

49ers Baseball Helps YMCA Open Miracle League Facility

Written by Ryan Rose

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It is not often that a baseball team participates in Opening Day ceremonies in September, but that is where the Charlotte 49ers found themselves at the University YMCA last Saturday, as opening ceremonies were held for the Miracle League

at their new facility. The Miracle League gives kids with disabilities a chance to safely play baseball. Volunteers, like the Niners baseball team, are paired with teams and kids as buddies, who help them play through the game of baseball on this special field. Redshirt freshman Patric King (Indian Trail, N.C. / Piedmont HS) went to head coach Loren Hibbs in the spring and asked if he could get the team involved. "After explaining the program and the opportunity to bring baseball to these kids who are less fortunate and help them to be able to play, my immediate response was yes," said Hibbs. The facility was entirely donated and is the only wheelchair-accessible field in Western North Carolina. The Charlotte Knights, including minority partner Bill Allen, were a huge part of the efforts to get the field in Charlotte. There are similar facilities built in Cary, High Point, Wilmington, Smithfield and Bunn. Children from as far away as an hour were expected to sign up. Over 40 kids were registered for the first games there, with expectations of over 100 in the near future. The home plate dedication ceremony was July 24, and the facility opened to games Saturday, September 15. King chose the University YMCA to serve his summer internship as part of his Levine Scholarship, which directs scholars to serve a summer with a local non-profit organization. When he got hooked up with the Miracle League project, he called other such facilities and programs around the country to scout out their organization of such events and how they handle the various needs of the kids who want to use them. "After all of the work put in by so many people to get the Miracle League going, I didn't know what to expect on Opening Day," said King. "A lot of people came out to the grand opening. It was a great thing to see, like a weight coming off after all that was done to build to that day. There were a lot of people out there who cared. It would be a hard thing to turn away from seeing how much fun all of those kids had." "Our players did a great job and were blown away by the facility, the enthusiasm of the kids and leadership of the staff at the YMCA," added Hibbs. "Our schedule will allow for our players to attend three more Saturday events and we are looking forward to continuing the relationship we have with the Miracle League at the YMCA." The 49ers were talking about the day well into the following week on campus. "The kids I had were so much fun to work with," said junior pitcher Ryan Mas. "They were so excited to play and it was great to see them have such a good time." "I wasn't sure what to expect when we went out there, but it was a lot of fun to be there and that place was amazing," added senior pitcher Corey Roberts. "I look forward to going back out there. It was the one time as a pitcher I didn't mind giving up hits." The 49ers will make more trips out to the Miracle League, including this Saturday, September 22. The field is located behind the waterpark at the university City YMCA, near the intersection of W.T. Harris Blvd. and Mallard Creek Rd. The YMCA has a call out to other volunteers to be a "buddy" to these youngsters. For more information, go to www.ymcamiracleleague.org