

Braking News

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

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BRACKETTES 101:

Debuting in 1960 and continuing for 17 years, "What's My Line?" was a panel game show that originally ran in the United States on the CBS Television Network. The game used celebrity panelists to question contestants in order to determine their occupation. One of those contestants was Raybestos Brakettes Hall of Fame pitcher Bertha Tickey. The panel was unable to guess her specialty. Today we are going to play a new game that I call "What's My Name?"

The names of former Brakettes players are listed below and you will have to match them with their accomplishment, unusual situation/relationship, or occupational/celebrity status. You will quickly learn there are many ex-Brakettes who are not high school or college softball coaches or physical education teachers. Many have been and continue to be involved in important positions/occupations, both inside and outside of sports.

A. Ellen Tomasiewicz	B. Billie Jean Moore	C. Bailey Sanders	D. Joan Bonvincini
E. Lisa Brummel	F. Sheila Cornell-Douty	G. Joan Joyce	H. Donna Lopiano
I. Sherry Asleton	J. Sarah Calgreen	K. Cheri Kempf	L. Pat Dufficy
M. Joyce Compton	N. Keri McCallum	O. Donna Hebert	P. Irene Shea

1 _____ Who Am I? I served as head coach of the Italian National softball team in the 1974 World Championships at Raybestos Memorial Field before I was named women's athletic director at the University of Texas (which did not have softball at that time). I proudly served as the CEO of the Women's Sports Foundation from 1992-2007.

2 _____ Who Am I? I have been a member of the U.S. Marshall Service since 2012. One of the people I have been charged with protecting is Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, who administered the Oath of Office January 20 to Vice President Kamala Harris.

3 _____ Who Am I? When I first joined the Brakettes in 1991, upon arriving at Textron Lycoming Field I noticed hundreds of workers picketing at the plant adjacent to the field. On my second tour of duty in 1995, when I arrived for opening day there was another strike in progress. For the past 14-plus years I have been involved in softball administration at its highest level as Commissioner of the National Pro Fastpitch league.

4 _____ Who Am I? I am one of a handful of players in ASA Women's Major softball history to win national titles on 3 different teams. I earned a Master's degree in physical therapy in 1989 from USC and worked in that field until 1994 when I devoted full time to softball and was fortunate to represent the USA in the 1996 and 2000 Olympic Games.

5 _____ Who Am I? I played softball and basketball at Weston High and Princeton University as well as second base on the Raybestos Brakettes from 1977-80. Since 1993 I have been the Principal French Horn for the Naples, FL, Philharmonic Orchestra.

6 _____ Who Am I? I played sports at Staples (Westport, CT) High and Yale University. I served as Executive Vice President at Microsoft until my retirement in 2014. I continue to be co-owner of the WNBA Seattle Storm.

7 _____ Who Am I? I pitched for UConn and the Raybestos Brakettes in 1979-80. I am a life-long Boston Red Sox fan, and my husband is Rich Gedman, the Red Sox starting catcher for many years.

8 ____ Who Am I? I was the first head coach of the United States Women's Olympic basketball team in 1976. I also am the first women's college basketball coach to win national championships at two different universities. And from 1969-72, I played for the Raybestos Brakettes.

9 ____ Who Am I? I am one of the few pitchers to beat the Brakettes with a no-hitter before joining their staff the next year. Now I am a General and Bariatric surgeon in North Carolina.

10 ____ Who Am I? I will bet you did not know I was a member of the USA National Women's Basketball team for two years and set a record with 67 points in a game. In addition, I was named a four-time Women's Basketball Association All-America and a two-time Amateur Athletic Union All-America.

(ANSWERS TO THE QUIZ ARE FOUND ON THE BOTTOM OF THE NEXT PAGE—Do Not cheat by looking. I am watching!)

'Total Body of Work' is Leading the Survey

And the survey says

Here are the results of Stratford Brakettes survey, thru January 24, 2021, to acknowledge the Top Five accomplishments in team history as we prepare to celebrate our 75th Diamond Anniversary season. The survey appeared in the November, 2020 newsletter and is located on the Brakettes website homepage at www.brakettes.com. Voting will continue through April 15. The Final results will be published in our 2021 season program.

It appears the overwhelming support thus far is for Item F, the 74-year record of 3,975 wins against only 408 defeats, a 90% winning percentage. As the talking heads on ESPN say during the College Game Day shows for the CFP and the NCAA Basketball tournaments, a team's overall body of work is the most important indicator. Such is the case with the Brakettes survey.

Broken down over the decades, that equates to a season average of 53.7 wins per year as opposed to 5.5 losses. Considering the best records in Brakettes history have come since they first became relevant on the national scene with the 1958 National championship, those figures are eye-popping to say the least.

With 87 ballots cast, Item F has collected 24 first place votes, or 27% of the total submitted to earn 249 points (five for first choice, four for second and continuing to one for fifth choice). The next highest vote total was for Item G, the team's 38 national titles (28 ASA and 10 WMS), with 159 points. However, G only garnered 10 first place votes but bulked up with plenty of second, third, and fourth place votes.

One point behind with 158 third place was Item D, 23 National ASA Hall of Famers. Item E, 14 members of USA Olympic Teams, was fourth with 153 points, while Item B, eight consecutive ASA National crowns from 1971-78, was in fifth place with 144 points.

All 11 items received votes, the lowest accrued by Item C, a 30-0 win over Washington, D.C. Metros in the 1992 national tourney in Redding, CA. The item received no first place votes and only seven points.

Don't forget to cast your ballot today!

The 'eyes' have: 20-20 vision does not make you an umpire!

Brakettes General Manager Bob Baird recently had successful cataract surgery in both eyes, the same procedure Manager John Stratton had last fall. When asked how it went, Bob responded, "Great. I can see 20-20 out of both eyes for the first time in 60 years and without glasses. I might go take the test and become a softball umpire!" Upon hearing that frightening revelation, Stratton told Baird, "You will never get assigned a game." Baird came right back at him, "Why would you say that?" Stratton shot back, "Because now you're over-qualified. None of the umps can see!"

Hal Baird, 'The Voice', has been silenced, but he will never be forgotten!

It will never be the same at Frank DeLuca Hall of Fame Field. The Voice has been silenced.

The Stratford Brakettes will open their 75th season June 4 without a key member of the organization. With the passing of Harold 'Hal' Baird last December 22nd, the Brakettes will be missing their long-time public address announcer. He had become a fixture with the team two years before they moved to their present home in 1988.

"Sure, we will be able to get someone to do the announcing for us," said Brakettes General Manager Bob Baird, ironically no relation to Hal. "However, you will never replace someone like Hal. He was to Brakettes Softball what the late Bob Sheppard was to the New York Yankees."

A veteran radio announcer for over 20 years, working at both of Bridgeport's AM stations WNAB and WICC, he possessed a unique, comforting, and professional voice that welcomed everyone to the ballgame with his familiar, "Good evening, and welcome to Frank DeLuca Hall of Fame Field, home of the Stratford Brakettes."

He was neither a cheerleader nor a homer over the microphone. He was spot on with difficult names, pronouncing each one with care and precision. He never wavered from being the consummate professional, letting fans know who was batting, who was playing afield, along with timely and well-written advertisements and announcements during play.

His 35th and final season with the Brakettes was a precarious one, not only from the perils of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hal had been in failing health for over a year and just making it up the stairs to his press box seat had become a struggle. But he did his job, just as he did for so many years without fanfare or fuss. Ultimately, it was the coronavirus that robbed us of this talented softball aficionado and his platinum voice.

A life-long Brakettes Softball fan, and proud of it, Hal also enjoyed hockey and was well-known for his 20-plus years of service announcing the games of New Haven-based professional teams the New Haven Blades and American Hockey League franchise New Haven Nighthawks.

The long-time Stratford resident also worked at Sterling House Community Center and was well-respected by all. In his spare time, he would spend many Fridays reading to the blind. He never sought to hang out in the limelight, rather he performed his duties in the background, specifically the confines of the press box.

In addition to announcing 1,265 Brakettes home games since the team moved from iconic Raybestos Memorial Field in the center of Stratford, to a former slow pitch ballfield on South Main Street, Hal also worked 14 other ASA National tournaments and three visits by the USA Olympic team, which were brought to town by Stratford Softball Tournament, Inc. On each occasion he also performed the duty of master-of-ceremonies prior to their start. Each of those tournaments featured a minimum of 30 games, so you do the math. He spent a good portion of his adult life hunkered down at DeLuca Field, first in the rickety old green press box, propped up by cement blocks and resembling the guard tower on the venerable TV show *F-Troop*, to the present version built in 2000. Whenever the boom box malfunctioned and he was unable to play the National Anthem, Hal would sing it himself. Once the night's games were over, he would complete his duties by addressing the fans with "Thank you for coming tonight and please drive home safely."

Yes, 'The Voice' may be gone, but he will never be forgotten!

Here are the correct answers to the Brakettes 101 Quiz

1 – H; 2 – J; 3 – K; 4 - F; 5 – A; 6 – E; 7 – I; 8 – B; 9 – C; 10 – G

Grade Yourself:

10 correct- You can have my job as Brakettes General Manager

8-9 correct- You obviously followed the Brakettes from their days at Raybestos Memorial Field

6-7 correct- You take a daily game program and occasionally read the CT Post

0-5 correct- It is time to go to our website and cram for the next Quiz

Scatter-shooting around the College Softball World with Stratford Brakettes players

UConn was off to a fast start at 16-5 before the virus cancelled 2020. The Huskies open February 12 at Conway, SC, and will play three Top 25 teams prior to Big East action March 13 against Georgetown. Sixth-ranked Texas, 19 South Carolina and 22 Baylor are all on tap. Stratford Brakettes standout shortstop **Briana Marcelino** of Easton is a key figure for UConn. She hit .348 last spring and led the club with 27 runs, 24 RBI, 23 hits, eight doubles, 41 total bases and a .522 slugging %, plus four home runs. Brakettes newcomer **Jana Sanden** of Riverton was outstanding for Northwest Regional, leading them to three Berkshire League titles. The 5-10 freshman is a dynamic infielder and played the past two summers for the NJ Batbusters . . . Manhattan figures to have an outstanding season, led by catcher **Kaitlyn Flood** of Southbury and shortstop **Lauren Rende** of Arsdley, NY. Flood was second on the Jaspers with a .419 batting average and eight RBI, starting in all but one game. Rende, who excelled last year for the Junior Brakettes, hit .382 and was third in slugging percentage at .559 for the 6-6 Jaspers. In 2019 Rende was the New York State Class B Player of the Year.

Juniors **Emma Larke** of Shelton, an outfielder, and third baseman **Rebecca Findley** of Seymour are anxiously awaiting Maine's opener. Larke hit .286, for the 2-7 Lady Bears last spring, while Findley appeared in five games as a starter. . . Patriot League rivals Boston University and Colgate University feature pitcher **Ali DuBois** of Torrington and Seymour outfielder **Rebecca Johnson**, respectively. They will meet in a four-game series in Boston April 3-4. DuBois is a two-time Patriot League Player of the Year in 2018 and 2019. Last year she went 9-5 for the Terriers of **Ashley Waters**, a Brakettes standout second baseman. She carved out a 1.44 ERA with 95 K's in 87 innings for 14-8 BU. Johnson, a former CT Gatorade Player of the Year, started all 20 games for the 12-8 Red Raiders in 2020, placing second with 11 runs and leading the team in sacrifice hits.

Courtney Cashman is back at UMass Lowell for her 'fifth' year, thanks to the NCAA, and coach **Danielle Henderson**, a former Brakettes Olympian pitcher, couldn't be happier. Cashman hit .491 with eight home runs and 22 RBI for the 8-8 Riverhawks in 2020. She won the **Micki Stratton MVP** award and the **Diane Schumacher** Batting Trophy with a .727 mark in last year's WMS. . . Waterbury's **Sarah Lawton** fashioned an 8-4 record for Florida Gulf Coast (19-8) last year. She appeared in 17 games with a 2.16 ERA and 80 strikeouts in 71.1 innings of work . . . St. Peter's University won four of its last six games, thanks to shortstop **Katie Sciglimpaglia** of Norwalk and Northford's **Sydney Senerchia**. Sciglimpaglia hit .242 in 14 games and Senerchia led the staff with a 3.21 ERA and 1.65 WHIP. St. Peter's opens March 27 v. Iona.

Sophomore catcher **Alexa Milius** has transferred from Central Connecticut to Virginia Tech of the ACC where she is second on the depth chart for the 20th ranked Hokies. Milius hit .374 in 2019 and was injured during CCSC's 0-4 season last year. . . Senior **Kristen Acocella** of Redding is hopeful of playing, but Dickson College is currently on a 'pause', while two-time captain **Gillian Birk** of Westport is the top offensive threat for Trinity College . . . Pennsylvania pitcher **Abby Abramson** of Cheshire and Yale outfielder **Gretchen Bunovsky** of Monroe both have taken GAP years since the status of Ivy League softball will not be known until the end of February. By doing that they maintain remaining eligibility as the Ivies do not allow players to participate once they have graduated or have been enrolled more than four years. . . Recent grads center-fielder **Val Suto** of Seton Hall and pitcher **Kaysee Talcik** of UMass Lowell will be using the spring season to get in shape now that their collegiate days are behind them.

In the March Issue we will review the collegiate players on both the Junior and Select Brakettes teams.

From Brakettes mourn loss of Kalafus; to decision Reunion Weekend in March

Annette Kalafus of Shelton passed away in January. She was a member of the inaugural 1947 and one of the most well-liked Brakettes. The last living member of that teams is **Midge Milowski**. . . Connecticut's top two high school girl's basketball teams are Notre Dame of Fairfield and Trumbull High. Select Brakettes outfielder **Mac Stone-Fulmer**, the state's reigning home run champion with 19 back in 2019, is a starting guard for the top-ranked Lancers, while Trumbull senior **Cassi Barbato** of Milford (she is part of THS Agricultural program) is a highly-touted shooting guard. Stone-Fulmer of Bethel has signed a softball Letter of Intent with Barry

University in Miami, while catcher Barbato has signed with Radford, VA. . . A decision on Reunion Weekend, tentatively set for July 9-11, will be finalized in early March. The status of the coronavirus is the deciding factor as many of the returning Brakettes players are in the age category that makes them extremely vulnerable.