

Over 50, but not over the hill. Competitive juices flow in Monmouth County Senior Softball League

Ira Kreizman's pitch looked pretty good, but the umpire called it a ball. Kreizman's Ocean Township team was losing big to Freehold No. 1 and things were getting a bit testy. The pitch was too "flat" for the 6-to-12 foot arc required, according to the umpire. Kreizman walked off the mound toward the umpire and sneered, "Don't tell me that wasn't a strike. I've been doing this for 40 years."

The first thing you notice about the Monmouth County Senior Softball League, for players 50 and over, is that it is not leisurely recreation but fierce competition. And most of the players involved, though perhaps a step or two slower, still can do many of the things they did 40 years ago.

Just ask Hoody Sexton about the competition level. The Ocean Township resident actually played fast-pitch softball with Whitey Ford in 1950, when Ford was

stationed at Fort Monmouth, before he moved on to the New York Yankees and a Hall of Fame career. (Ford incidentally led the league in hitting, but the Yankees found out he was playing and forced him to quit.)

When Sexton started playing in the Monmouth County Senior League at 56, it had been 20 years since he was playing fast-pitch softball in Elizabeth.

"I played American Legion baseball and some semi-pro ball," said Sexton, who plays second base on Ocean Township No. 1 with Kreizman. "I was one of the first to play in the Jersey Shore League when it started in 1952. But these guys are more competitive than anyone I've ever played with."

"I played in a tournament in New Egypt two weeks ago. It was 80 degrees and we played three games in one day. I never did that in my life. I also play on a 60-and-over team. Some of

the guys are fantastic."

There are some slight variations from regular softball rules in the over-50 league, mostly to help prevent injury. To avoid collisions at first base, there are two bags, one for the fielder and one for the runner. Also to avoid collisions, to score a player does not touch home plate but crosses a line that stretches from the corner of the plate to the backstop. There is also a "point of no return" line between third and home to avoid run downs.

We get the best players from each team and go to tournaments. This weekend is a World Series Qualifier. From there you go to Texas for the World Series. This is for different age groups, 50, 55, 60 and 70 and up. There are some real good teams there, a lot of ex-pro ballplayers.

"I hadn't played in 25 years," said Joe Conoly of the Hazlet team, which is off to a 5-0 start, first place

in the North Division. "I started playing three years ago for the exercise, to get the cholesterol out of the system. Then I fell in love with it."

The interest is there and growing rapidly. With the amount of games the players are playing, the teams are getting more competitive each year.

Where do all these players come from? One of the more interesting things about the league is the mixture between those who have played softball right along and those who haven't picked up a ball or bat in 40 years.

"You get players in a variety of ways," said Richard Borman, who got the Neptune team started a few years back. Borman is the Director of Recreation in Neptune.

"I had been playing in open leagues but 50 percent of the people who play haven't played since high school."

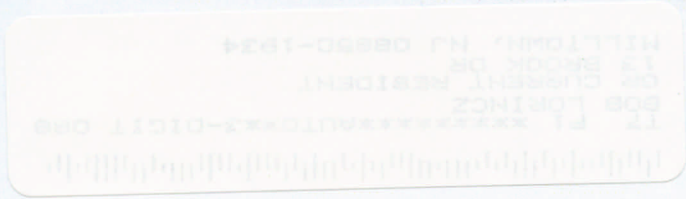
By Tom Olausen

Gets ready to take a swing. Wielenga plays for Oh Brother's.



Bob Wielenga

8 EXTRA INNINGS



Pre-sorted
Standard
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 51
Red Bank, NJ



222 Castlewall Avenue
Long Branch, NJ 07740

NJSSA

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE NEW JERSEY SENIOR SOFTBALL ASSOCIATION

NEW JERSEY SENIOR SOFTBALL ASSOCIATION

Extra Innings

