

Sports channel coming to cover Hargrove in second season as BJ manager

By EARL WATT • Daily Leader Since Mike Hargrove agreed to be the Bee Jay manager, Liberal has received national attention.

Last year, the Rocky Mountain News, Sporting News and the Associated Press all featured Hargrove, the former Major League legend who started his career as a Bee Jay in 1972 and later managed the Cleveland Indians to two American League titles.

This year, on opening night June 4, ESPN will be in Liberal to do a segment on Hargrove's return to his roots in a segment known as "Where Are They Now?" to be aired at a later date on ESPN.

"We sent their producer a schedule, and he called back and said he will be out here Wednesday evening," Bee Jay General Manager Bob Carlile said. "He wants me to show him the city, and he's going to do some interviews Thursday night before the game. He will tape both ball games on June 4 and 5."

Hargrove's story has been unique in professional sports.

Two years ago, in the middle of a pennant race, Hargrove stepped down as manager of the Seattle Mariners. Less than a year later, Hargrove was in Liberal coaching the Bee Jays, the team that started his road of more than 30 years in professional baseball.

"It's never happened before," Carlile said. "A lot of ex-major leaguers go back to their college, but to come back to the semi-pro team where he got his start, people can't believe he would do

that.”

But Carlile said he knew why they did.

“Mike and Sharon Hargrove are the same kids that were here in 1972,”

he said. “They have the same values, and they want to give back to the people that helped them.”

Hargrove guided the Bee Jays to a fourth place national finish last year, which Carlile said was a testament to the coaching staff.

“We took a bunch of kids last year, and our coaching staff of Galen McSpadden, Bill Merrill, Hargrove — the job they did and progressing those kids from Day 1 to finishing fourth in the tournament was an incredible job.”

The attention the Bee Jays and the community have received from Hargrove’s connection over the past year has helped put the Bee Jay program back on the map as an elite summer league baseball program.

“We had people from Boston and San Francisco, Minneapolis — wherever — call and tell us they saw the articles about Hargrove coming to Liberal,” he said. “The publicity he has brought to the City of Liberal is fantastic.”

Carlile announced the news about ESPN coming to Liberal at Tuesday’s City Commission meeting.

“I don’t know if you support the Bee Jays or not, but it is clear the Bob does,” commissioner

Dave Harrison said. "I don't think we would have Hargrove without him."

But Carlile refused to take the credit.

"I think this is all due to Mike Hargrove, and I want to make sure that credit is given where credit is due," he said.