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Bob Cooney: For Cherry Hill East's Tagland, unintentional beaming is déjà vu all over again



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AS THE FASTBALL bore in toward Cherry Hill East's **Chip Tagland**, then loudly cracked off his batting helmet, all his mother, Nancy, could do from her seat behind home plate was drop to her knees and scream, "No. Not again."

It was the sixth inning of Monday's Olympic American game between East and Lenape. East had come back from an early deficit and taken a 6-5 lead in the important divisional contest, and was looking to add to its lead. **Brian Reynolds** had led off the inning with a single when Tagland, who had already singled in a run, dug in.

Seconds later, he was on his hands and knees, blood gushing from under his right eye, his mom moaning in the background. For both of them it was *déjà vu*. Again.

"When Chip was in the seventh grade and playing for an AAU team in Washington Township, he was in a tournament game and went to steal third base," said **Nancy Tagland**. "Chip was watching the catcher as he was trying to get to third and the ball hit him right in the face. It turned out he had broken the orbital bone on the left side of his face. I'll never forget, he was hurting pretty badly but he wouldn't let go of the bag, for fear they would tag him out. We took him to the hospital and there originally was talk of putting a plate in his face, but ultimately doctors decided that since he was young, he would heal on his own.

"He went to his team's game the next night. He saw the player who threw the ball and told him it was OK. I remember he still had the imprint of the ball's stitches still on his face."

Forward to August 2007 when Tagland, preparing to enter his junior year at East, was playing for Cherry Hill's junior American Legion team in a regional final in Connecticut.

"I remember we were rained out on Friday and had to play on Saturday," recalled Nancy Tagland. "My brother and my niece drove all the way up to watch Chip play. In his first at-bat, he got hit by a pitch, right in the face again. But he got up went to first, finished the inning and then took the field the next inning. After that, he went over to the coach and said his face didn't feel right."

The Taglands had to find an oral surgeon, in Connecticut, on a Saturday. They finally did and the X-ray revealed a broken jaw. A few days later, back in South Jersey, Chip had the jaw wired shut. For 7 weeks he had to have all his foods mixed through a blender before he could suck them through a straw.

The injury forced Tagland to miss his junior year of soccer. But, as he said, "One door closes, another door opens."

Wanting to stay close to soccer, Chip volunteered to help out with a Cherry Hill soccer program for developmentally delayed children. He has spent many hours helping the special-needs children learn to play one of the sports he loves, and has recruited some friends to do the same.

"I love doing it," he said. "I just enjoy helping people. I think being with these kids has taught me to appreciate things and

also helped me realize that, in my future, I'd like to do something to help people, either be a nurse or get into special education."

He is "pretty much" settled on attending Alvernia University in the fall, where he will play soccer and perhaps try out for the baseball team. "Juggling two sports as well as going to college might not be that easy, but I might give it a try," he says.

As for his most recent ball-face confrontation, Tagland had to get 10 stitches just below his right eye, but should be ready to get back on the field any day.

"I really don't know where the ball hit me or where it hit my helmet," he admitted. "When the ball got close, I just closed my eyes."

After getting hit, Tagland stayed on all fours, getting advice from the umpire to stay down and relax. Tagland assured the ump that he was OK then was checked on by his coach, **Erik Radbill**.

As his coach arrived, Tagland looked up and said, "My mom is going to kill me."

See, before the season Tagland had decided to shed the helmet with extra facial protection. You can bet it will be back on his head again when he returns.

Getting it done

A familiar face can be seen at many South Jersey baseball games. First-year Rider assistant coach **Jaime Steward** has been tirelessly scouting players for the Broncs, who are 19-17 this season.

Steward finished a fine career at Gloucester Catholic in 1997 before graduating from Le Moyne College in 2001 as the school's all-time strikeouts and innings-pitched leader. He then pitched in the Anaheim Angels organization before stints with the Camden Riversharks and the Atlantic City Surf. *

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