

Field of dreams: Bellefonte christens new and improved baseball facility

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PHOTO SUBMITTED/ A look at Bellefonte's new baseball facility. The Red Raiders earned a million dollar grant to help build a new field which was first played on Tuesday afternoon.

BELLEFONTE — On a picture-perfect day for baseball, the Bellefonte Area High School baseball team christened the new and improved John Montgomery Ward Baseball Field at Governors Park.

The improvements were on display on Tuesday. There is a state-of-the-art turf infield, a drainage system, new signage throughout, two new dugouts, stadium-style seats, new bleacher seats, a sparkling new press box and even a shiny flagpole in right field.

And while the result was not what the Red Raider faithful wanted — a 10-8 loss to Mifflin County — there were plenty of highlights and memorable moments to go around.

The field improvements and renovations were the brainchild of Bellefonte mayor Gene “Buddy” Johnson. The significance of the day was not lost on him.

“Having the field done and having the Crunick Family, coach Denny Leathers and coach Don Robinson here and a lot of the Corman family, it was very, very special to get the field and get this first game in at John Montgomery Ward (Baseball) Field,” Johnson said.

During pregame ceremonies, Johnson unveiled some significant signage at the field. Bellefonte’s home dugout is named after Dylan Crunick, a former Bellefonte Area High School baseball player who passed away from cancer at just 15 in 2014. The visitors’ dugout is named for former Bellefonte coaches Denny Leathers and Don Robinson, who were on hand and posed for photos.

The improvements and renovations took place thanks in part to a \$1.1 million state grant. Former Pennsylvania Sen. Jake Corman helped secure the grant. He was on hand on Tuesday afternoon to throw out the ceremonial first pitch.

Corman calmly walked to the pitching rubber and delivered a strike to his son, Jake.

“I’ve done it a few times. The key is that first, you’ve got to warm up,” Corman said with a laugh. “And second, you have to aim high. It was a great honor. It was very nice that they asked me, and I was thrilled to do it. Even better to have my son catch the ball. It was an exciting moment.”

Following Corman’s first pitch, the teams were introduced, the National Anthem played, and it was time to play ball.

Corman said that the project has been special to him since its inception.

“It feels fantastic; It’s about the program. Bellefonte baseball has been a historic program. It’s probably been our best athletic program over the decades. It was an unfortunate series of events that led to them being in a very difficult situation without a field. To be able to pull the community together and get a very special field for the kids to play on ... is very exciting,” Corman said.

Corman even worked the public address system from the press box, which is named for his late mother, Becky, who passed away earlier this year.

Johnson said it was an emotional day for all those involved.

“Pregame, when I came up to the press box, I saw the grass mowed, the lines on (the field) and the guys out there fielding ground balls, the crowd funneling in and the music playing, it was just an amazing feeling. I’m very proud of everyone who had a hand in it — from Weber Murphy Fox to Joe Menna, who is taking care of the grounds — it really has just been a team effort,” Johnson said. “It just goes to show you what a great community we have.”