

Brett's pine tar from local firm

By Stacie Knable
Evening Sun Staff

George Brett really didn't care, the Yankees didn't know, and the Orioles didn't realize that Baltimore was right there with the Royals, Billy Martin and Joe Brinkman, smack in the middle of baseball's "Tar Wars" controversy.

In fact, the sticky situation can be traced right back to Cockeysville, home of a 62-year-old company which sold to the Yankees the sticky stuff that Brett slathered somewhat liberally on his home-run-hitting bat during last week's Kansas City/New York game.

The Warner-Graham Co., a chemical distributor that also supplies pine tar to the Pride of Baltimore, appropriately markets the dark-colored, natural tree product as "Oriole Pine Tar." The family-owned company sells the tar to more than eight major league clubs, including the Orioles.

Though the Kansas City Royals

regularly opt for another brand of pine tar, the Yankees choose the Baltimore-made gunk. And that's how Oriole Pine Tar got all over George Brett's bat at Yankee Stadium.

"When we're on the road, we use the home club's supplies, like their donut weights, rosin bags and their pine tar," said Al Zych, the Royals' equipment manager.

Brett's potentially game-winning homer was ruled the contest's final out because of a little-known rule that limits the use of pine tar on a bat—Brett had spread the stuff a naughty 18-plus inches.

Kansas City protested, however, and American League president Lee McPhail overturned the umpires' ruling Thursday, wiping out the Yankees 4-3 victory and creating a game that is suspended with Kansas City leading 5-4 with two outs in the top of the ninth inning.

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THE WARNER-GRAHAM



By Clarence B. Garrett—Evening Sun Staff

George M.S. Riepe and G. Mitchell S. Riepe Jr.

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TAR, From B10

But back to the pine tar: Kansas City's Zych said he wasn't sure what brand the Yankees provided. George Brett, reached before a recent game in Detroit, admitted he had even less insight; furthermore, he didn't seem to care much. Only Peter Sheehy, the Yankee's long-time equipment manager, knew the brand name.

"Yep, it's Oriole brand pine tar," said Sheehy.

If the Yankees use Warner-Graham's Oriole Pine Tar, it must be the best—the kind that really sticks to a guy's hands—right?

Well, Sheehy didn't know about that, because, he noted, he just doesn't have enough time to worry about pine tar. But another Yankee equipment manager, Nicholas Priore, knew a good deal more about the situation, like the amount his team uses and the identities of the real pine-tar aficionados ("Don Baylor uses quite a lot").

Still, Priore struck out when it came to counting the virtues of Oriole Pine Tar: "It's just the pine tar that everybody's been using," he said.

But back in Baltimore, Jim Tyler, the Orioles' equipment manager, was more than ready to spread the dope—

after all, he buys about three pints per season.

"Warner-Graham makes the best pine tar," Tyler said. "It's thicker than the rest. It's like the high grade, the Cadillac of pine tars.

"When other teams come into Baltimore, they always request this [Orioles Pine Tar]. They don't know what it is, but they know the pine tar they get in Baltimore is the best," said Tyler, adding: "Even Milwaukee, the last time they were in, wanted to know where to purchase it."

Whether Milwaukee has joined Oriole Pine Tar's major league customer list . . . well, the folks at Warner-Graham will never tell. George M. S. Riepe, president, and his son, G. Mitchell S. Riepe Jr., vice president of the company, said competition in the pine tar business is tough. And lest the other pine tar distributors—in Chicago and Massachusetts—discover that Warner-Graham sells to the Orioles, the Yankees and several other teams, the Riepes preferred not to comment.

The executives mentioned, however, that Warner-Graham sells to several distributors across the country who apparently supply additional baseball teams with Oriole Pine Tar,

which is imported from Germany and packaged in pint, quart, gallon and five-gallon containers at the firm's 26,000-square-foot plant on Church Lane near York Road.

Riepe Jr. noted that Warner-Graham sells about \$40,000 worth of pine tar—at about \$1.40 per pint—each year, though baseball teams' purchases account for revenues of only about \$3,000. And, he added, the Riepes may root for the Orioles, but the name of their product has nothing to do with loyalty.

"We've got a whole line of products with the Oriole name, and

we've had them for 60 years," said Riepe. "We came before the baseball team."

The primary use of pine tar, according to Riepe, is for veterinary practices such as packing the hooves of horses and cattle.

Besides pine tar, Warner-Graham annually sells about \$4 million worth of chemicals, including solvents such as paint thinner and turpentine; pure ethyl alcohol for hospitals and flavoring extract; rosins and paint pigments used, for example, in the gold coloring on cigarette packs; paints and paint sundries.