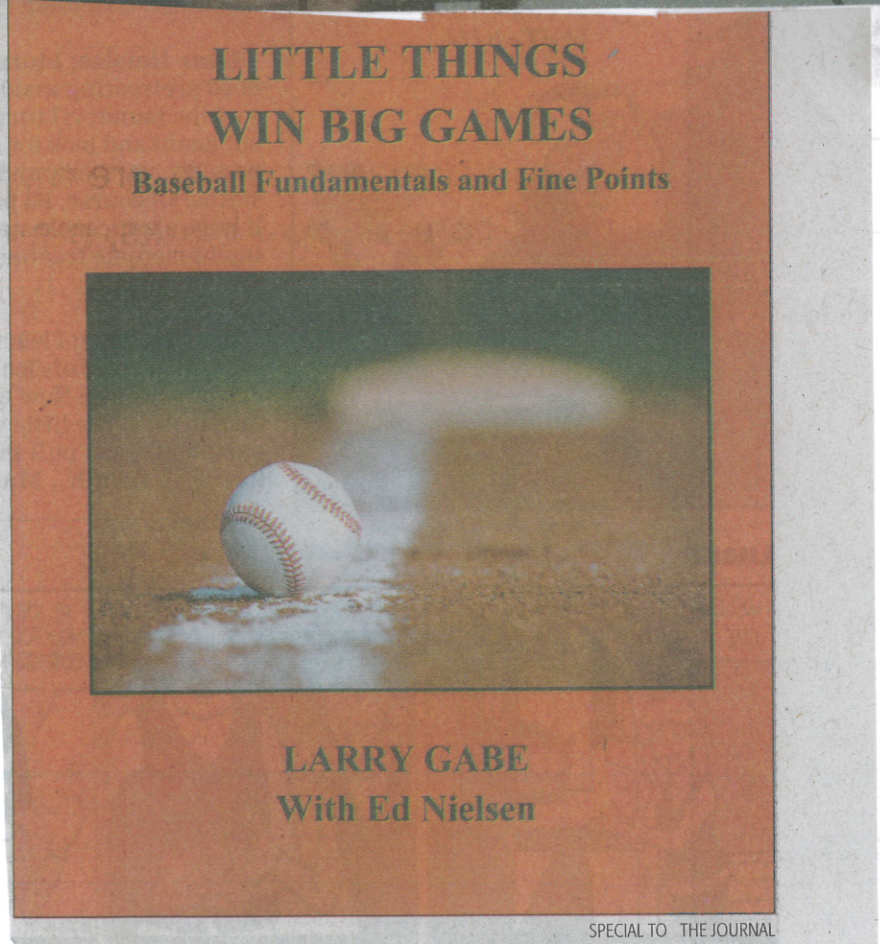
'The right way to play'





SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Keowee Key resident authors guide to baseball fundamentals

BY ERIC SPROTT
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — With spring training underway, Larry Gabe should have been able to sit back and enjoy his new copy of Sports Illustrated in late February 2014.

Having played and followed baseball for more than 60 years, the start of baseball season is perennially cause for celebration for the longtime Keowee Key resident, but when he turned to a story about the Texas Rangers having to hold clinics for their new players to show them how to execute the basic fundamentals of the game, his day took a turn for the worse.

However, Gabe was able to channel his frustration and sheer dismay into a project he hopes will make such clinics less necessary in the years to come.

"I just wondered, 'What do you do about it? Do you get mad or kick the dog?'" he said with a laugh. "I know a heck of a lot about baseball, and so I decided to write a book."

The book, "Little Things Win Big Games," is a 187-page guide to all things baseball, featuring 145 photographs that illustrate teaching points for every position on the field, as well us hitting and base running among a myriad of other topics. Published last month and dedicated to coach Jerry Eimers, an influential figure in Gabe's life, the book is available for $20 locally at The Booksmith in Seneca, while it can also be purchased online through Amazon, Barnes & Noble and Books-A-Million.

Written with assistance from Ed Nielsen, who like Gabe grew up playing on ball fields across Iowa, the local author described the book as a "60-year brain dump" of information. Gabe was an all-conference first baseman as a senior at the State College of Iowa — now the University of Northern Iowa — and finished with a .312 career average. He garnered tryouts with the Philadelphia Phillies and Chicago White Sox, while the Baltimore Orioles were also interested in his services.

After college, Gabe ultimately decided to go into business, but he continued to play competitive fast-pitch softball across the country and still plays slow-pitch softball locally with the Lake Keowee Senior Softball League, which he helped found.

With that said, it was a massive "brain dump," which Gabe said came together in a tidier fashion than he imagined.

"What I did is just sit down and write an outline of what should be in the book, chapter by chapter," he said. "A lot of the things I have in the book just aren't taught to kids anymore ... and the book is designed to teach kids and coaches the right way to play."

And, as the title of the book alludes to, Gabe is a firm believer that the little things can make all the difference in today's game, as the use of science — specifically through the use of plyometrics and area muscle-specific training methods — is making offense extremely hard to come by.

With pitchers who can hit 100 mph with their fastball no longer a rarity, Gabe said, opposing offenses are struggling.

And that, Gabe said, is detrimental to the game, as he's suggested lowering the mound and moving it back to give batters more time to react.

"I think it's going to happen in Major League Baseball," he said. "If I'm right, batting averages are going to continue to go lower, runs scored will go down and hits will go down. You don't have very many .300 hitters, and fans are not going to pay big bucks to go a ballgame and see a 2-1 or 3-2 game.

"They want action, and I think Major League Baseball is very aware of it."

And while Gabe is confident those changes are coming down the line, he's a staunch believer that there's no substitute for playing the game the right way by learning the fundamentals at a young age and coaches continuing to preach them at the lower levels.

"In the book, I say all the time — you have to act," he said. "You can't stop and think about what you're going to do, because if you do, you miss the play. It needs to become a reaction, and you have to do it the right way.

"You need to learn the right way to play the game if you want to play it well. It goes from running bases to learning the total game so you can play mentally alert, and that's what gives you the competitive edge."

THE DETAILS

FORMAT: PAPERBACK
PAGES: 187
PHOTOGRAPHS: 145
PRICE: $20

esprott@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6681
Follow on Twitter @Journal_ESprott