

PROGRESS
2015



Kelly Stoakes, left, and her twin brother Devon, right, practice their swings at Diamond in the Rough, owned by their parents, Dave and Kim Stoakes. Daily Freeman-Journal photo by Troy Banning

Batter up!

■ Diamond in the Rough offers training facility for baseball players, teams; owners hope to soon have a golf simulator

By TROY BANNING
tbanning@freemanjournal.net

Dave Stoakes has always loved the game of baseball. The subtle nuances of the sport, the fundamentals, the skills needed to thrive, the competition — all of it appeals to him and it has since he was a kid.

Kim Stoakes, the matriarch of the family, had a similar passion growing up. And while Dave suited up for the Ellsworth Community College baseball team, Kim was busy earning four letters as a member of the Drake University softball team.

Years have past and they're no longer young enough to play the games. Dave spent his early adult years on the fastpitch softball diamond and then transitioned into the role of high school softball umpire — a side job that eventually earned him a spot behind the plate at the state tournament — but he's since hung up that hat, too.

So what to do now? Start a new business, of course.

Still wanting to stay involved in their sports of choice, the Stoakes family began the journey to bring a new training facility to Webster City more than a year ago, one that

they hope will bring enjoyment while also enhancing the baseball and softball skills of today's youths. Diamond in the Rough, located at 203 Commerce Drive on the south side of Webster City, opened its doors for business earlier this month. It features three state-of-the-art pitching and batting cages that can be used for both baseball and softball, as well as an area for hitters to work on soft toss or off a tee.

"The process has taken a little longer than I expected," Dave Stoakes said. "I had hoped to open it (last year), but Mother Nature decided to take care of that issue.

"We wanted to build something that people can come in and use and it's going to last for a lot of years, and I think we've done that."

With the harsh Iowa winters, and oftentimes cold and damp springs, the boys and girls of summer get short-changed in terms of the amount of offseason improvements they can make. But that's no longer the case.

"In our area there are a lot of people that drive to Ames or drive to Des Moines to get workouts in," Dave Stoakes said. "I just thought that we needed a place, and if we

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Diamond in the Rough

can help 20 or 30 or 50 or 100 kids get more enjoyment out of the game because their fundamentals are better, then great. That's why we're doing it."

Stoakes stresses that his family's new facility — a building that is nearly 5,000 square feet in size and plush with astroturf and padded mats throughout — is for anyone and everyone that would like to further their abilities.

"We're building this for every kid who has a desire to learn the game and get better at the game," he said. "When I was in junior college at Ellsworth, being able to go over to

the cage three to five times per week and swing, it made me better."

The three 70-foot tunnels can be set up in various ways to maximize an individual's or team's workouts. All three feature baseball and softball mounds made of clay — just like they are at the area diamonds. Screens can be put in place if pitchers would prefer to throw against live batters, and a nine-hole board that Stoakes said looks like a tic-tac-toe board can be set up if pitchers want to work on throwing to spots.

Want to work on hitting? That can be done, too.

Stoakes purchased two Iron Mike pitching machines, similar to what the professionals use, that simulate the arm motion of hurlers. They can be set from 40 to 90 mph and can self feed up to 200 baseballs or 150 softballs.

All of the cages are separated for safety reasons, but it will be up to those using the cages to supply their helmets and bats.

"We really wanted to make this as safe as possible for everyone,"



Dave and Kim Stoakes, owners of Diamond in the Rough, stand in front of the large logo on the wall of the facility. The training center will offer athletes and teams a chance to work on baseball and softball skills.

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Stoakes said. Diamond in the Rough will be open seven days a week — from 3 to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday; from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Saturday; and from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Sunday.

Rather than charge per session, the Stoakes family has opted to sell memberships to the facility. An individual one-year membership costs \$250, or a family membership can be purchased for \$400.

“With a membership, you can come in and use it anytime that we’re open,” Stoakes said. “This is a workout facility. We want people to come in, get their work in, and then let others in.”

Teams — from youth, to Little League, to high school and beyond — can also make reservations at \$75 per hour per cage. Stoakes said that \$5 will be shaved off that price for every individual on the team that is already a member.

Dave Stoakes also hopes to host baseball and softball clinics for those that are interested.

That’s coming within the next few months. Another of the Stoakes’ sporting passions has been golf — a game that their oldest

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son, Daniel, thrived at as a multiple-time North Central Conference champion for Webster City, and he went on to play collegiately at Northwood University in Cedar Hill, Texas, a suburb of Dallas.

With the ample space, Dave Stoakes plans to use a portion of the building to house a golf simulator, which will surely make him the envy of every local weekend hacker.



Devon Stoakes steps into a hit during a recent practice in the batting cages at Diamond in the Rough.

“I think it would be so cool to have a little kids’ softball clinic with Dave Hilton and Jim Adams,” he said. “Maybe they’d like to do that and maybe they’ll say no, and that’s fine, but we’ve got the resources here in Webster City of people that know the game.”

So the diamond part is covered. But what about the rough?

“I’d like to have it in within 90 days, but I don’t currently have a timetable,” Stoakes said. “Within 90 days everyone’s golfing outside anyway, so it might not be until the fall, but we’ll see.”

Stoakes has researched units made by High Definition Golf, which is based out of Canada. The company is renowned for its quality products.

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