



SPORTS

RIGHT WHERE HE BELONGS

After years of trouble and pain, Ethan Duffy is back on track and enjoying life as a single father

By Doug Wolter
dwolter@dglobe.com

Worthington

Ethan Duffy says he's a totally different person than he was just five years ago.

To hear him talk about his former life, you already know.

Five years ago, Duffy was in prison. He'd been busted too many times for drug use, and for selling. But finally, after chances given, chances wasted, and more than enough opportunity to contemplate where he was headed, he was able to get his life back on track.

A major incentive was the birth of his only child, a daughter, Emelia Grace, born in January of 2017.

Today Ethan, a 2010 Worthington High School graduate, is a single father with a good job as a supervisor at Monogram Meats. And he plays baseball with the Worthington Cubs.

The best thing of all is to be with Emelia Grace — to see her grow, to share hugs and kisses. Even picking her up at daycare is a special

Worthington Cubs baseball player Ethan Duffy went through a very rough period in his life that included prison time. But he's turned his life around. Now, he's a single father holding down a responsible job. Loving life, he says his relationships are stronger and more meaningful than they've ever been.

treat that reminds Emelia's 29-year-old father how blessed he is.

"It's awesome. She runs up to me every time I go to daycare. Because after she was born, that relationship wasn't there," Ethan explains. "She was raised entirely by women when I was gone. I've accrued a relationship with my daughter which is unique in a way. She's got that

girly-girl side from all the fantastic women in her life who helped raise her, and she's got a tom-boy side that comes from me. Every day she's asking about fishing, or if we are going to a ball game."

Caught in bad choices

After high school graduation, Ethan attended Minnesota West Community and Technical College in

Worthington, but he dropped out within two months. In his first year of college, he made questionable friend choices. He began taking and selling marijuana.

Realizing that he was putting his future in jeopardy, he stopped the marijuana for a while, but he returned to West and fell back into the same scene.

"Most of my problems were of my own choosing,

but I also chose the wrong crowd to hang out with. You fly with the crows, you get shot with the crows," he said.

He'd begun to sell again, and then he was introduced to methamphetamine. He thought he could make a lot more money a lot faster with meth, so he sold it, and took it, too.

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Doug Wolter / The Globe



AMATEUR BASEBALL

Pronk helps Frogs even record at 2-2

By Scott Mansch
The Globe

LAKEFIELD — Dustin Pronk was a boy among men when he began his amateur baseball career with the Lakefield Frogs 11 years ago.

These days the Frogs and their fans know that Pronk is indeed the man.

Pronk went 3-for-4 with two walks on Sun-

day as Lakefield defeated Ruthton 13-5. The Frogs improved to 2-2 on the season by rallying from behind. Lakefield took control by scoring nine runs in the fifth inning.

Pronk is no longer a young kid in a man's league.

"You grow up around here and you see some older guys who can

really play," he said. "Then when you get thrown into the mix it makes you compete at a higher level."

In the Frogs' big inning, 14 men went to the plate and several of them hit safely. Pronk contributed a bases-loaded walk.

"Dustin's been our 3-hole hitter for five years or so and that says

a lot about the consistency he brings to our offense," said Frogs' manager Nolan Luhmann. "He's the type of kid who loves coming to the field to play ball and being around the guys."

Pronk is primarily a first baseman, but Sunday he picked up the pitching victory.

"Whatever suc-

cess he brings to us on the mound is a bonus because of what he does for us in other aspects," Luhmann said. "The Lakefield Frogs are a better team on and off the field because of guys like Dustin Pronk."

Pronk, 27, is a 2012 graduate of Jackson County Central. His hometown Jackson

Bulls have a tremendous amateur ball legacy and many veteran players. So when Pronk and a few of his pals were teenagers looking for a summer home they decided to throw in with the fledgling Frogs. The team was started from scratch a decade ago.

BASEBALL: Page 10

Abagotte Opiew competes to win, and with his twin brother

By Doug Wolter
dwolter@dglobe.com

WORTHINGTON — Abagotte Opiew likes to wear colorful socks. And he likes to compete in a wide array of events at track and field meets.

The Worthington High School sophomore has been working on setting a new school record in the triple jump for all of the 2021 spring season. He has also competed in the 100-meter dash, the 200-meter dash, the 110-meter high hurdles, occasionally the 300-meter hurdles, and the 4 x 400-meter relay.

We may have missed one.

For Opiew, who also competes in basketball, football and cross country, he has always had to be on his toes to compare favorably to his two brothers, who are also fine athletes at WHS. His older



half-brother, Terbutto, who graduates this spring, is an excellent football, basketball and track and field athlete for the Trojans (he's a particularly bright star in basketball, in fact, where he has made the Globe first-team All-Area for three seasons while finishing as the school's No. 2 all-time scorer). Abagotte's twin brother, Marenono, is also a solid three-sport athlete.

Very early in the Trojans' 2021 track and field season, Abagotte reached 44 feet, 8 inches in the triple jump, just two inches away from the school record. He indi-

cated impatience at breaking the mark, saying he might do it in the very next meet. That didn't happen, but the important thing is that the long and lanky soph has goals, and he's determined to reach them.

Which is interesting, because during his interview for The Drill recently, Abagotte said that the best sports advice he's ever received is "to be patient, because not everything is going to go the right way."

Indeed. All in good time. To see video from our Drill episode with Abagotte, you can go to The Globe website at www.dglobe.com and click on sports. Here's a sample of the interview:

QUESTION: How competitive are you with your twin brother Marenono?

THE DRILL: Page 10



Tim Middagh / The Globe

Worthington High School track and field athlete Abagotte Opiew practices the hurdles. Opiew is an accomplished runner and jumper with the Trojans.

Abagotte Opiew
Worthington
Sophomore
Track and Field

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Anything can happen in section baseball, softball

THE DRILL

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Here are a few random thoughts about baseball, softball, the present and future of the baseball field near the Worthington middle school (which still needs a decent name), and other end-of-the-year spring sports.



DOUG WOLTER
Sports Editor

We start off with high school baseball and the interesting saga of the Luverne Cardinals, who are No. 3 in the state Class AA rankings and the top seed in the Section 3AA South tournament which is already under way. I watched the Cardinals advance to 19-3 on Saturday with a 7-4 victory over arch-rival Pipestone Area, but there's an Achilles Heel plaguing the team that came to light once more in that game.

issue has cropped up many times this year.

It's a funny thing about the Cardinals. They're truly an exceptional team, and head coach Mike Wenninger says their goal is realistic — to qualify for the state tournament after earning section runner-up status for the last three seasons.

Wenninger said, as is often the case, the mistakes his boys made on Saturday happened on easy plays. And when they come, they seem to come in bunches, as if they're contagious.

"It's something like, if one guy makes a mistake, it's like another guy says, 'I can do that.' But it's better to make them when you're winning," said the coach.

Which is, for Luverne, most of the time. In the next few days, we'll see

if the winning (and the errors) will continue. The Cards were scheduled to continue the 3AA double-elimination tournament against No. 2 Fairmont on Tuesday (June 1).

Mistakes, of course, can be difficult to fix. For the Cardinals' errors appear to be part of their DNA in 2021.

"This is why you take high blood pressure medication and you get more gray hairs," Wenninger said moments after Saturday's game.

Actually, Wenninger doesn't suffer from high blood pressure. Not yet, anyway.

More good news about Worthington baseball

Good news was received this past week concerning the Worthington middle school baseball field.

Last week Monday, the Worthington City Council approved a Worthington Area Youth Baseball Association application to sell 3.2 beer at junior Legion, Legion and amateur games from May

through August. All in all, it's a welcome decision. The right steps are in place to monitor the change. Beer's availability at ball games allows adult fans the entire baseball experience at the middle school field. We hope it adds a few more fans, especially at the amateur games where attendance has dropped off over the last several seasons.

The increase in concession sales will go toward field maintenance and the paying of umpires, and benefits to the baseball community also include the reducing WAYBA fees. In the future, it could lead to more baseball fields and, as a result, more tournaments to be hosted in Worthington.

And now, a brief message about the middle school field:

Last year, the field was in poor condition. The infield was unacceptably bumpy and uneven, and third base was best manned by wearing a hockey mask. This year, the field is outstanding. The grass (there seems

to be more of it, too) is always mowed properly, the uneven places have been smoothed, and — in short — it's a field Worthington can be proud of.

The press box behind home plate was beautifully re-constructed. It's a modern press box now, and comfortable. Some of us are a little concerned that, one of these days, a foul ball will break the glass. But it's a small price to pay.

And incidentally, while we're at it, here's one more attempt to encourage somebody to re-name the ball field. There's no reason we should have to refer to it as the middle school field any more. Marshall has Legion Field, Jackson has Wacker Field, Windom has Island Park Field, Luverne has Redbird Field. Let's give our Worthington field a real name, people. It can't be that hard.

For the full column, visit d globe.com and search under sports

ANSWER: "It's very competitive. I think I have the jumps over him, but he has high jump over me and the 400. We kind of get competitive when it comes to track. I do like to outdo him. 'Cuz I don't like to be the worst twin. If he beats me in the 200, I'm making him run the 200 so I can beat him in the next meet. I'd say we're completely two different persons. He's a bit stubborn, I would say. I feel like I'm more relaxed. I let things go, and he doesn't. I think I'm a funnier person, too."

QUESTION: Who inspires you in sports?

ANSWER: "I think the people that inspire me in sports is probably Terbutto and GBrown Ojulu because when I was younger I always looked up to them, because they were always good at sports and I always wanted to play sports. I probably started to run track because of GBrown. GBrown was a really good track runner, and Terbo was a good football and basketball player."

QUESTION: What's the most unusual thing about you that people should know?

ANSWER: "I think most people don't know that I'm a funny person. Because I don't really like talking out in public. I'm usually just with my friend group. My jokes, they're dumb jokes but they make them laugh, so I think that's pretty funny."

BASEBALL

From Page 9

"It's going pretty great," Pronk said. "We have a good group of guys and most of us have been playing together for a long time. We knew there wasn't going to be enough spots for everybody to play in Jackson and we knew we had a lot of good ball players. So we decided that making a new team was best, so a lot of us young guys went over there. We've been friends for many, many years."

The Frogs have taken some lumps in the highly competitive First Nite and Gopher

League, which is filled with veteran, experienced players. To build a new team into a contender is not easy.

"No, it's not," Pronk said. "We notched five wins our first year, which was 11 years ago, and that was a good deal because the league is very, very tough."

Pronk was a standout at JCC and played for the baseball team at Minnesota West in Worthington. He's playing better than ever this season.

Sunday's game in Ruthton offered plenty of evidence. Pronk said it was a great day for the Frogs.

"We normally carry a roster of 17 to 20, but we only brought

10 guys to Ruthton," he said. "Other people had Memorial Day commitments, which is understandable ... We started off a little slow, but once we started clicking in that fourth inning everybody was rolling."

The Frogs' solid start isn't the only thing that's looking up in Lakefield. So, too, is the Frogs' ballpark a much-improved facility.

"It looks fantastic," Pronk said. "We've updated our outfield fencing and we have new dugouts and a new crow's nest. It's really looking good."

Many of the Frogs have been involved in the construction. "We put in a lot of work and effort," Pronk said. "Troy

Schultz of Lakefield puts in countless hours and time and money into the facility. He does a great job and has done wonders with writing grants. It's turned into a really, really nice facility.

"Our guys are really committed, no matter if we're pulling weeds or playing a game. Everybody shows up and does their thing. It's a pride thing. We're all trying to make it a better place."

For the complete amateur baseball roundup, go online at www.d globe.com and search under sports

DUFFY

From Page 9

In 2013 he was busted for meth.

"I got a fifth-degree controlled substance charge, which is a felony."

He went to jail, was released under conditions, and he violated the terms of his conditions. He went to in-patient treatment at Project Turnabout in Granite Falls, but he still wasn't ready to straighten out his life.

He began to work at a job in Luverne and he went to meetings, he recalls, "thinking it was just all going away." But he relapsed with methamphetamine a year and a half after treatment and started selling larger amounts. He was arrested again in 2016 and went in and out of jail, still violating the terms of his release.

In 2017 he was told by a judge that prison now was his only option. In

April of that year he was incarcerated in St. Cloud, then transferred to Moose Lake, then to Willow River. He heard about a very strict boot camp program, and he was allowed in.

It was very strict, indeed. "I can probably march better than most military," he says now.

It was a six-month program.

"That's when I decided this is it for me," he said. "I knew that I needed to get out and be all that I could be for my daughter. There was no more room for failure."

Far exceeded expectations

Emelia's mother, Rose, passed away on Dec. 22, 2020. Rose and Ethan were never married, but Ethan says they enjoyed a strong relationship before Ethan got into trouble. Ethan had already had full custody of his daughter since Emelia was 2 years old.

After only about two weeks of leaving the prison system, Ethan started working for Monogram Meats.

"They took me with open arms," he said. "They knew everything, and they took me in and supported me. They're like my family."

Fortunately for Ethan, he also has lots of other family and friends who support him. He knows they're always going to be there for him. At the top of the list is his devoted, loving mother (who has hardly missed a baseball game of his since he was 4), and his two brothers. And so many others, all the way down to his teammates on the baseball team.

Today, Ethan not only has his daughter, he has a job of responsibility that he enjoys, and he's back at college working toward a business management degree in food science. And he has purchased a house in Fulda, too. He doesn't need

any prodding to say how Emelia makes him happy and proud. He looks forward to coaching her in sports when the time comes. But whatever she wants to do, he's going to support her in every way.

Even if it's ballet. "I'm not going to be dancing in a tu-tu, but I'll be there clapping for her," he promises.

Emelia's dad is in a serious relationship today, and his girlfriend has a wonderful relationship with his daughter.

The baseball is just one more enjoyment in Ethan's new life. He is a left-fielder, center-fielder and pitcher.

"I love getting out there with the guys. It would be great to have a winning record. I love the lights, the smell of the grass, hearing the fans cheer. And my mom has been at every single game," he said.

He takes things one day at a time, saying,

"I keep my feet on the ground."

And he wants everyone to know that, whatever the problem, whatever the heartache, there's no such thing as a lost cause.

"My life right now is so far-fetched from

what I saw in 2018 from when I got out of prison," he said. "They make us fill out these after-care plans for where you see your life after five years, after 10 years. And I've far exceeded what I envisioned."

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