

### Senior League Players Catch Fever Once More

For Al Mills, some things are better late than never.

In 1988 Mills, Fair Haven, learned of Senior World Series Incorporated, a national softball league for men over 50 years old. The league had been in existence for eight years.

Despite the late start, Mills, with the help of Flemington resident Mike Christy, decided to form a similar league on a statewide level. State champions would qualify to compete in the national championships.

The response to the state senior league was so great, Mills and Christy were able to create separate county leagues. Thus the two men were the co-founders of the Monmouth County Men's Senior Softball League, for men over 50.

According to Mills, the Monmouth County league was slow in formation. "We held a meeting in Freehold Township and three or four gentlemen showed up," he said. "We had another meeting in North Jersey and 75 showed up.

"Then whole teams from towns just

started coming little by little. It started off as a state organization, but we went around to all the counties and explained the details to them to get them interested."

Nine counties now have over 2,000 players involved in leagues. Other counties with leagues include Mercer, Burlington, Union, Morris, Ocean, Bergen, Middlesex and Hudson.

The 12 teams from Monmouth County are located in Long Branch, Fair Haven and Ocean, Neptune, Freehold, Marlboro, Middletown and Hazlet townships. Mills is a past-president of the county league and the current manager of the Fair Haven-based Jersey Blues.

County league champions advance to the state tournaments. From there, the Winners can go to the national tournaments. Teams that place first or second in these tournaments can advance to the national championships, the World Series, held in Orlando, Fla., every October.

Mills said the senior softball league has grown increasingly popular not only

in Monmouth County but in New Jersey as well. However, he added the leagues are constantly facing two major problems. They have a hard time finding sponsors and playing fields. As for sponsors, Mills chalked that up to the economy.

Playing fields are hard to come by because there are so many children's leagues, Mills explained. "The children always come first, and I agree with that," he said. "However, there just are not enough fields around with all the little leagues, girl's leagues, pony leagues. Any league you can think of for kids needs a field, and the kids come first.

By: Lisa Van Lenten



Left: Mike Christy - Right: The Late Al Mills

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