

BERTHA PETINAK RAGAN TICKEY

Born “Borica Petinak” in March 1923 in Orosi, California, Bertha was the fifth of seven children of Chetko and Andja Petinak who were Serbian immigrants from Bosnia, Hercegovina.

Bertha lost her father when she was eleven and her mother when she was twelve and was raised by her older brothers and her godparents, Stana and Obreon Vuich. (Their daughter, Rose Ann Vuich, went on to become the first woman elected to the California State Senate in 1976.)

Bertha first played softball as shortstop on the Sultana girls travel ball team in 1937. She first pitched for the Alta Chevrolet team in Dinuba in 1938. The team traveled up and down California, often beating teams from larger cities.

Elwood Case, the manager of the Orange Lionettes heard about Bertha in 1939 and convinced her to come to Southern California to pitch for his team, at the tender age of sixteen. The Lionettes won the SoCal fast pitch championships in 1940, 1946 and 1947. At the ASA National Tourney in 1949, Bertha was crowned “Miss Softball. That year she struck out 756 batters in 60 games and also racked up 120 consecutive scoreless innings.

The Lionettes went on to win the ASA Fastpitch World Title in 1950, ‘51, ‘52, and 1955. In 1955 she threw 155 consecutive scoreless innings, a record that still stands today.

In 1956, Bertha packed up and headed East to help William Simpson develop his Raybestos Brakettes into a world class team. While there, Bertha led the Brakettes to National Championships in 1958, ‘59, ‘60, ‘63, and 1966, ‘67 and ‘68.

On August 15, 1962, she struck out baseball’s batting king, Ted Williams, twice, during a pre-game exhibition. She went on to pitch a shut out later in the evening for the Brakettes. In 1956 and ‘57, she worked for the fledging “Sports Illustrated” magazine, traveling around the U.S. with other top athletes promoting spectator sports as a national past time.

In 1963, Bertha married Ed Tickey, a former member of the Brooklyn Dodgers and catcher for the Raybestos Cardinals men’s softball team. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce sponsored a worldwide tour of women’s softball in 1965, designed to promote the sport for inclusion into the Olympic Games; which became a reality in 1996.

Bertha retired from competition in 1968, at age 46, after pitching her final game in the National Championship Tournament in front of her entire family. She struck out 20 of 21 batters in that regulation seven inning game, a record that still stands today.

Bertha pitched 757 career wins, with only 88 losses. She threw 42 perfect games and 162 no hitters. She was an 18 time All American, and eight time National Championship MVP. She owns eleven National Championship titles, four with Orange and seven with Raybestos. She threw a record three perfect games in national tourney play; one in 1950 (her first national title), another in 1954, and again in 1968 (her last title, and final game).

After retiring from softball, Bertha went on to a career with The Barnum Festivals in Stratford Connecticut, where she served as their executive director until her retirement in the early 1980's. She is a member of the ASA National Hall of Fame, the Connecticut Hall of Fame, The Orange County Hall of Fame, the Fresno Hall of Fame and the Central Valley Softball Hall of Fame. Dinuba High School named it’s Varsity Field in her honor on January 24, 2009. Bertha resides in Clovis, California.