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September 2, 2021

Madeira's Grass Man Gets Major League Start

Madeira High School (MHS) has a storied varsity baseball team. In 1999 the team won the DIII Ohio state championship game, and 2013 MHS alumnus and former player Andrew Benintendi is now a Major League Baseball outfielder. Today, a kind and unassuming retired school teacher is an important character in the tale of MHS baseball.

In 2012 Gene Matsudo began volunteering as a one-man grounds crew at the MHS Varsity Baseball team's home field - Sellman Park. He donates countless hours of his time cutting and manicuring the infield, cleaning the dugouts, and caring for the bullpens. Whether it's cold in the spring or hot in the summer, he's on the field rounding the bases with his own familiar push mower.



Gene was affectionately nicknamed "The Grass Man" by the 2016 varsity players, who dubbed him an honorary team member. They presented him with a Madeira 'Matsudo' baseball jersey, which he wears when he attends MHS baseball games. Gene was there when Andrew Benintendi played, and had the honor of helping Andrew reveal the banner on Sellman Field celebrating Madeira's first major league player. And when Gene's son, Madeira Superintendent Kenji Matsudo, took him on an Honor Flight - members of the baseball team surprised him at the Greater Cincinnati airport when he arrived home late that night. Madeira has proven the Grass Man is one beloved team member.

At the end of each season, Gene has team baseball cards printed that he hands out to the players. On them he thanks the players for a great season and says their efforts were amazing. He also includes the phrase, "Through life's ups and downs, keep your eyes on the prize finding joy in the journey until you reach your goals." His support for the players extends far beyond the field's grass.

Former Madeira baseball coach Aaron Pfeffenberger wanted to find a way to thank Gene for his volunteer efforts and dedication. "The amount of time and effort he volunteers on the field to help create a great atmosphere for the players is aligned with his selfless personality. Every year Gene is Madeira Baseball's biggest supporter and I wanted to find a way to thank him for all of the countless hours he has put towards the program," Pfeffenberger stated. "Even though I believe there truly is not enough gratitude the program could show him, I thought that throwing out the first pitch at a Reds game would create a memory that he and his family could cherish for a lifetime."

On Sunday, August 22, the Cincinnati Reds took on the Miami Marlins. With his wife Charleen, family, friends, and community members in attendance, the first pitch that day was thrown out by The Grass Man - who was wearing his Madeira Matsudo baseball jersey. Afterwards he received a baseball autographed in Japanese by Cincinnati Reds player Shogo Akiyama. At the age of 89, Gene Matsudo became Madeira's "second major league player."

