

AUSTIN TAYLOR TAKES THE REINS OF CROCKETT'S BASEBALL PROGRAM



Above: New CCHS head baseball coach Austin Taylor met with his team members for the first time this week after taking over for Brent Fronabarger. Pictured here with Taylor are his wife Molly, an English teacher at CCHS, and his children Casen and Kinsley.

By Ron Barry

“Of all the American sports, there are none that prepare you for the realities of life like baseball does.”

With those words – sitting in a dugout on a late June afternoon in Alamo, Tennessee – newly-named Crockett County High School baseball coach Austin Taylor revealed not only why he loves the game, but also some of the coaching philosophy he will direct toward his Cavalier diamonds.

Taylor, 31 years old and a Crockett native, moves into the head coaching position after two years as an assistant to Brent Fronabarger and three years in charge of the Cavs’ middle school program, where his teams secured championships in each of his seasons there. Fronabarger resigned at the end of this past season in order to concentrate on his other duties at the school.

The quote above summarizes fairly well at least part of the reason Taylor is now coaching the sport that gave him a collegiate playing career at both Walters State Community College, where he was part of a NJCAA World Series team, and the University of Tennessee at Martin, where he posted a solid .291 average and collected 100 hits in 92 games.

“When I finished playing, I never really had aspirations of going into coaching,” Taylor said. “But I’ve always been drawn to working with young people, and baseball is a sport in which consistent failure plays a large part in the game, with a lot of time to think about it. It can really beat you up, especially if you’re also feeling parental pressure to succeed or you don’t have a solid leadership presence in your home.”

Taylor said he initially got “roped in” to coaching youth teams, but realized the importance of providing steady guidance to a lot of kids who weren’t necessarily getting the right messages from the adults around them.

“My parents were extremely solid in my upbringing,” he said. “Everything was ‘yes sir’ and ‘no ma’am’, ‘please’ and ‘thank you’, and I always knew what was expected of me as far as behavior. They were great. And I had great coaching here at Crockett when I played football and baseball. But when I was finished with college ball, and got into youth coaching, I saw a lot of kids that didn’t have that. So I want to provide that kind of atmosphere. I learned a lot from Coach Fron, both in the two years here assisting him and in the camps he did at Union University with Andy Rushing. I appreciate getting a front row seat to see how he ran things here. And I want the young men who play here to continue to learn a lot more than baseball strategy. I want them to continue to learn the things that will someday make them better husbands, dads, entrepreneurs, or whatever paths they take in life.”

Baseball as a sport provides an excellent chance to do that, Taylor said. “Even the best hitters in baseball make more outs than they get hits, and you might have three whole innings to think about each one until you get a chance to bat again. Meanwhile, you might boot two ground balls hit to you, the temperature may be starting to drop and you’re cold – there’s all kinds of things that creep into your head. It’s just like life. So you have to learn to be resilient, to always look forward, to be ready for the next play, and to give your absolute best effort every single time, no matter the score or the circumstances. If you can do that, you can be a success in a lot of areas.”

While Taylor said these long-term goals for his players are important, he didn’t want to minimize the pursuit of excellence on the field.

“I’m competitive, and I want to bring that gold ball (the TSSAA State Championship trophy) here to Alamo,” he said. “We’ve never had one here, but we’ve been close. The other things I’ve mentioned are more important in the long run, but if we develop the right attitude on the field that also translates off the field in real life, then the wins will come. I don’t worry about the scoreboard – if we play the game the right way, it takes care of itself.”

One of the things that excites Taylor about his opportunity is the fact that he’s already coached the majority of the players on the squad.

“My first year of middle schoolers will be the junior class of this year’s team in the spring,” he said. “So I know these guys, and they know me. They’ve been taught well by Coach Fron, and we should have a good foundation to build on.”

Taylor, who cites Atlanta Braves legend Chipper Jones as his favorite player, will be teaching in the CCHS alternative school program. His wife Molly is an English teacher in the high school. They have a son, Casen, and a daughter, Kinsley. He will be assisted on the Crockett baseball field by Jacob Clark and Josh Ferguson.

The team will begin official tryouts today (Thursday, June 20) at 2:00 for those athletes not already engaged in football practice.