

Sports

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Scott Rawding, of Middletown, wears the uniform of the Diamond State Base Ball Club, a vintage team which plays by the 1866 rules. Those rules include using the same ball throughout the game and playing without gloves.

At the old (1866) ball game

Diamond State Base Ball Club re-creates team of over 100 years ago

By JANEL ATLAS
Special to The News Journal

DELAWARE CITY — Some fans have decided to stop complaining about the current state of baseball and instead revive the good old days of the game.

Vintage base ball is baseball using the rules, customs, uniforms and spellings of the 1800s (when "base ball" was two words). Vintage Base Ball Association president Glenn Drinkwater says there are about 90 member clubs in the United States and Canada.

Delaware's new (but old) team is the Diamond State Base Ball Club. Club president John Medkeff said that he always has had an interest in Delaware sports history and discovered vintage base ball at an Elkton Eclipse game.

Base ball players (sometimes called ballists) wore wool uniforms and fielded the ball without gloves.

"In a way, the players are historic interpreters, bringing base ball from the past to life again," Medkeff said.

Rules are from 1866 and include the following:

- The same ball is used through the entire game, which leads to a marked decrease in the distance it travels off the bat.
- Wooden bats are longer, heavier and fatter at the handle.
- The pitcher stands in a des-

IF YOU GO

Diamond State Base Ball Club plays and practices on weekend afternoons, usually on Sundays, at Fort DuPont, so fans must pay admission fees to the state park, near Delaware City. The season opens at 1 p.m. April 11 at home against the Elkton Eclipse. Details: www.diamondstatebaseball.org.

igned area, not upon a mound, and tosses the ball underhand.

- Unless the pitcher intentionally fails to deliver "hitable" pitches to the striker, the umpire does not call balls.

- Foul balls do not count as strikes.

- Foul tips caught either in the air or on the first bounce by the catcher are considered outs.

And a different atmosphere exists, too.

"The four qualities that distinguish a vintage base ball game are sportsmanship, gentlemanly behavior, courtesy, and respect," Drinkwater said. "It is the norm for players to congratulate their opponents on making a fine play."

One of the players who'll take the field for the Diamond State BBC's inaugural game at Fort DuPont is Scott Rawding, of Middletown. His friends are curious about the rules, "especially when I tell them there is

no glove involved," he said.

"We have done everything we can to get John's club up and running," said Bruce Leith, who established the Eclipse in 2006. But when the season starts, he doesn't expect the Eclipse to take it easy on the new neighbor.

"I envision a slice of history coming to life, and Delawareans feeling a sense of community pride," said Medkeff. "But these are actual competitions, too, and we're going to go out and try to win those games."

The first Diamond State BBC was organized by Wilmington businessmen on Oct. 2, 1865.

In its first season in 1866, Diamond State did well against Delaware teams, such as St. Mary's College of Wilmington, Lenapi of New Castle and Atlas of Delaware City.

But its first game against the Philadelphia Athletics in May 1866 at Delaware Avenue and Adams Street, Wilmington, was a 104-5 rout.

Diamond State disbanded in the early 1870s.

The new team is seeking members.

"No extraordinary skills are needed, and the time commitment is actually less than that of a town softball league," said Medkeff.

Also needed are volunteers to serve as umpires and scorekeepers for the six home games between April and October.