



Swinging for the **FENCES**

Dixie Youth baseball molds tomorrow's greatest players

BY SIMON CROFT

PHOTO BY ROB KAUFMAN

Baseball. It's known as "America's favorite pastime." From hot dogs and peanuts to children running for foul balls in the stands, almost everyone can remember at least one game.

Of course, remembering the score of a particular game can be more of a challenge, but catching your first foul ball or attending your first "bat night" is something special almost every person can remember.

Here in the Lowcountry, baseball is a passion.

Whether it's taking in a competitive game with the Bluffton Eagles on a Saturday afternoon during the summer, or watching five-year-olds run over each other at a T-ball game, baseball abounds. In fact, Hilton Head and Bluffton supply a generous portion of the state's young baseball players.

The Hilton Head Baseball Association and the Association for Bluffton Baseball and Softball offer children of all ages the chance to put one out of the park on any given weekend during the spring months. Not to mention all the Amateur Athletic Union and American Legion teams that play during the summer months.

Given the beautiful weather and mild winters in the area, baseball can be played at just about any time during the year.

Opening day this year for Dixie Youth was March 20 on Hilton Head

and in Bluffton; the first pitch was thrown on April 3.

The goal of both programs is to teach the fundamentals of baseball to children at a young age. In fact, the success of local high school teams can be attributed to the coaching and mentoring they received as children in the leagues.

"We try to coach so every child has some form of activity all the time," said Art Andrews, chairman of the board for the Hilton Head Baseball Association. "At the present time, the programs at high schools are having a lot of success. A lot of that has to do with the coaching from a young age."

This spring, the Dixie Youth program will have more than 400 children participating and that number increases with every year.

"The baseball program has grown quite a bit in the past couple of years," Andrews said. "We've increased the number of teams by about 15 percent in the past two years." But with all the available teams for children to participate on, having more than one child in a program can be a strain.

Just ask Lynne Anderson. She has four children, three of whom play, or have played, in the Dixie Youth program and she knows first-hand how time consuming and involved baseball can be. But, that's not to say she'd change anything.