



December 2012

Brakettes Cap 2012 Season with WMS Championship

The Stratford Brakettes beat the St. Louis Saints 7-0 on Sunday to capture the 2012 WMS Championship at DeLuca Hall of Fame Field in Stratford, CT. The Brakettes won their third straight title and closed out the 2012 season at 68-3, racing to the finish with an 18-game winning streak.

Tournament MVP Denise Denis hit a first-inning solo shot in the Championship Game to provide the WMS Most Outstanding Pitcher Brandice Balschmitter with all the offense she would need. Denis went 9-for-15 in bracket play to lead the Brakettes' offensive juggernaut. In addition to being presented with the Micki Stratton Award, given annually to the tournament MVP, Denis picked up the Pat Dufficy Award as the WMS home run queen, with three long balls. She also drove in 11 runs, while collecting two doubles and a triple.



Joan Joyce award winner Brandice Balschmitter with GM Bob Baird.

Balschmitter struck out 11 and gave up just three hits in the shutout, as she closed out her 2012 season with a 36-2 record. She earned the Joan Joyce Award by recording 22 strikeouts in a combined 12 innings of bracket play, after sharing the award with teammate Rachele Fico in last year's championship.

After the homer by Denis in the first, her 13th of the year, St. Louis starter Meg Soultz kept the Brakettes' bats at bay until the fifth inning. Becca Carden started the Brakette fifth with a leadoff double and was sacri-

ficed to third on a bunt by Jess Mouse. Carly Normandin earned a one-out walk and stole second, putting runners at second and third. Kate Bowen then ripped a double to score Carden and Normandin for a 3-0 lead. Bowen was 3-for-3 in the title game, with a homer, double and four RBI's.

The Brakettes put the game out of reach in the bottom of the sixth, as they tacked on three more runs. Bowen followed by launching a two-run blast to close out the scoring at 7-0. It was her third home run of the 2012



Steff Call slides in safe at home during the 2013 WMS campaign.

Award winners Denis and Balschmitter were also named to the 2012 WMS All-Tournament Team in the outfield and at pitcher, respectively. The two former UMASS stars were joined on the squad by Brakette teammates Alisa Heronema (catcher), Steffi Call (first base), Ashley Waters (second base), Kate Bowen (utility), and Rachele Fico (pitcher).

Bowen also won the Diane Schumacher Award as the Tournament Batting Queen, going 7-for-10 (.700) in bracket play.

The win captured the Brakettes' 31st National Title, having won 28 ASA Women's Major titles and the last three WMS Championships.

Brakettes Defeat SoCal Hurricanes to Win FCI Tourney in Vegas!



Things looked bleak for the Brakettes on Saturday morning, as they lost their opening-round game to the Southern California Hurricanes. The Hurricanes overcame a 3-2 deficit in the 7th inning with two solo home runs to send the Brakettes into the loser's bracket. The team would have to fight their way through several quality teams and the Las Vegas heat to get a chance to play for the title.

The team bounced back with a 5-1 win over the CA Condors and a 12-1 rout of the Scorpions. For their 4th game of the day, the team faced the Corona Angels, a quality team from the Los Angeles area.

The Angels jumped out to a 4-0 lead, their big hit being a two-run home from UCLA shortstop Steph LaRosa. In the bottom of the 3rd, manager John Stratton gathered the team together for a little pep talk and asked the team if they were ready to go home. The Brakettes rallied, stringing five singles together to bring the score to 4-3. Katie Bowen doubled in the 4th and was sent home on a clutch two-out single by Denise Denis to tie the game. Denis advanced all the way to 3rd on the play at the plate and scored the go-ahead run on an error by the SS. Rachele Fico pitched out of trouble in the 5th and the Brakettes won the run-ruled game.

The Brakettes completed their run through the loser's bracket with a Sunday morning 5-0 win over the Crusaders. Brandice Balschmitter pitched a 4-hit beauty and Steff Call added her 14th HR of the year.

In order to win the tournament, the Brakettes had to beat their nemesis, the SoCal Hurricanes not once, but twice. The Hurricanes were a collection of Pac-10 and California All Stars who had beaten the Brakettes 4-3 in the tournament's first round.

The first game turned into a 7-0 rout. Rachele Fico pitched a brilliant 4-hitter. Home runs by Steff Call, Mandie Fishback and Becca Carden led a 9-hit Brakettes attack that ended the game in the 5th inning. The Brakettes would now play the Hurricanes once again, this time for the tournament crown.

In the title game, it was Brandice Balschmitter of the Brakettes dueling Ally Carda of UCLA. Becca Carden of the Brakettes got the scoring started in the top of the 2nd with a double. After a sac bunt, she scored on a Sac Fly from Carly Normandin. The Brakettes added another run in the 3rd as Carden drew a bases-loaded walk. Sam Fischer and B.B. Bates hit solo home runs for the Hurricanes to tie the score at 2-2 going into the bottom of the 6th.

Becca Carden hit a dramatic home run in the top of the 7th and Rachele Fico came in to close out the game. The Brakettes had battled the Arizona heat and some great California teams to win the Fastpitch Championship Invitational.

Many fans agreed it was some of the most competitive games they had ever seen in a long, long time!



An Interview with Brakettes Great Barbara Reinalda

We would like to thank Barbara for answering our questions. For the complete interview, go to:

http://www.stratfordbrakettes.com/alumnae_news.htm.

1. What did it mean to you to play for the Raybestos Brakettes in the pre-Olympic era? How do you feel about the experience now that your playing days are over? I am very glad to have played pre-Olympics. Back then we all played because we “loved the game”, not because we expected something in return. I like to look at myself as a “Pave Runner”, setting the expectations for the next generation. After retiring, it is still very exciting to look back at the time I played and enjoy the stories all over again. It was a time in my life I will never forget, especially all the fantastic people (players/coaches/FANS) I had the pleasure meeting. To this day I remain friends with several of them.

2. Can you tell us how Ralph Raymond found you and recruited you? During my first year at Cerritos College in California (May 1976) there was an article in the LA Times about me and the success we were having. A Raybestos salesman in the area read it and sent it back to Joe Barber and Ralph Raymond. Ralph’s son saw me play in San Diego, which I did not know until several years later. Ralph call Coach Kelly from Cerritos and then called my parents. After talking it over with my mom and dad, they said “if you don’t try it you will never know if you can do it”. So from 1976 to 1980 I came out for the summer then in 1981 I moved here....the rest is history.

3. Which ASA Women's Major National Title means the most you??? After all, you won 12 of them: '76, '77, '78, '80, '82, '83, '84, '85, 88, 90, 91, and 92... I like to say they all mean the world to me, but the 1976 Na-

tionals really has a spot in my memory. We were not expected to be in the finals, let alone to be the Champions. I think that summer we had the worst win/loss record ever in Brakettes history.

4. Could you tell us about the one(s) that got away... which ASA National Title(s) did the Brakettes NOT win that you think they should have? Nobody remembers 2nd place.... 1981, I think in Houston when we lost 2-1 in the “IF” game to Orlando Rebels.

5. - What individual accomplishment are you most proud of? Played in 675 games for the Brakettes; Pitching for 19 years with a record of 441-31 leading the list of all time records in pitching;1976 ASA "National Tourney MVP and led all hitters with a .429 average; compiled a 45-6 record in 18 ASA nationals; any others we don't have that should be mentioned!

I’m not really into the stats...but probably one that might not even be recorded is not walking a batter for 2 years. I’m not really into the stats thing because all my stats are in my eyes a TEAM stat not an individual stat. Without the TEAM I would have no stats at all.



6. Which Brakette you played with was the most impressive to watch? WOW this is a tough one....There might be a few that I could mention, but I am only going to mention one....Allyson Rioux. She would have been one of the best 2nd basemen ever to play.

7. How do you see the game of women's softball evolving over the next 10-20 years? Any chance it makes a return to the Olympics? I think it will continue on the same pace as it is now. There is a good chance it will be back in the Olympics.

8. What was your favorite part of the 2011 Brakettes Alumnae Weekend Reunion? There is a lot... but meeting the players before my time and listening to how their playing days were compared to ours and reminiscing about old stories and things that happened.

An Interview with Barbara Reinalda (continued)

9. Has the growth of the game on the college level (WCWS and Regionals on ESPN, etc.) affected the women's major and pro levels? How can the popularity of the college game translate to the Women's Major and/or pro levels? Yes I do believe college has affected Majors and Pros. I think they are playing non-stop from age 10, getting a scholarship and by the end of college they are so burned out. The only ones that continue to play are the ones who truly play for the "love of the game".

10. You were a part of the 1976 team, which saw current manager John Stratton lead the team to the ASA Title in Ralph Raymond's absence. Please describe that season to our fans... Well not being from around here, not knowing the Brakette Tradition, it is hard for me to explain the season. It was a season of ups and downs, only 2 returning Brakettes on the roster, we were all new so we spent the summer playing and getting to know each other on and off the field. I did not meet Ralph Raymond until our first game at Nationals.

11. What does it mean to you to see Johnny managing the Brakettes 36 years later? Watching Johnny still coaching shows people how much he loves the game of softball. He is there for the players and the love of the game, not himself.

12.. What is the funniest thing you ever saw or heard on the field while playing for the Brakettes? In the dugouts? No names will be mentioned, but a funny thing on the field. I was watching someone hit a ball in the left/center gap, hustling down the line and tripping over 1st base, landing face first half way between 1st and 2nd.... then laughing themselves while crawling all the way back to 1st. As for what happened in the dugout.....stays in the dugout. Sorry....

13.. Now that the statute of limitations has passed, are there any off-the-field moments during your Brakette days you would like to share with your fans? I don't think I will answer this one..... I want the fans to remember me as they saw me...HA HA!!!!!! Remember I was the "MOM" to the player and had to take care of them off the field.....HAHA.



Brakettes' Great Joan Joyce Inducted into NFCA Hall of Fame

The National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) recently announced that Brakette's legend Joan Joyce will be inducted into their Hall of Fame. Joan has been the head coach of Florida Atlantic University's softball team since its inception in 1994. During her tenure, FAU has won ten conference championships. They have averaged 41 victories per season and have made seven trips to the NCAA Softball Championships. Our congratulations to Joan and best wishes for continued success at FAU!



L-R, top row- Manager Ralph Raymond, Scorer Tom Ashcroft, Joanne Cackowski, Joan Moser, Irene Shea, Sharron Backus, Cec Ponce, Barbara Clark, Lou Gecewicz, Pat Whitman, batgirl Sheila McArdle, Coach John Stratton
bottom row- Rosie Adams, Jennie Edminster, Peggy Kellers, Joan Joyce, Joyce Compton, Sue Tomko, Willie Roze, Claire Beth Tomasiewicz, Kathy Elliot.



An Interview with Brakettes' Great Diane Schumacher

Our thanks to Diane Schumacher. For the complete interview, please go to:

http://www.stratfordbrakettes.com/alumnae_news.htm

1. What did it mean to you to play for the Raybestos Brakettes in the pre-Olympic era? How do you feel about the experience, now that your playing days are over? Playing for the Raybestos Brakettes was like playing for the NY Yankees, in that I was part of a softball dynasty of all time... We were treated like pros... Playing for the Brakettes has opened many doors for me professionally and continues to do so. In fact, a book was written in 1976 called *The Greatest Dynasties of All Time*. We were the only chapter on a womens' team; The Raybestos Brakettes along with the NY Yankees, Boston Celtics, Montreal Canadians, Green Bay Packers.

2. Which ASA Women's Major National Title means the most you??? '76, '77, '78, '80, '82, '83, '84 '85. They all mattered, because I enjoyed playing to win, but the first in 1976 (was special) because it was the miracle year. In 1975, all but two players left the Brakettes to play pro ball, including Joan Joyce and others. That same year Ralph Raymond sustained a heart attack and could not manage us, so John Stratton stepped up to the plate and did a great job. Barb Reinalda wore the uniform of Donna Lopiano and I wore the uniform of Joan Joyce. We felt like the uniforms were playing from those who wore them in the past. It wasn't until we won that last game did we feel we EARNED for ourselves the right to be national champions.

3. What individual accomplishment are you most proud of? (.329 career avg., 5 team batting titles, 6 Olympic Sports Festivals, 2 Pan Am Games, 4-time 1st Team ASA All-American, etc.) Certainly my individual performance of the 1978 nationals, in which I believe I had 13 RBI's for the tournament. I remember the ball looked like a grapefruit when it was pitched and this is a true story... When I got up to hit, one of the ASA state commissioners was sitting near home plate and he yelled out to me, "Where are you going to hit this one, babe?" I looked to him and pointed to the right center wall and said, "I'll hit this one over there." Sure enough, I whacked it over the fence for a home run. That game I hit for the cycle. I remember

signing autographs after the game and was the last one onto the bus. When I got to the top and looked down for a seat all of my teammates were clapping. That was really a special moment for me. I was then named Women's Sports Softball Player of the YEAR which was really a nice honor.

4. In addition to being remembered as one of the Brakettes' greatest hitters and first basemen, you had a very successful career (55-16, 1.01 ERA) on the mound as well. Were you ever pressed into action unexpectedly at the last-minute (or during the game)? If so, please entertain us with your memories... I averaged 6 strike outs a game I believe, but I always joked to my teammates that all of them will touch the ball at least once when I pitch, so stay on your toes! I told them I pitch for time and fewest pitches, which I believe was about 55 one time. I was done in an hour, unlike Kathy Arendsen, who averaged 17 or more strike outs a game and pitched to a lot of 3-2 counts. I remember when Kathy experienced tendonitis I went in for her and did fine. Ralph thought I walked too many people as I averaged 1 walk a game. As long as you don't walk a lead-off hitter you have a shot. John always disagreed with Ralph and felt I should pitch more. I looked at it this way. I got to play every game every day where when you pitch you play every other game. I'd rather play!



5. Which Brakette that you played with was the most impressive to watch? Probably Kathy Arendsen, for her absolute domination in a game as the pitcher. When they did get a hit off her she was even tougher! I bet the Bahamas Coach a case of beer one time when their gal led off with a triple with no outs. He was yelling, "Now we go, here we go...." I yelled over from first base, "Wanna bet she stays right here? I'll bet you a case of beer!" He said "You're on!" Well Kathy just went to work and mowed down the next three hitters by striking them all out. I turned to their first base runner as I was running off the field and said, "Your coach owes me a case of beer!" I never collected it!

6. How do you see the game of women's softball evolving over the next 10-20 years? Any chance it makes a return to the Olympics? I have been told by several sources that Softball will not have a chance to make it back into the Olympics in the near future. If I had any involvement on a Committee or asked to get it back in, I would do everything in my power to see this happen. It is ridiculous not to have fastpitch in the Olympics. The sport was well received back in the previous Olympics... Getting sports in the Olympics is very competitive and very difficult... The Europeans really control the vote.

An Interview with Diane Schumacher (cont.)

7. What was your favorite part of the 2011 Brakettes Alumnae Weekend Reunion? Seeing my former teammates and reconnecting with all the coaches and people who were a part of my playing years. I loved when they introduced the former players from the different eras and I saw and met one back from the early 50's escorted out to the field by her great grand- daughters which was really neat. I also had a chance to interact with the current players which I also enjoyed. I loved all the pictures that were on display. I loved the banners and saw my name flapping in the wind. The whole week-end was just great... Seeing John Stratton, Micki , Joan Joyce was great. The picnic out at the beach was a lot of fun, for sure. Home run derby... The games were fine to watch, but I found myself mostly interacting with people in the stands!

8. Has the growth of the game on the college level (WCWS and Regionals on ESPN, etc.) affected the women's major and pro levels? How can the popularity of the college game translate to the... Women's Major and/or pro levels?" The profile of the game has changed because of the television coverage from the Olympics. Television is now better prepared for covering the game both with the camera coverage itself and certainly the play by play and color. The College game now has taken over as the higher profile sport from the ASA due to television and the building of stadiums at the College level.

Because of Title IX, the Colleges are now putting money into the sport of softball, having several organizations besides ASA, which initially was the only game in town, talented players are more spread out... I am not sure that the women's Major is as strong as it was back in the 60's -90's. The Olympics really began the start of the breaking apart of the women's major from what it was to what we see today. Earlier when you made a USA team you were away from your major team for about 3-4 weeks. When you made the Olympic team you were gone from your major team for a year with all the traveling in preparation for the Olympics. The ASA was a feeder for the International game along with some College players. Now it is the College players.

9. You were a part of the 1976 team, which saw current manager John Stratton lead the team to the ASA Title in Ralph Raymond's absence. Please describe that season to our fans... We were like the bad news bears at times. We made mistakes that cost us 11 losses that year. Each week it seemed new players were coming through the gate to try out and join the team. Barbara Reinalda came from California. Then, Sue Enquist, center fielder from UCLA came. John did a fantastic job with us as rookies. Having the nationals at Stratford was perfect for us to really have a home town flavor. The fans at Stratford were really softball savvy and just being around them was always so supportive. The whole electric

atmosphere of 7-10,000 people cheering that whole national week was really special. I think we made all of our mistakes during the season and we peaked at the right time at nationals. Having Ralph give an inspirational speech, having Bertha Tickey in the dugout during the tournament, having Micki Stratton in the stands always yelling " Stay Loose, Schuie" all contributed to a magical moment in time.

10. What does it mean to you to see Johnny managing the Brakettes 36 years later? John Stratton has the longest tenure of any Brakette Coach. He bleeds Brakettes. When you think of the Brakettes you have to think of John Stratton because of his loyalty to the organization. He married the catcher of the team, together they raised a son who was our bat boy, who grew up around us, who then coached himself in the organization and married a Brakette himself! For John it is a family affair. Both Micki and John must have over 800 "daughters" over the years they helped to groom. I am thrilled that the organization has continued under John's leadership. John has continued to represent this team with class and dignity and of course has continued the winning tradition despite all the changes that have occurred to the sport and to the organization. This team will and has been his legacy to the town of Stratford. He's a home town boy who made good in his community. I will always be proud of John and always felt lucky to have worked with him as a player. Heck, I lived with his dad my first year and both his dad and I would have a night cap of I think it was whisky. God awful, but I would never let Pop know it was awful. He loved it. I cherish that time and those memories. I just wish I were closer to it.

11. What is the funniest thing you ever saw or heard on the field while playing for the Brakettes? In the dugouts? There are too many funny moments some I cannot reveal only privately because of the nature of the situation and those Brakettes know the stories I am referring to. One moment I will share was funny after the fact but it hurt initially. Andy Van Etten was hitting to the outfield and we were practicing cut-offs and I was playing first. So when Andy self- tossed the ball to hit to the outfield I immediately got myself into the cut off position by the pitcher's mound to provide a target for my outfielder. The next thing I know I got hit smacked on my leg near my butt . Here I was with my arms stretched out and sometimes I would yell "hit me, hit me". Well Andy hit me!

12. Now that the statute of limitations has passed, are there any off-the-field moments during your Brakette days you would like to share with your fans? I would rather just thank the fans; those that are still with the organization and those who have passed. I always said in any of the public speeches I gave over the years about my experiences that the fans of the Brakettes were the greatest fans ever because they knew the game better than other fans around the country.