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Gladiators game brings out diehards — cowbells and all

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BRADENTON — It's an organization steeped in second chances, giving Bradenton a semi-professional football brand.

Yet, there was a buzz in the atmosphere as both stands piled up. The fans who couldn't grab a seat stayed standing along the fence that bordered the PAL Youth Complex field.

This all with temperatures dipping into the 40s — cowbells and all.

Some helped out with the chains.

Some preferred the subtle approach to supporting the team.

Others voiced their opinions loudly.

That's how it was for the fans at the Bradenton Gladiators home game against unbeaten Orlando in the Florida Football Alliance on Saturday. The Rage ended up winning the game 29-21. It improved to 6-0 and earned its 31st consecutive victory.

The Gladiators call Charley Knight the "super fan."

He attends every game.

Home or away, it doesn't matter.

Usually you'll spot him with the green Gladiators visor to complement the orange Gladiators shirt. If it's cold, like Saturday, then Knight dons a long-sleeved green undershirt.

"I played ball myself, baseball and softball for years," Knight said. "And it was something missing in my life. I'm 70 years old, and I wanted something to make me feel young."

Knight said he and Al Kaleel will do anything for the team.

That means keeping stats during games, riding with the squad on road trips, and on Saturday, he helped run the yardage sticks.

"I go to every practice," Knight said. "I don't miss nothing. Anything to help."

George Gavin found out about the area team and decided to start watching games, too.

"I heard about them last year," Gavin said. "We were trying to get to a couple games last season, but we never made it. We figured we'll definitely catch four or five of them this year ... so far it's been pretty good."

Then there is Rich Jospitre.

While not a traditional fan — Jospitre plays for the Miami Bulls — he still made the voyage to Bradenton in support of the league, even if it meant taking some good-hearted jabs at a Rage player before the game.

"Whenever we have a bye week, we'll come out and support," the Bulls defensive captain said.

The Gladiators' next home game is in two weeks against the Sarasota Millionaires.

Cowbells are provided.

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