

Q&A with Brakettes' Manager John Stratton

Q: Can you compare the 1971 and 2011 undefeated teams? (John was the assistant coach to Hall of Fame Manager Ralph Raymond in 1971.)



J.S.: That's tough! This team was as good defensively and probably had more offensive pop, but that team had Joan Joyce in her prime and six more national Hall of Famers. It's a testament to our current players that we can even compare to a squad like that. The 2011 team was so special, and they could play with the greatest Brakettes' teams we've seen.

Q: What stood out to you about Alumnae Weekend?

J.S.: The kids (current players) were in awe of the Hall of Famers. The alumnae had a blast. It was so important for them to reconnect with the Brakettes' tradition. It was so important for the franchise, because it brings the past and the present generations together. The networking will help in our sponsorship push, as well.

Q: How are the Brakettes trying to recruit sponsorships?

J.S.: Playing top competition is important to attract more sponsors, and in 2012 we will certainly play the best. Bringing in Team USA would be huge. The webcast helps us build our fanbase, but we still have a ton of work to do. We need more exposure in the media. We also need to pound the pavement locally to sell more home run fence signs, etc.

Q: How important is it for the WMS National Championship to continue to grow?

J.S.: The WMS has picked up where the ASA dropped the ball in the Women's Major division. The tournament is run how it should be run, and it serves as the culmination of the season for all involved. More and more players and fans are looking forward to it every year. It's crucial we continue to build on that success.

Q: Why are the Brakettes traveling to Las Vegas for the Fastpitch Championship Invitational next July?

J.S. Most importantly, the Brakettes will get to showcase their name and talents again on the national stage, against the best of the west. The east-west rivalry is just great for the game of softball, especially when it's the Brakettes vs. California. That's the best.

Q: How will you spend the off-season this year?

"Retirement" has been good to us. My wife (former-Brakette

and National Hall of Famer Micki Machietto Stratton) and I were fortunate to travel back and forth between Florida and Connecticut for a few years, but we are home (in Stratford) for good, now. I enjoyed coaching with Joanie (Joan Joyce at FAU), but it's good to be home and spending time with the family. My son, Jay (former Brakette coach), and his wife (former-Brakette Keri McCallum Stratton) now have two beautiful children. We are delighted to be grandparents again. McKenna Ashley will be 4 in November, and Conner John joined the Stratton family back in May. Micki baby-sits every day and we all have a good time hanging out. Plus, I help Jay and Barbara Reinalda (former-Brakette and National Hall of Famer) at Yale as a volunteer coach. Barbara has done a nice job with that program, and it is fun to work with a former player and my son.

Q: Do you count the days until Opening Weekend?

Hahaha... Not yet, but I will in a few months. It's good to take a break. The season is condensed into less than three months now, but we still play so many games. It's great to recharge the batteries. But as every softball season gets ready to start, there is this excitement that takes over and reminds me of why I still love to work with the Brakettes.

From the Chairman of the Brakettes:

2011 was an exciting season for the Brakettes. On top of an undefeated season, the Alumnae Reunion weekend gave us the chance to meet the players who helped shape the Brakettes' tradition of excellence.

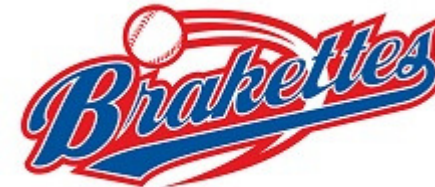
It's my goal for 2012 to see that the Brakettes continue to strive to 'be the best' and to 'Beat the Best'. We have already committed to send the team to Las Vegas in late-July 2012 to play in the Fastpitch Championship Invitational tournament. This will be one of the few opportunities for the Brakettes to play the best teams from the western USA.

We have also opened talks with TeamUSA to try to bring them to Stratford in 2012 for a double header against the Brakettes. Everyone still remembers the night in 2008 when they came to Stratford with Jenny Finch, Crystal Bustos, Stacey Nuveman and the stars of the 2008 Olympic Team. If they come, we'll need your help in packing DeLuca Field!

My most important goal for 2012 is to return the team to a sound financial situation. We'll begin to raise money year-round and try to increase the number of corporate and private sponsors. We also have plans to have joint fund-raising with other non-profits, by giving them Brakettes tickets to sell and splitting the proceeds.

We need your help! If you can help identify potential sponsors, or know a charitable organization we might work with, or can volunteer some of your time to help us organize special events, I urge you to contact me and get involved.

Pat Sanders, Chairman of the Board (PatSanders@hypack.com)



Brakettes Newsletter: October 2011



Brakettes Host Alumnae by Kathy Gage

Thanks to all who attended and helped make it a very special Alumnae Weekend (July 8-10) 2011! It was great to see so many players from all decades of the 65 years of Brakettes softball.

The weather tried to dampen our spirits Friday night, but in spite of this wet beginning, players spent time chatting and catching up until the skies opened and really stopped the party! We were unable to hold the Homerun Derby or play the doubleheader, but fortunately that was the end of the bad weather.

Saturday was glorious and the Short Beach pavilion was a perfect spot for Brakettes to gather and enjoy a luncheon of deli sandwiches, eggplant parmesan, lasagna, salad, potato salad, pizza and cake. There was a beautiful breeze with sun, sand and a water view. Players and guests enjoyed chatting with friends, family and former teammates while the presence of numerous Brakettes' children, some only a few months old, added to the Brakettes family atmosphere.

After enjoying the luncheon, we all gathered at the field to take the all-team photo. It was quite a feat to get all the players in one picture so that all faces could be seen!

The opening ceremonies were wonderful, watching each player be introduced and assemble on the mound. What a fabulous gathering of 65 years of wonderful softball players!

Rain postponed our Homerun Derby Friday night, but we got it in just prior to the Alumnae Game on Saturday. Congratulations to Jess Serio for winning the Homerun Derby! Thanks to all the alumnae who played in the Alumnae Game and to Rosie Adams and "Skippi" Schippini for being the bat girls for the game. We enjoyed watching all of you play. It was amazing to watch some great catches by Jenna Lopez and Pat Dufficy, and great fun to get to see Barbara Reinalda and Joan Joyce pitch.

Sunday was another glorious day at DeLuca Field, starting off with a brunch for players and guests. We had a good turnout for this last chance to chat with friends and former players. A double header with our visiting team, the NY Havoc, capped off our Alumnae Weekend.

The wonderful photo display of all the team photos for 65 years of Brakettes softball were collected and prepared by webmaster Harlan Gage. Team photos and other special photos were provided by Jim Fetter, Edna Fraser, Dolores Ruffo, Eleanor Mastroni, Mary Primavera, Annette Verespy Kalafus, Linda Finelli, Kathy Redling and Jo-Jo Ottaviano. Many thanks to all of them for helping to complete the collection. The 1955 photo was the last photo needed to complete the collection and was still not found at the time of the reunion. Recently however, former Brakette, Marie "Jo-Jo" Ottaviano (1951-1963) provided the missing 1955 photo! Thank you Jo-Jo!! It is now on the Brakette archive site and has been added to the photo display boards. Thanks to Jim Fetter for help in displaying them at the field during the reunion. They made a nice backdrop for the reunion gatherings.

We look forward to seeing all players who attended the reunion this year and many more at the next Brakettes Alumnae Weekend in 5 years!

Check out www.brakettes.com/gallery to see more of Kathy Gage's photos from the Reunion Weekend!



Joan Joyce throws out one of the ceremonial 'First Pitches' while Barbara Reinalda gets ready.



Brakettes Legend Pat Dufficy shows off her home run swing during Home Run Derby!

Brakettes' Historic 2011 Season Revisited

By Rob Baird, Brakettes Media Director

The Stratford Brakettes capped the 2011 campaign with their 30th National Championship on August 7th in Stratford, CT. However, it was not the milestone achievement that left those in attendance most amazed.

What was obvious early in the summer to the Brakettes' loyal fans became known to the rest of the softball world at the 3rd Annual Women's Major Softball National Championship... The 2011 Stratford Brakettes were a team for the ages, one of the best squads the franchise has ever produced.

The Brakettes came back from a 3-1, seventh-inning deficit on June 4th to defeat the Newtown (PA) Rock, 4-3. It had been a year to the day since the Brakettes' last defeat, which ironically came at the hands of the Rock. After that early season scare, the Brakettes continued to gain confidence and fans in bunches throughout the season.



2011 Brakettes in Lyons, PA: Front Row: Sarah Calgreen, Kate Bowen, Melissa Mancuso, Ashley Waters, Denise Denis, Rachele Fico; 2nd Row: Carly Normandin, Stacey Lajoie, Alisa Heronema, Becca Cardin, Mandie Fishback, Stephanie Call, Brandice Balschmitter, Player/Coach Amber Radomski, Kristyn Sandberg; Back Row: Manager John Stratton, Official Scorer Steve Pavlich

Stratford went on to win all remaining 59 games to finish 63-0, as the Brakettes enjoyed just the second undefeated season in team history, eclipsing the 57-0 unblemished mark of 1971. Coupled with 62 straight wins at the end of 2010, the Brakettes have now won a record 119 consecutive contests.

In winning their second-straight WMS National Championship, the Brakettes posted run-rule shortened victories in every game of the tournament, denying the opposition any hope of knocking off the defending champs.

The Brakettes also made a long-anticipated trip to the Midwest for the St. Louis Saints Invitational, returning the favor the Saints have shown in traveling to Stratford in recent years. Unfortunately, tornado warnings and flooded fields cancelled the tourna-

ment for the first time in 46 years, and the Brakettes and Saints settled for a pair of games on Sunday, June 19th. The Brakettes won both matchups, as well as two games against the St. Peter's (MO) Outburst on the following Tuesday, which brought the Midwest trip to a successful close.

Weeks later, the Brakettes went back on the road and put their unbeaten streak on the line. When the Brakettes captured the Lyons Ballfield Fourth of July Tournament in Lyons, PA, they offered more proof that this team was special. The Brakettes swept settled for a pair of games on Sunday, June 19th. The Brakettes through seven games in two days against teams from New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, outscoring the opposition 60-1.

Back home in Stratford, Frank DeLuca Hall of Fame Field served as the showcase for the Brakette's unrelenting offensive firepower, night in and night out. The combination of speed and power from top to bottom of the lineup was brutal for opposing pitchers to deal with.

The Brakettes also took time in early July to remember their glorious past. Alumnae Weekend 2011 was a wildly successful event that attracted over 90 Brakettes from the original team in 1947 to present day players. Hall of Famers Joan Joyce, Micki Stratton,

Donna Lopiano, Lou Albrecht, Willie Roze, Peggy Kellers, Rosie Adams, Barbara Reinalda, Diane Schumacher and Pat Dufficy took part in the weekend, organized by Kathy Gage.

The Brakettes shattered the previous single-season team home run record of 65 with 103 round-trippers, while several Brakettes marked impressive individual accomplishments.

In her first year as a Brakette, Stephanie Call set new single-season Brakette records for home runs (31) and RBI's (90). Call sprinted past the previous mark of 15 dingers, held by three Brakettes, including teammate Denise Denis. It took until the last day of the WMS for Call to surpass legendary Brakette Pat Dufficy's mark of 89 RBI's. Call held down first base for the Brakettes, but also went 9-0 as a pitcher. She was named to the 2011 WMS All-Tournament Team.

Denise Denis hit her 50th homer as a Brakette, making her the second player to reach the impressive plateau. All-time home run leader Pat Dufficy (91) is the only other Brakette to have achieved such a feat. Denis finished with 10 homers for the season, her third-straight year with double-digit long balls. She now has 53 for her career.



Becca Carden shows the swing that led her to a .485 BA in her 'rookie' season.

Rachele Fico extended her undefeated streak as a Brakette pitcher, as her 29-0 season pushed her career mark to 72-0. Brandice Balschmitter rejoined the team full-time and went 23-0, winning her 80th game as a Brakette in the WMS winner's bracket final. The duo shared

the Most Outstanding Pitcher Award at the WMS tourney, as they dominated every team in the field. Newcomer Becca Carden sprinted her way to the team's batting title, finishing with a .485 average. She also led the team with eight triples. Carden also rounded out what Manager John Stratton called the "best outfield he's ever seen", playing a mean left field alongside Carly Normandin in center and Denis in right. All three outfielders were named to the All-Tournament Team at the 2011 WMS National Championship.

Normandin again served as the Brakettes' leadoff hitter and put forth her best all-around year. She led the team with 79 runs and 89 hits, while finishing second in average (.461), home runs (20) and RBI's (68).



Mandie Fishback anchored a rock-solid defense in 2011!

An already solid defensive alignment got stronger as the season progressed, again led in the infield by the double play combination of shortstop Mandie Fishback and second baseman Ashley Waters. The tandem also performed well in the heart of the order, as Fishback batted .420 with four homers and 45 RBI's, while Waters finished at .411 with eight homers and 48 RBI's. Waters led the squad with 16 doubles and was named to the 2011 WMS All-Tournament Team.

The Brakettes were spoiled by solid play behind the plate, as well. First-year catcher Alisa Heronema caught the most games for Stratford, while finishing third in batting with a .458 mark. Heronema provided the first half of the team's speed and power catching combo, finishing second in steals to Carden. Kristyn Sandberg provided the pop at the plate, finishing with 11 home runs and 43 RBI's in roughly half a season of play. Sandberg took home the MVP and Home Run Champ Awards at the WMS National Championship, as she smashed four homers in bracket play.

Amber Radomski took on more responsibility in 2011, as she became an assistant coach to Manager John Stratton, while continuing to play for the red and white. She produced her best offensive season as a Brakette, batting a career-high .338 and seeing most of the time at third base.



Rachele Fico accepts the Joan Joyce award from GM Bob Baird as the best pitcher of the 2011 WMS Tournament. Fico shared the award with Brakettes pitcher Brandice Balschmitter.

The 2011 Stratford Brakettes also showed tremendous depth at every position, with reserve second baseman Kate Bowen putting up solid numbers in her first Brakette campaign. Melissa Mancuso worked herself into a platoon at third with Radomski, and Sarah Calgreen played significant innings at first. Stacey Lajoie was the team's pinch-running specialist and served as a backup outfielder, while Mariel Schlaefer and Jordan Paolucci also saw considerable time behind the plate. Sara Plourde also started one game on the mound in 2011.



Stephanie Call re-wrote the record book for HRs and RBIs in 2011.

Manager John Stratton has said expects the vast majority of the team to return in 2012, but they will have a huge task if they wish to match the success of this past season.

With the 9-0 victory over the St. Louis Saints in the 2011 WMS Championship Game, the Brakettes put the finishing touch on a season of greatness. The undefeated mission was complete, leaving the 2011 team in rarified air, shared only by the greatest Brakettes teams of all-time.