

Grant Union Holds Alumni Baseball Game

“Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, and baseball fans of all ages: Welcome to Malone Field in John Day, Oregon, in the heart of beautiful Grant County! Today, we gather on this field where generations of young men have chased fly balls, turned double plays, rounded third, slid into home, and made memories that have lasted a lifetime. This is more than just a baseball field. This is Prospector Country! This is the home of the Grant Union Prospectors!”

These words echoed off the hills surrounding the Seventh Street Complex in John Day on Saturday, August 15, 2026. Grant Union baseball alumni came from all across the United States, returning to John Day for the opportunity to play on their high school baseball field, reunite with their high school teammates, and thank the coach and community who helped create their history and form their future.

“Today, we get to bring back the players who once wore the Grant Union uniform. Some of them played here recently. Some played here a long time ago. And some of them may have to take a little longer getting out of the batter's box than they used to! But every one of them shares something important: They are—and always will be—Grant Union Prospectors. Today isn't really about how fast we can throw a baseball. It isn't about how far we can hit one. And let's be honest, for some of you, it's probably best not to find out how fast we can run anymore! Today is about memories. It's about teammates. It's about coaches who pushed us. It's about parents and grandparents who sat in these stands. It's about bus rides, long road trips, cold spring games and hot summer practices, victories and tough losses—and all the stories that came from them. Because when you play baseball in a small town like John Day, you're never just playing for yourself. You're playing for your school. You're playing for your family. You're playing for your community.”

After the brief welcome extended to each of the players and their families, an announcement was made the team would be observing the tradition of a ceremonial first pitch. For more than a century, someone has had the honor of throwing out the first pitch to officially signal that it's time to play ball. In the early days, guests simply tossed the ball from their seat in the grandstands. The honor has been given to presidents, celebrities, Hall of Famers, hometown heroes, veterans, and community leaders. This time would be a little different, as it was announced the honor would be given to someone who has been with these players from the very beginning.

“For years, he taught young men far more than how to hit a fastball or turn a double play. He taught teamwork, sportsmanship, perseverance, and what it means to wear the name “Prospectors” with pride. His fingerprints are all over the history of Grant Union Baseball, and many of the players here today—and many in the stands—can trace their love for this game to his time in the dugout. Coach Art Thunell, thank you

for the countless innings, the lifelong memories, and the legacy you've built here at Malone Field. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Coach Art Thunell to the mound!”

Although Coach Thunell needed no introduction at Malone Field, it is important to remember he was a Grant Union High School teacher, coach, and athletic director from 1976-2005. In the 28 years he was head baseball coach at Grant Union, the team won 22 league titles and three state championships. Thunell was awarded League Coach of the Year 14 times, State Coach of the Year four times, and National High School Baseball Coach of the Year in 2005. When Thunell retired in 2005 with a win/loss record of 591-190, it set an Oregon record for career wins in coaching. In 2006, he was inducted into the Oregon High School Baseball Coaches Hall of Fame.

And just like that, it was time to play some baseball. “Grant County, Are you ready for some baseball? Ladies and gentlemen, from all across Grant County, and from places near and far, please welcome home the men who once proudly wore the uniform of the Grant Union Prospectors! Today, we don't care how old you are, we don't care how long it's been since you played, and we certainly don't care how many aches and pains you will have tomorrow morning! Today, you're back where you belong: on the field, with your teammates, in front of your friends and family, in the heart of Grant County, at Malone Field, home of the Grant Union Prospectors! Grab your glove and take the field. Have some fun and make some more memories. And most importantly... PLAY BALL!”



Grant Union baseball coach Art Thunell (1977-2005), threw the first pitch to current Grant Union baseball coach Trey Thompson.



Alumni Prospector baseball players returned to once again play the game they love, have the opportunity to reunite with teammates, and say thank you to coaches.