“Hometown Teams: How Sports Shape America,” a traveling exhibit from the Smithsonian Institution, isn’t the kind of thing that can be set up anywhere.

“There were 21 crates of stuff,” said Matt Edwards of Mount Airy Museum of Regional History, the first venue in North Carolina chosen for the exhibit that arrived here aboard a tractor-tractor.

On Wednesday, Edwards, the museum’s executive director, and Amy Snyder, curator of collections, were joined by a handful of volunteers in busily unpacking the crates and setting up the exhibit under the direction of Terri Cobb, a Smithsonian representative from Washington. They were preparing for its grand opening on Saturday, when the public can view it for free.

Although the black crates still held much of the display, one could see it slowly taking shape in a 1,200-square-foot space in the changing exhibits gallery on the museum’s third floor, en route to a mission of telling the story of how sports has shaped America.

The workers unpacked a banner that soon revealed a giant image of the storied Wrigley Field in Chicago while being fitted to a metal frame in one part of the room. Meanwhile, larger-than-life images of basketball and hockey players emerged in another.

Nearby, another part of the exhibit that had been completed earlier displayed the heading “More Than a Game.” It featured sports magazines, baseball cards and even a collectible Barbie doll dressed in a soccer uniform.

“There are seven sections,” Cobb explained as the various pieces came together, including a section of aluminum bleachers — a universal fixture of the nation’s sporting landscape, along with other come components that collectively will tell the story.

“It’s really a way of celebrating all the things that sports brings to us, as individuals and communities and athletes and fans,” Cobb summed-up regarding the exhibit’s message overall. It features not only the role played by professional teams, but sports’ existence on a grassroots level on Little League fields or in high school gyms.

In addition to “More Than a Game,” the themes of the self-contained modules include “Rooting for the Home Team,” “Take Me Out to the Ball Game,” “Sports Explosion,” “Playing the Game” and others. One section is dedicated to sports’ portrayals in movies.

On Wednesday, the assembly team was referring to a series of diagrams spread around the floor to guide it in completing the exhibit.

Plans originally called for the set-up process to also include more than 20 people from other localities in North Carolina where the touring exhibit will go after leaving Mount Airy. They were to come here as part of an overnight workshop to learn how to arrange the various pieces once they leave here.

But today's forecast of inclement weather forced the cancellation of the workshop, Edwards said, with volunteers recruited to help with the task.

Grand Opening

The grand opening for "Hometown Teams: How Sports Shape America" will kick off Saturday at 10 a.m. at the North Main Street museum and last until 5 p.m.

Local high school wrestlers who recently won state championships are expected to be on hand for the event, according to Edwards.

The public will be able to view the Smithsonian exhibit for free on Saturday, and afterward it will be covered in the regular admission price at the museum.

“Get out and break the cabin fever,” Edwards said in inviting everyone to come by on Saturday.

“Hometown Teams: How Sports Shape America” will be housed there through April 11.

Basketball Presentation

Edwards also mentioned two activities that will accompany the traveling exhibit, a weekly series of sports-related programs and the preparation of a permanent exhibit on this area’s sports history.

“We’ve had a few changes in our original programming,” he said.

Included is the rescheduling of a NASCAR-oriented program initially slated for this Saturday, featuring Rex White, a member of the NASCAR Hall of Fame's Class of 2015.

That event has been moved to March 21.

The schedule reshuffling also includes shifting to this Saturday a program on women's textile basketball which was to be held later in the series.

It will be led by Pamela Grundy, a sports historian, who is to present the story of teams prevalent decades ago when companies sponsored all-female basketball squads.

One such group, the Elkin Blanketeers, a mill team representing Chatham Manufacturing Co., was a national champion.

The program on women's basketball begins Saturday at 2 p.m. on the museum's third floor where the traveling exhibit will be displayed.

Actor and playwright Mike Wiley, who heads a production company in Durham, also will present a program on Jackie Robinson as part of the series. Among other presentations will be one focusing on Mount Airy High School football.

Another activity linked to the traveling exhibit involves a permanent exhibit now being developed to highlight local sports history.

It presently exists on a small scale, with a large exhibit to result during the coming weeks, Edwards said.

Mount Airy Museum of Regional History and the surrounding community were expressly chosen by the North Carolina Humanities Council to be the kickoff site of "Hometown Teams" as part of the Museum on Main Street program. It is designed to bring high-quality traveling exhibits to smaller rural communities through a national/state/local partnership.

This city was picked as part of a grant- application process, the museum executive director has said.

The Smithsonian exhibit also is being funded in part by a $2,500 grant from the Duke Energy Foundation, which was awarded in January in support of the museum's annual changing exhibits program.