of entertainment was a baseball game among themselves in which both big and little people participated. Even at three and four years of age, Mike, along with his brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, cousins and parents, "mixed it up." When Mike was just four, one of his uncles, J.D. Roland, whom many considered a natural first baseman, commented to Vernie Moore, Mike's dad, that he believed Mike had unusual potential.

Vernie Glen, Mike's brother who is thirteen years older than Mike and who now lives in Alaska, was probably the first to introduce Mike to baseball. Vernie Glen and James, another brother of Mike's who is five years older and a truck driver, both played a great deal of catch with Mike, pitched him zillions of balls so he could learn to bat, and knocked him uncountable flies and skinnners so he could learn to field. James, himself a good pitcher during his high-school days, encouraged Mike, though Mike was not difficult to encourage. In fact, Mike was constantly "messaging" with a baseball and watching baseball. He consistently hounded others to "play baseball with me." He often watched his brother Vernie Glen play against Johnny Bench, a Bingerite who became a big-league catcher for the Cincinnati Reds right out of high school and who recently has been named to the Baseball Hall of Fame. Eakly and Binger, Bench's high-school team, are arch rivals even today as they were during Mike's school days. Mike also watched baseball on television, and one day when listening to and watching Pee Wee Reese and Dizzy Dean on Sunday afternoon baseball on television, Moore, who was two or three at the time, announced that playing baseball was what he intended doing for a living. True to his goal, baseball became his life even though he became a rather proficient basketball player too, being named to the First State All-Tournament Team his

senior year. Of course, his six-foot, four-inch height as a senior didn't hurt here either.

Hoot, a nickname that his mother, Oleta, gave him for no reason that she can come up with, continued his way through public school and the Midgets, Preps, minors, and American Legion summer ball, making a name for himself and his fast ball as he went, earning such honors as State All Star.

He gives many people credit for his success, including his sister Frances, who patiently (usually) hauled him to practices, and his parents, who faithfully followed him to all those games. His parents still make regular trips from Weatherford, where they have retired, to see his pro games. He also gives much credit to his junior-high coach, Jim Buie, currently the superintendent of schools in Eakly, and to his high-school coach, Mike Southall, now superintendent at Washita Heights. Moore says of Buie, who by the way is his cousin, that Buie was instrumental in getting him started in the right direction; he credits Southall with giving him a broader perspective about baseball.

Another mainstay on Mike Moore's roster for success is his best buddy, Daryl Scales, his main public-school and summer-league catcher and longtime friend. Mike says that he and Scales were "naturals together and seemed to think alike and therefore worked well together." After games in high school or summer ball, these two could be found at the ball park or in their yards practicing, trying to discover what hadn't worked at the previous game and what had gone wrong. On one occasion, Moore's mother, Oleta, was watching Mike bat while Scales tossed him the ball. She suggested that Mike was standing too close to the plate. After adjusting, Mike found that she was exactly right. He was always willing to follow advice. Scales says that he likes to think that he pushed Mike to work harder, but he says that Mike always worked hard at playing baseball. Moore and Daryl Scales are true friends. Moore took Scales, as well as Joyce, his wife-to-be, and his mom with him when he went to Seattle to sign his contract with the Mariners. Their friendship remains constant: when Mike returns to Oklahoma, he always

sees Scales. In fact, they usually try to get in some coyote hunting, a sport they both enjoy, in the Eakly area.

Moore also awards Larry Cochell, Oral Roberts University baseball coach, and Jim Brewer, who was the pitching coach at ORU, much credit for his success. Though Mike was drafted by the St. Louis Cardinals directly out of high school and was also pursued heavily by Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma University, and the University of Arkansas, he chose to attend ORU. His decision was based on several factors: the ORU facilities and a five-year scholarship offered him, his mother's strong desire for his college education and the maturity and growth she felt college could provide him, and word sent to him from Johnny Bench, his childhood hero, to attend college before going pro.

Moore agrees that ORU did mature him. While he was there, Jim Brewer made changes in Mike's pitching delivery. Up until this time, he had thrown much like a catcher. Brewer felt, and Mike came to agree, that a change in delivery would help keep him from injury and could extend his career. "Brewer," according to Moore, "had fun with and truly enjoyed baseball," an attitude that was an inspiration to his players. Moore says that Larry Cochell was instrumental in getting much exposure for his ORU players. He says, "Cochell knew the politics and the right people to contact in order to aid players toward professional careers."

While at ORU, Moore also played College Summer Pro ball in Liberal, Kansas, an experience he says that built his confidence. There he was named the Most Valuable Player both his freshman and sophomore years in the National Baseball Congress. During college, Mike, named an All American, played on the USA team to Cuba. Team members were chosen for this honor because of their statistics and abilities.

During his three years at ORU, Mike met and later married Joyce Hart, a Costa Mesa California girl who also attended ORU. Married in 1983, Mike and Joyce are the proud parents of twin two-year-old daughters Jessica Dawn and Amanda Rae. Moore and his family live in Ahwatukee, Arizona, a Phoenix

suburb near where he trains. His youngest sister, Margaret, also lives there and is one of his most avid fans as are her three sons.

Devoted fans from Eakly make regular trips to Arizona to watch him train and to Texas and to Kansas City to watch him play when his team comes to play the Rangers and the Royals. These fans often wish he played in the National League rather than the American League because in the Nationals he would get to show off his batting abilities too. As a high-school player, even when he was the pitcher, he often batted cleanup; and in his senior year, his batting average was 500 plus. Once, and only once while at ORU and not pitching, he was the designated hitter and with four times at bat, knocked a homerun and a double. Such fans as the Butch and Doyle Snow families, the Ralph Morgan family, the Melvin Scotts, the Lester Clears, and the Scales family regularly watch Moore in person every chance they get. They say of Mike, "He's still the same ole Mike. He's friendly. He's not uppity." He always seems genuinely glad to see Eaklyites and to have his own very personal cheering section.

Presently, Mike and Joyce are on the state board of directors for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, an association in which he has been active for several years. He gives to others in numerous ways. He has made gifts of baseballs, spikes, hats, and catcher equipment to American Legion teams. He has presented spikes to Triple A'ers who have to provide their own equipment. Moore doesn't forget his roots either; he is interested in Eakly and has provided donations to the Eakly ball field and to the Eakly Pioneer Day celebration. He also does not forget his fans who are no longer able to travel long distances to watch him play. He regularly visits such people when he returns to Eakly. True, he is a small-town boy who has made it big, but big to Mike also means remembering from where he came. ●

MONA JEAN SUTER was reared in Eakly and later taught English there for over a decade; consequently, she is well acquainted with her subject and his family. For the past twenty-plus years, she has taught in the SOSU Language Arts Department.

The Mark

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