

## TOURNAMENT OF CHAMPIONS

### *Forte wins Home Run and Strashinsky Pitching Contests*



During February 10 through February 12, 2012 the Senior Softball USA (SSUSA) Tournament of Champions was held in the Winter Haven, Florida area with 77 men's teams and 7 women's teams participating. Among the men's teams were 5 from New Jersey in several age groups from 50

to 80 including Sweet Construction 55's (55 age group), New Jersey Hitmen (55), Stahl Post #30 (60's), Jersey Jaguars (70) and Nami Construction (75).

The SSUSA Tournament of Champions is only for those teams that have been previously crowned king of the hill at a Senior Softball USA major tournament during the previous year. "The TOC is the most elite event in this sport to celebrate winners of the top tournaments in the country," said Terry Hennessy, chief executive officer of SSUSA.

Prior to the start of the tournament, there were 2 days of various activities including an all star game, hitting and fielding clinics, 3 inning mini-tournaments, and 4 contests that tested various softball skills. These contests were precision hitting (hitting a ball off a tee between 2 cones placed in various spots in the field), base running speed, pitching accuracy, and power hitting (a home run contest). Unfortunately, none of the New Jersey teams won their tournaments. However, Alex Strashinsky and Fran Forte of the Jersey Jaguars won the 70+ age group pitching and power hitting contest respectively.

### *Congratulations to Teams & Players in the Original TOC-2012*

Senior Softball-USA's ORIGINAL Tournament of Champions is unmatched in the entire sport. No other tournament, at any age level, offers the prizes and experiences designed to celebrate the winners of the toughest competitions of the year. Teams from 25 states competed in 21 divisions-and hundreds of players participated in the free hitting clinics, skills contests, and the warm-up mini-tournament. After

With the wind gusting and swirling, Alex pitched 2 balls out of 10 into a 12 inch bucket 50 feet away. This set the bar for the contest. One other pitcher out of approximately 30 tied Alex. This Florida pitcher and Alex were put into a pitch-off, in which Alex prevailed. This was Strashinsky's second visit to the TOC and he also represented the Jersey Jags in this year's All Star Game.

In the home run contest, each contestant got 8 pitches (not swings) to try to hit over the outfield fence. In an attempt to provide consistently good pitches, a pitching machine was used rather than a live pitcher. Bad choice. As anyone who's been to a batting cage knows, pitching machines use special dimpled balls so that the position of the ball entering the machine does not significantly affect the trajectory of the pitch. Using regular softballs with their raised seams in a pitching machine produces pitches that difficult to control. As a result a hitter was lucky to get 2 or 3 pitches that could be hit over the fence. At the end of contest, 3 hitters out of about 15 to 20 contestants each had 1 home run so that another round of 4 pitches with those 3 hitters was needed to break the tie. When 2nd round was finished, Fran hit 2 more home runs to win the contest.

At the awards banquet, attended by more than 1500 players, family and friends, Alex Strashinsky received a pitching award certificate and a Reebok Softball glove. Fran Forte received the Home Run Certificate and a Miken Ultra II softball bat.

*By: Fran Forte & Alex Strashinsky*

the competition began, there were some tight games in several divisions. Top-seeded Hannington's of Massachusetts emerged undefeated to win the 70's Silver Division, prevailing in the final 18-13 over the Jersey Jaguars from the Garden State.

Pfeiffer Grey Sox from Michigan took two out of three games from Nami Construction from New Jersey to win the Men's 75 AAA Division.



#### PITCHING WINNER



L to R: Bill Roth, Alex & Fran Dowell.

#### HOME RUN WINNER



L to R: Bill Roth, Fran & Fran Dowell.

## Did You Know?

... that Tino Hernandez, growing up in the Dominican Republic, remembers playing baseball with Juan Marichal, and the Alou brothers, Matty, Jesus, Moses & Felipe. Tino played on the 75+ Senior Olympic team in Texas City, TX.

... that veteran Senior Olympic player, Gorden LeMatty, married his wife Ruth on the nationally televised NBC show, "Bride & Groom". They were both 20 years old, and he was in the Navy. He had to get his mother to sign a permission slip to get married. That was 58 years ago.

... that long time player, Joe Masi, from North Jersey, was born in Brooklyn, and as a youngster played baseball against Joe Pepitone, and Hall of Famer, Sandy Kofax.

... that Howie Marlin, the elder statesman of senior softball, is writing a book about his cable TV sport talk show. The show ran for 15 years, and he interviewed hundreds of sports celebrities, including 10 baseball Hall of Famers, Super Bowl Champions, Heisman Trophy winner, Olympic Gold Medal winners, Stanley Cup Champion and many other sports personalities. The book is due out this fall.

... that Neil Best, Middlesex County, is the sports and media columnist for Newsday, and also covered the New York Giants, as a reporter, for almost 10 years.

