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American Legion team returns to Duncan Park for 75th anniversary

Post 28 played at Dorman High last season

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Public address announcer Chris Everette sits in the stands while the fans are relegated to the third base line during the American Legion baseball game at Duncan Park on Tuesday.

After a one-year hiatus, the Spartanburg Post 28 American Legion baseball team returned home to historic Duncan Park Stadium for its 75th anniversary Tuesday night. Post 28 played at Dorman High School last season, but the others have been played at Duncan Park.

"Post 28 is Duncan Park and Spartanburg's team," said Spartanburg Post 28 athletic director Jesse Campbell, who has held the position for 35 years.

"It feels like I've come home. It's a thrill to be able to come in here and see people filing into this ballpark again with smiles on their faces. It's a happy time for the people of Spartanburg and Spartanburg County."

Spartanburg fielded its first American Legion team in 1933, and since then it has been one of the top programs in the state.

In 1936, Duncan Park hosted the World Series of American Legion, and Spartanburg beat Los Angeles for the national title. More than 21,000 fans were said to have attended the World Series.

Post 28 and Duncan Park are the home of 11 state championship teams, with the last two coming in 2003 and 2004. Duncan Park has hosted the state tournament at least 15 times.

All of that tradition appeared to have ended last year when city officials were almost forced to close the park's gates for good.

Duncan Park, which opened in 1926 and is named after Confederate major David Duncan, needed major renovations to make the old ballpark safe and playable. City Council reached an agreement with Spartanburg School District 7 in which each entity provides funding for those repairs, with more expected to come from private sources.

Temporary bleachers have been placed along the third base line, because the stadium grandstands are still closed. The old outfield wall was demolished and a new one erected.

"So far everything looks good," said John Fortune, a Post 28 Legionnaire. "The field and fence is beautiful. I think being able to play here is a wonderful thing for these young boys."

Fortune was the Post Commander at Cowpens Post 125 when it disbanded 15 years ago. He served in the Navy during World War II and the Korean War.

"I'm very happy Duncan Park reopened," said Richard Jones, a Post 28 Legionnaire who served in the Air Force in Louisiana during the Vietnam War. "This is a big asset to the city. There is a lot of history here."

Campbell said the state tournament could be held at Duncan Park next year if the renovations are completed.

He also said that he will be attending the National Convention of the American Legion Baseball Association in Minneapolis in September, trying to get the World Series to return to Spartanburg in 2011 or 2012.

"Anytime that you're here at Duncan Park and you have these young men on the field, it's a blessing," Campbell said.