

Big league response to Clarinda A's bus fire

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The Clarinda A's baseball team has spent the week recovering from a frightening fire on a road trip Monday night that destroyed the team bus, uniforms and players' personal belongings.

But in the days that followed, the response from Clarinda residents and former A's players was swift and heartening.

Among the ex-A's to learn about the fire were Ozzie Smith and Von Hayes.

"They've both offered to help out," said Merle Eberly, the team's former manager and father of current manager Ryan Eberly.

Much needs to be replaced. Besides the bus, an estimated \$2,000 to \$2,500 worth of personal property was lost in the fire.

"We've got a lot of alumni who have answered the call (to help)," Ryan Eberly said. "One did a Web page on it."

The A's, a summer team of college-age players, were on their way back from Topeka on Monday night when the fire was sparked by a blown tire on Interstate 29 just south of St. Joseph, Mo.

"It happened about 12 or 12:15 (a.m. Monday)," Ryan Eberly said. "The left rear tire blew. We drove off to the side of the Interstate.

"Kids said, 'There's sparks flying.' One of the kids grabbed a fire extinguisher and it kept flaming. We told the kids to get away from the bus."

Moments later, the bus was engulfed, and there was nothing the South Central Buchanan Fire Protection District volunteers could do to save the contents inside and underneath.

"Everybody was safe," the manager said, "and that's the important thing."

Eberly even made light of it after his team won two of the three road games. He told the St. Joseph News-Press: "We were really on fire, even on the bus."

Mike Ghutzman, a current A's player with two brothers as alums, said it was a chaotic scene.

"Everybody started running out of the bus," Ghutzman said. "We didn't know what was going to happen.

"I grabbed my bag, and by the time we got off onto the street, it looked like a bonfire. You never expect your bus to catch on fire."

The Eberlys didn't expect the response to catch like wildfire, either.

"Even out-of-town people that we don't have a direct connection to are helping," said Pat Eberly, Ryan's mother. "It's been pretty neat."

The team's board of directors wasted no time searching for a replacement bus. Gary Ulmer, president of the team's board, and two other board members drove to Minnesota on Thursday to check out used buses.

"We just might get one if we find something we like," Ulmer said on Wednesday. "It'll be about a two-week turnaround."

The replacement bus won't be cheap. Even a used one will cost between \$24,000 and \$25,000.

Donations can be made to Clarinda A's Baseball, 225 E. Lincoln St., Clarinda, Iowa 51632-1648 or by calling 712-542-2103. The team Web site is www.clarindaiowa-as-baseball.org.

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