

# Braking News

The Official Newsletter of the Stratford Brakettes, Junior Brakettes, and Select Brakettes

Volume 3, Issue 5

Written by Bob Baird (203) 218-1066

April/May 2021

## **STRATFORD BRAKETTES ARE NOT ONLY THE MOST SUCCESSFUL CLUB TEAM, THEY ARE THE OLDEST-CONTINUOUS TEAM IN THE HISTORY OF SOFTBALL**

For decades it was sketchy, at best. But, thanks to a pandemic, semantics no longer factors into the equation. From this time forward, the Stratford Brakettes softball team will be known as both the most successful 'club' team in the history of the sport and the oldest-continuous softball team since its inception in 1947.

With no disrespect intended to the Pekin, IL, Lettes softball program, or its storied history, for decades they have publicized the notion they were the "oldest-continuous" softball team in the world. However, that honor really belonged to the Brakettes.

The proof is in the difference between the words continual v. continuous. Continuous is a word that is used for an event that continues for some duration without any interruption. Continual is an adjective that is used in situations where a condition is repeated frequently. So, when a process starts, stops, and then restarts again, the word used to describe it is continual. When a process continues for a longer time without interruption, the word to be used is continuous.

The history of the Brakettes goes back to 1947 when Raybestos-Manhattan, Inc. General Manager Bill Simpson started a women's fastpitch softball team, called the "All-Stars." One year later the team became known as the Raybestos Brakettes. The Stratford plant produced brake linings for cars and trucks. They've never switched their nickname nor have they called anywhere home except Stratford, CT, first at iconic Raybestos Memorial Field through 1987 and from 1988 thru the present at DeLuca Field (originally named Avco Lycoming Field).

### ***That is an example of continuous.***

What eventually transformed into the Pekin, IL, Lettes (almost the same scenario how the old Washington Senators evolved into the current Minnesota Twins MLB team) began in Peoria in 1930 when the Caterpillar Girls softball team hit the field. The company is renowned for manufacturing tractors. When formed it was comprised of girls from the plant's auditing department. They became the Caterpillar Diesettes in 1940 and the Sunnyland Lettes in 1956 when they moved.

Legendary Chuck McCord - he later became ASA President - was named manager in 1947 and he remained through 1972, when he and pitcher Lorene Ramsey retired. Both were inducted later into the National ASA Hall of Fame. The City of Pekin offered the team use of Mineral Springs Park in 1959 and the team assumed the name "Pekin Lettes." Regarded as the pride of the Midwest during much of that era, the team never finished higher than third in the national tournament, which they accomplished in 1965 in Stratford.

In the team's 2008 program book and on their website, the City of Pekin honored them on their Golden Anniversary (50 years) Celebration. However, in 2019 the team announced it was their 90<sup>th</sup> consecutive season of play, making them the oldest-continuous softball team in the world!

It is hard to understand how a team organized and played its first game in 1959 could be celebrating its 90<sup>th</sup> consecutive year in 2019. Added to the mix is the fact that Manager Sandy Lambur (1981-87) moved the club to Fresno, CA, and played there two seasons. Lambur replaced another ex-Lettes player, Barb Fuller, who upon being fired by team management then started another Lettes team in neighboring Peoria.

Sounds like the old Washington Senators, one of the charter 8 American League cities. They moved to Minneapolis in 1961 and assumed the name Minnesota Twins. Two years later Washington had an expansion team, also called the Senators until they moved and became the Texas Rangers in 1972. The District of Columbia would remain without a team until the Montreal Expos moved and became the Washington Nationals.

***That is an example of what continual means.***

Rumor has it McCord was given the opportunity to become the Manager of the Brakettes in the late 1960's. We will never know for certain if that was fact or fiction. All the leading players at that time have departed to softball heaven - Simpson, team business manager and former ASA president Joseph T. Barber, and Lettes coach McCord.

This is what we know. The Stratford Brakettes are still the most successful and oldest continuous softball team in the world. Actor Bill Murray summarized it best, quoting a line from his 1981 movie *Stripes* where he proclaimed, "That's the FACT, Jack!"

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Pekin, IL, was one of the most supportive sites of women's softball in ASA history. The Brakettes have always enjoyed their trips to the marigold capitol of the Midwest. We last played at picturesque Mineral Spring Park in 2016 and won the six-team City of Pekin tournament title. The city last hosted an ASA national title event in 2003, also won by the Brakettes. The Coronavirus cancelled the Lettes' 2020 season, while the Brakettes managed to play a complete season, their 74<sup>th</sup> consecutive.

## **EX-TV AND RADIO CELEBRITY PAUL PIOREK IS OUR NEW PUBLIC ADDRESS ANNOUNCER**

For the first time in 34 years there will be a new voice over the public address system at Frank DeLuca Hall of Fame Field. "We will never replace the golden voice of Hal Baird," said Stratford Brakettes General Manager Bob Baird. "However, we are extremely pleased to announce that we have the Best 1-A celebrity you could find in Paul Piorek."

Piorek has been a media fixture in southwestern Connecticut for over 40 years. And he has been a fan of the Brakettes dating back to their days at Raybestos Memorial Field in the center of town. A Fairfield native, Paul was a 25-year veteran television meteorologist at News 12 Connecticut in Norwalk and a staff announcer at WICC Radio in Bridgeport for nearly a decade. On numerous occasions he did his weather forecast remotely at DeLuca Field, either in the morning or right at prime time during a Brakettes game or the national tournament.

Paul is no stranger to women's fastpitch softball. He and his sister Maryanne were regulars years back at Memorial Field. Paul was his sister's biggest fan when she played for nationally-ranked Sacred Heart University in the 1980's where Bob Baird was an assistant coach for the Pioneers.

Piorek is a New York Emmy award winner, a five-time Emmy nominee, and a four-time Connecticut Associated Press Broadcasters' Association award winner for Best Television Weathercast. Also, he is a two-time Communicator award winner and was voted Best Local Television Personality by the readers of Fairfield County Weekly magazine. Housatonic Community College presented him with the Distinguished Alumni Award and in 2012 he was inducted into the school's Hall of Fame.

Currently, Paul teaches Science and Mathematics in Fairfield and he is the voice of both Fairfield Ludlowe and Notre Dame of Fairfield High School football team. He has two sons, one of whom is a United States Marine.

## **13TH ANNUAL WMS CHAMPIONSHIPS FEATURES 14 TEAMS FROM 7 DIFFERENT STATES**

Before softball became an Olympic Sport with the 1996 Games, the highlight and culmination of each season was the ASA Women's Major Softball National Championship. Both the ASA Men's and Women's tournaments began in 1933. While the men's event is still played, albeit a watered-down product of what once was a spectacle, the women's tournament died in Buffalo, NY, in 2008, the final three games of it rained out with the sun brightly shining in early afternoon that Sunday.

Bob Baird and John Stratton planned the foundation for its successor, the Women's Major Softball National Championship. All the stars were in alignment and this year will be the 13<sup>th</sup> annual WMS at DeLuca and Short Beach Fields. Between 2009 and 2014 ASA was still awarding berths for the women's major. However, not one of them ever materialized. WMS is now the end of season destination.

The last ASA event in 2008 saw a 13-team field, five Buffalo teams and eight in total from New York in addition to the Brakettes, who finished third after the tournament committee decided the rain rendered all eight fields (one with lights) unplayable. If you believe that, Trump would still be in the White House.

This year's WMS features 14 teams from seven different states, the most ever for the event. In addition to the three Brakettes teams, out-of-state entries are: Maine Pride, Mass Drifters, Stripes & Strikes (Pennsylvania), Central New Jersey Lightning, Maryland Chill, and Tri-State Thunder (Delaware). Add in the CT Eliminators Women, CT Eliminators 18+, CT Seahawks, CT Impact, and CT Rogue teams and it should be a highly-competitive field.

## **DIAMONDS ARE A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND, ESPECIALLY THE ONES YOU PLAY SOFTBALL ON**

When the governing bodies of college and high school softball gave the go-ahead to play softball this spring, you could hear the collective sigh of relief. For some players and teams, it turned out great, but it left others thinking what could have been. Either way the outcome sure beats what happened in 2020 when everything was abruptly shut down in mid-March.

Players on all Brakettes rosters will have plenty of stories to tell this summer, ranging from outbreaks of COVID, lengthy periods of inactivity, and more cancellations than games played. The six college freshmen on Coach **Lauren Pitney's** Select squad all are anxiously awaiting their start. Some of them will play more games in one week this summer than they did during their entire collegiate season. The seven high school players will have fared much better as their seasons will be running into early June.

Probably the hardest hit was Clark University in Worcester, MA, which had to pause several times for COVID and only played eight games. Easton catcher **Rebecca Mauro** hit .231 and played errorless defense. Junior Brakettes standout **Maddie Procyk** of Monroe led Amherst College to an 11-5 record with her 5-0 pitching mark and a .349 batting average. Amherst played the entire season with only nine players.

The University of Bridgeport trio of pitcher/first baseman **Sam Schiebe** and centerfielder **Meg McFarland**, both of Masuk High, and West Haven's **Kia Robinson**, who started at third base, led the squad to a 20-7 record and a berth in the East Coast Conference championship series Friday at Seaside Park. McFarland was named second team ECC outfielder. Stratford Brakettes **Katie Sciglimpaglia** of Norwalk and **Sydney Senerchia** of North Branford led St. Peter's softball team, which showed promise despite a losing record. Senerchia pitched several gems, including two 11-inning no-decisions. She should sue for lack of offensive support.

### **From Happy Birthday Faith to Cassi looks for another All-State Selection**

Belated Happy Birthday wishes to **Faith Buchino**, the Brakettes longest-living fan who just turned 96 years young on May 5. . . Cheshire's **Abby Abramson** will not be playing this summer after getting accepted into Med School, which begins in early July. She is the only pitcher in Brakettes history with 10-plus decisions to finish her career unbeaten with a combined 18-0 record and 1.67 ERA. LSU standout **Rachele Fico** of Monroe has the highest winning percentage behind Abby, with her 94-1 record, the only loss coming to the Akron Racers of the National Pro Fastpitch league in 2012 . . . Fourth-year Brakettes pitcher **Ali DuBos** of Torrington, the All-America pitcher at Boston University, owns a 24-1 career record. She led top-seeded Boston University (33-2) into the Patriot League playoffs, boasting a 22-0 record with 137 K's and a 0.69 ERA . . . Junior Brakettes pitcher **Sophia DiCocco** (10-1) helped Tufts earn an automatic NCAA Division III berth by sweeping previously unbeaten Williams, 10-2 and 7-0 for the school's 12th conference crown. . . **Sarah Lawton**, the winningest pitcher for the 2020 WMS champion Stratford Brakettes, threw an 11-inning gem in the 1-0 clinching win over Stetson last week to earn a berth in the ASUN finals against Liberty. Lawton

allowed only two hits in the victory over Stetson in the divisional series. She is 8-6 with a 1.90 ERA and 67 strikeouts in 99.2 innings pitched. Liberty is coached by ASA Hall of Fame and ex-Brakettes shortstop **Dot Richardson** and is the top seed. . . Ardsley High (5-1), NY, standout **Sarah Rende**, a Select Brakette, is hitting .600 with three home runs and 14 RBI in six games. In their only loss she had all three of the team's hits and drew an intentional walk in her last at bat. . . Notre Dame shortstop **Mac Stone-Folmar**, another Select player, leads Connecticut with a .700-plus batting average, 12 home runs and 39 RBI for the 11-1 Lancers. . . Select players **Kelly Pritchard** (9-2) and infielder **Juliette Zito** are the top players for 11-2 Amity, the No. 10 team in the state. . . After earning first-team All-State in basketball at Trumbull High, catcher **Cassi Barbato** is cruising to another All-State selection this spring. She is hitting .550 with four home runs and 24 RBI for the 9-3 Golden Eagles.