

For this family, it's all about baseball

By Jean Doran Matua, Editor

There are few opportunities for multiple generations to play together on the same team, in any sport. Minnesota Amateur Baseball has no age limits, either to start or to end, allowing good players to play on town teams for as long as they can, or want to.

The Kimball Express are among a few teams in a unique position, even within Minnesota, having a virtual dynasty on the team, and with a history – and future – of other players.

Tom Marquardt is the team manager today, as he has been for decades. His father Jim played, as did his late brother Ron. Tom started playing for the Express the summer before his senior year of high school, in 1975.

Tom also played basketball in high school, since there's no baseball in the winter. Tom asked Cindy Hinkemeyer, a cheerleader two years younger than Tom, to prom back then, and the rest, as they say, is history. Tom and Cindy have been married 45 years and, throughout their marriage, baseball is their life.

Cindy's father also played amateur baseball. Dennis Hinkemeyer played for the St. Augusta Gussies, and Cindy has a soft spot in her heart for that team. She started going to watch Gussies games with her dad regularly when she was about 10 or 11. But the Express now is her team of choice, and of family. Her husband, all three sons, and her two oldest grandsons are on the Kimball Express town ball team.

Scott (44) is Tom and Cindy's oldest son. He's married to Amanda and they have three ball-playing kids, Cade (20), Addi (18), and Jaxon (17). Addi played fast-pitch softball in high school, and she starts college in Arizona this fall. (More on Cade and Jaxon below.) Scott is a financial manager and co-owner at Ameriprise Financial in Litchfield.

Scott's baseball career with the Express began at age 12 when he filled in for one game because they were short of players; he was in sixth grade. He fully joined the team the next year, at 13. He usually plays third or first base. He played five years of college baseball, and he's played 32 years with his dad Tom as manager.

Scott almost didn't play this year. "A lot of people my age aren't playing any more," he said. He says he's the oldest player in the Central Valley League today.

Scott is proud of his son Cade who was chosen second-team All-American at ICC, with only three catchers in the United States selected for this honor. (Scott was third-team ICC All-American when he played college ball, and he was the first-ever All-American at Itasca.)

And Scott is excited to be able to go to Jaxon's football games this fall; Jaxon is a junior at Litchfield.

Brooks (40) is married to Colleen, and their kids are Henry (11), Louis (8), and Eleanor (5). All three of their kids play baseball, and all three may be future Express players.

Brooks is Assistant Baseball Coach at St. Cloud Cathedral High School. Both Brooks and Colleen teach at Apollo High School; Brooks teaches phy ed and health, and Colleen teaches history.

Brooks started playing with the Express in 2000, just after his senior year of high school. He usually plays center field, or occasionally third base. Basketball was actually Brooks' first love, sports-wise, and he also liked football. It wasn't until he started college ball that he had fun in baseball, and was a member of good teams. He admits that he played baseball because everyone else in the family played.

Brooks' son Henry was bat boy for a few years until he lost interest. Louis gave it a try, but he didn't have the passion for it that Henry did. Henry, now 11, could be good enough to join the Express soon. "He is meant to play baseball," Brooks said. That may keep Brooks in the game a bit longer, so they can play on the same team together.

"Baseball has given [our family] a lot," Brooks said. It's stressful when the kids are young, he added. But summer is baseball. Brooks said that baseball probably got him to college, and led him to his career. "Every Sunday is like a family reunion," he said. "Baseball is what brings us together every summer."

Brian (38) is the youngest son, and he's single. His day job is driving truck for Chamberlain



The Marquardt family relaxing after a post-game dinner. In front are Eleanor, Henry and Louis. In back are Brooks, Cade, Colleen, Jaxon, Scott, Cindy and Tom. Missing are Brian, and Amanda. Staff photo by Jean Doran Matua.

Oil. He started playing with the Express at age 16, in 2000; he's in his 23rd year on the team this year. He usually plays short stop or third base. (Even Brian's dog loves playing catch with baseballs.)

"Not many families in Minnesota play together so many years," he said. He and his brothers have nearly 75 years combined experience playing with the Express. Add Tom's 47 years and you've got quite a family legacy.

"It's fun to be part of contending for state titles," Brian said. The Express were State Champs in 2017, and were in the final four in the 2018 State Tournament.

Cade is 20 and has played with the Express for four years now, since 2019. He is a catcher. He played ball at Itasca Community College, like his dad. He has started the ball season at Mankato State University this year. Naturally, grandparents Tom and Cindy went to Florida to watch his spring practice with the MSU team.

"I love it," Cade says. "It's like the best thing, like you're a little kid." He said he learns a lot from his dad Scott, the baseball coach. Cade also played hockey and football in high school. He is studying finance at MSU, and his girlfriend Kelsey is a student at the University of Minnesota-Duluth.

As for the future, Cade says there's "no end in sight" for the family dynasty. "There will always be Marquardts on the field," he says.

Jaxon started playing on the Express last year, at age 16. He plays catcher or first base. A junior at Litchfield High School, he also plays football and basketball. He hopes to go into welding or machinery after he's done with school.

"It's fun and all," he says of playing with the whole family and the Express. "It's cool, a family thing."

Henry is now 11. He made his Express debut as the bat boy. He especially enjoyed hanging out with the players. He plays short stop and pitcher on his team.

In the winter, Henry plays hockey. He loves that, too, and he considers hockey and baseball as equal loves.

The day I met with them recently was Henry's 11th birthday, and he had played three 10U AAA games that day. His Waite Park team won the championship game that afternoon.

Henry has loved baseball ever since he was little, hitting off a tee at only a few months old. He says "for sure" he wants to play with the Express. His fondest memory of his years as bat boy with the Express was winning the 2017 State Championship game. (That was a high point for a lot of us, Henry.)

Louis is 8. He plays baseball in Waite Park as well. The team he plays on is a non-traveling team.

Louis spent some time as bat boy after older brother Henry lost interest. But Louis didn't enjoy it as much as Henry did, so he didn't last as long.

Eleanor is 5. She also plays baseball in Waite Park, with the boys. When asked if she will play on the Express when she's older, she quickly replied, "For sure." And then, "I'm thinking about it." "I wanna play with them," she said of other family on the Express.

Growing up with two older brothers who are big into all sports, Eleanor can hold her own with the best of them. She watches and learns, and she's already a good baseball player.

Cindy may be the glue that keeps them all together. Well, baseball is probably the glue, and that makes Cindy the glitter.

She faithfully attends all the Express games, and most of her grandkids' games as well.

She prepares a family meal for everyone after home and local games. She tries to keep things simple, like baked salmon or shrimp, or burgers on the grill; things that can be done quickly after the game. Or things that she can prepare the night before, like hot roast beef sandwiches. It's this, and the home she's made near Lake Carnelian, that makes her grandchildren prefer coming to her house over most other places.

"If I didn't love the game, I'd've been gone years ago," Cindy has often said. They've been married 45 years, with every year of their marriage occupied with baseball. Tom continued to play on the

Express after they got married, eventually becoming manager. He played with the team, on occasion, through the 2019 season.

As matriarch of this brood, Cindy attends nearly every game. She used to feel badly if she didn't make the first pitch of every single game. This year, she missed one exhibition game, and she may have missed a few first pitches. She bikes to nearly every game, whether it's in Cold Spring or Cokato. Bicycling has long been "her thing," while the boys have their baseball. Thirty-five years riding the same bike, she's put on more than 30,000 miles – mostly to baseball games. And she uses her time biking to pray – for her kids, grandkids, and baseball. She doesn't pray for a win, she says, but rather for both teams to do their best and to be safe.

"I do love it," Cindy says. "I don't know what else we'd do." Besides being a "baseball mom," Cindy has worked at Kimball Elementary School for about 33 years. She's a few years away from retirement, but she has no plans to sit still. She is also the groundskeeper at their home that overlooks Lake Carnelian, tending to a large lawn and several gardens.

Tom was pretty much ready to retire as manager of the Express several years ago. Then they won the State Tournament in 2017. That gave him new spark to carry on for a few more years. Now he's got two grandsons on the team, and two or three more grandkids not far off from playing with the Express.

"I'm glad we're in the position we're in [this year]," Tom said. The Express started in the Region 11C tournament at #1 seed. They lost to Monticello this weekend in the region championship game going into the State Tournament that starts next week; Kimball will go in at #2 seed (which means that they get second pick at drafting a pitcher from another team to play with the Express in the State Tournament).

"I'm more than happy how the season's gone," he added. He believes that the amount of talent on the team this year exceeds that of the 2017 team. "Experience means a lot," he says, "and there's a lot of experience there."

Marquardts, to page 15



The Marquardts just after a game: (from left) Brian, Tom, Scott, Cindy, Cade, Brooks, and Jaxon.