

Braking News

The Official Newsletter of the Stratford Brakettes/Junior Brakettes/18U Select Brakettes

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FAU SLUGGER ANSWERED THE ‘CALL’ FOR THE STRATFORD BRAKETTETS

Stephanie Call never got the opportunity to represent the United States on the softball diamond. She played her Brakettes career just three years into a 12-year hiatus from softball’s next scheduled appearance in the 2020 Olympics. Well, she finally got her chance to play for Team USA last summer as a member of the USA Softball Women’s Slow Pitch Futures team.

It’s doubtful she would have received a look if there had been Olympic Games in 2012 or 2016 since the selection process is heavily slanted toward college standouts in the Power Five Conferences. It’s similar to the College Football Playoff where the SEC, Big Ten, and ACC are the chief powerbrokers.

Nevertheless, Stephanie Call played on some of the finest teams in Brakettes softball history from 2011-2014. She played three years and eight games, a total of 202 games. During that time the Brakettes compiled a 200-8 overall record and posted two unbeaten seasons (2011 and 2013). Coming to Stratford from Florida Atlantic University, where she played for Hall of Famer Joan Joyce, the 6-foot-2 Call arrived highly touted and she didn’t disappoint.

The Fort Lake, FL, native set the individual season home run record with 31 in her first year and followed with marks of 21 and 22. Coming back for a long weekend in 2014, Call played in eight wins and hit five solo homers in 16 at bats, finishing her career with 79 home runs, good for the No. 3 spot all-time. Consider this, all-time home run leader Denise Denis had 135 in 15 years and Pat Dufficy, who is second at 91, played in 19 seasons. You get the idea that if Call had kept playing, her totals would have been off the charts.

On July 13, 2012 she hit the longest ball in the history of DeLuca Field when her first-inning blast of the nightcap of a twin-bill sweep over the Mass Pride cleared the 300-foot permanent center field fence. The monstrous blast traveled 344 feet before hitting a cedar tree deep in the wetlands. Only former Olympian Jessica Mendoza, now ESPN Baseball analyst, had ever hit the back barrier on a fly in 2008. See the action on U-Tube by going to “300-foot Home Run.”

JUNIOR’S GILLIAN KANE NAMED SPRINGFIELD COLLEGE CO-CAPTAIN

Junior Brakettes pitcher Gillian Kane of New Canaan has been named co-captain of the Springfield College softball team for the 2021 season. Kane is a junior pitcher for the Pride. After a solid 2019 freshmen season, she was the starting and winning pitcher in Springfield’s only game last spring, a 5-2 win over Amherst before the season was abruptly halted due to the COVID-19 virus.

In 2018 Kane started 17 games, winning nine in 85.1 innings with a 4.18 ERA. She had six complete games and struck out 37 batters. Her combined no-hitter against Westfield State was the first for the Pride since 2011. Playing in 25 games, she had 11 hits and drove in as many runs.

Winning three games and posting a 2.13 ERA last summer for Coach Mary Scigliompaglia Brainard’s Junior Brakettes, Kane batted .412 with a home run, eight RBI and nine runs scored. In two years the Junior Brakettes were 25-11-1 and 24-11. When you delete the wins and losses against the Stratford Brakettes the record is 48-8-1.

**DON’T FORGET TO READ THE BACK PAGE OF THIS NEWSLETTER
FOR A SPECIAL HOLIDAY TREAT- MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!**

CIRCUMSTANCES FORCE PRO LEAGUE TO 'GO DARK' FOR SECOND YEAR IN A ROW

News Flash!

The National Pro Fastpitch League, operating since 2004, announced earlier this month that it will forego the 2021 season, marking the second straight year it will go dark. The 2020 season was cancelled last May when the novel Coronavirus made it impossible to play.

Here's a portion of the press release: "Confronted with multiple COVID-related problems, the National Pro Fastpitch (NPF) has decided to suspend games for the 2021 season, making this the second consecutive year the league has done so. NPF home venues either are not available, or are available only with restrictive conditions on attendance and COVID protocols, making individual team operations difficult. A season already curtailed by the one-year delay of the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo, is expected to be abbreviated further by quarantine requirements imposed on the international teams participating in NPF."

NPF planned on five teams in 2021, three of them the international Olympic teams of Australia (Aussie Peppers), Canada (Canadian Wild), and Mexico (Cleveland Comets). They would have joined the charter member Chicago Bandits and first-year California Commotion. A fourth Olympic qualifier, Italy, was slated to play several exhibition games against NPF teams. China (Beijing Eagles) opted out after 2020, while the ultra-successful USSSA Pride of Viera, FL, exited after 2019.

Former Brakettes pitcher Cheri Kempf (1991-93, 1995) has done an outstanding job of keeping NPF afloat despite seeing 33 different franchises since its inception. The Brakettes organization participated in NPF in 2006, going under the banner of Connecticut Brakettes, while still maintaining an amateur team. Stratford Brakettes Manager John Stratton coached the professional Brakettes, while his son Jay skippered the Stratford Brakettes to an ASA championship in Buffalo, NY. Both John Stratton and Brakettes Softball General Manager Bob Baird agree that "if Cheri was the commissioner when Connecticut Brakettes were in NPF, we probably wouldn't have dropped out in 2007."

The Connecticut Brakettes finished runner-up in both the regular season and post-season championship tournament, bowing 2-0 to the New England Riptide in the finals at DeLuca Field. There were seven teams in the NPF and they all finished with a winning record. That's because they played a rotating list of international teams who visited the United States with those games counting in the overall NPF standings. China, Chinese Taipei, Puerto Rico, Japanese pro team Denso, Venezuela, Canada, and 2007 NPF candidate Michigan Cruise let each team play a 48-game regular season.

While there are hundreds of talented elite softball players in the country, finding credible and well-funded sponsors has become a documented problem. Back in 2006 all the teams were stocked with USA college talent with just a smattering of foreign flavor. This season would have seen at least 60 percent of rosters filled with international players.

"Promises of a 10-team league in 2007 and a weekly national television contract were enticement to get us to join," said Baird. "Also, not all the teams visited DeLuca, most notable being the Chicago Bandits and their poster girl pitcher Jenny Finch. The hardest pill to swallow was the inability to sign No. 1 draft pick Cat Osterman who played on our 2005 amateur team. Chicago Bandits GM and then NPF commissioner Bill Conroy guaranteed us that all of our 2005 players would be returned to us. They pulled some shenanigans to make sure that Cat didn't sign, making her available for the 2007 draft where she was taken by the Rockford, IL, Thunder, whose owner was a close friend of Conroy."

Let's hope that Kempf can make a return to play in 2022 a reality since there are so many aspiring young women who have dreamed of playing in NPF after college. A total of 45 former Brakettes have also played in the league.

Quiz: Who were the other six teams in the NPF with the Brakettes in 2006? Answer on next page.

WHO SAYS THREE'S A CROWD? DEFINITELY NOT THE SELECT BRACKETTES

While the season opener is a few days shy of six months from now, the newly-formed Select (18U) Brakettes coaching staff is anxiously looking forward to that day. The team will open the 2021 season by appearing in the Summer Slam Invitational at Meriden, CT's Dunn Sports Complex June 18-20. It is one of six tournaments the newest member of the Brakettes Softball family – they join the Stratford and Junior Brakettes, will play in.

Head Coach **Lauren Pitney** and assistants **Jaymie Sommers** and **Jack Pritchard** are excited about the opportunity to join the Brakettes organization. "I am looking forward to opening day," said Pitney, who recently retired from the Stratford Brakettes after four outstanding years as their all-star second baseman. "We've assembled a very competitive team and I think once we get to work our fans will be really surprised."

The Select Brakettes also will be playing in the Spartan Classic in Meriden June 25-27, the Micki Stratton Round Robin July 17-18 at DeLuca Field, the Caroline Farley Tournament in Concord, NH, July 23-25, the Shoreline Stinger XV in Guilford, July 31-August 1, and the 13th annual Women's Major Softball National Championship at DeLuca Field August 5-8.

The team is comprised of six college freshmen and nine high school seniors. They possess solid pitching, a plethora of offensive weapons, and have the potential to be strong defensively. Leading the staff will be Bentley College frosh **Payton Doiron** of Beacon Falls, an All-Stater at Trumbull's St. Joseph High, and Notre Dame of Fairfield All-State pick **Briana Brown** of Shelton, who will be playing at North Carolina's Fayetteville State. **Kelly Pritchard** of Amity High, Stamford High's **Jordan Rossi**, and Ridgefield's **Skylar Arent**, the only southpaw, complete the pitching staff.

Joel Barlow grad **Rebecca Mauro** of Easton and Berlin High star **Callie Gendron** are freshmen at Clark University in Worcester, MA, and Springfield College, respectively, catch and play third basemen, while Danbury's **Kendell McNamara** catches and plays first base. **Lea White**, an All-State pick from Maloney High, is a scholarship freshman at UMass-Lowell, where she will play for former Brakettes pitching standout **Danielle Henderson**. Westhill of Stamford's **Maddy Bautista** and Danbury High's **Emily Stefanelli** are other infielders who can also play the outfield.

The four primary outfielders will be Notre Dame of Fairfield's **Mac Stone-Fulmer**, Amity's **Juliette Zito**, Ardsley High, NY, All-Region pick **Sarah Rende**, and Shepaug High grad **Lucy Puskas**, another Springfield College recruit. Pitney is the graduate assistant at Springfield, which is under the tutelage of **Katie Bowen**, a former All-Star second baseman for the Brakettes. Rende is the younger sister of 2020 Junior Brakettes shortstop **Lauren Rende**, who was promoted to the Stratford Brakettes following Pitney's retirement.

Stone-Fulmer is the daughter of Western Connecticut State Coach **Heather Stone** and she led Connecticut with 19 home runs as a sophomore in 2019. She has committed to Barry University in Miami. Puskas played for Team Connecticut the past two years and she has developed a familiarity with the DeLuca Field home run fence, hitting four balls over it last summer. One of her booming blasts came against Brakettes ace **Kaysee Talcik**, who was perturbed at first, but when she learned Lucy was going to be a Select Brakettes player in 2021, she replied, "then that's okay."

ANSWER TO QUIZ: New England Riptide, Arizona Heat, Texas Thunder, Akron Racers, Chicago Bandits, and Philadelphia Force.

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS WITH APOLOGIES TO CLEMENT C. MOORE

'Twas the night before Christmas
And all through the park
Not a player found anywhere
It was getting quite dark

The bats, gloves and balls
Neatly placed on the bench
The trash cans still filled
And wow, what a stench!

Pit, Val, and Emma Larke
Shivering in their cars
They'd rather go out to eat
Than play under the stars

Coach Botto in her mask
And Jay beneath his cap
But Big John was missing
Is he taking a nap?

The fans now arriving
and they entered the gate
Yes, there'd be a game
Even if it starts late

Umpires Cliff and the Bullet
Replete with their tools
Standing at home plate
To review the ground rules

The moon shining brightly
Some lights remained out
Sluggers Flood and Milius
Anxious to supply clout

When all of a sudden
A familiar figure did appear
With eight starting players
Who brought all their gear

The old softball icon
With his players in tow
Coach Stratton the legend
Was hoping for snow!

"Now, Rende! Now, Sydney!
Now, Findley! and Gillian B
"On! Alyssa, On! Sophia,
On! Chach, and Jenna G.

Briana will play shortstop
Scig go to 2nd base
Kaysee T's on the mound
Since her nickname is ace

Mark Dempsey's not here
Gillian Kane's got the book
Ali Dubois is up next
If Talcik gets the hook

So manning the outfield
Is Gretch, Kristen and Britt
If the offense goes stale
McCann's there to pinch hit

Then, without any warning
Cassi, Kailey reach for a stick
They want the coaches to know
They're not here for kicks

Holly, Becca J, & Abby O
All threats with their speed
Pitchers Abramson and Lawton
Insurance if there's a need

For Kia, Schiebe and McFarland
Three Purple Knight mates
Their collegiate softball futures
Have suddenly turned great!

Vadas is lights out pitching
Procyk has plenty of class
Dana and Jana's fielding is superb
And GiGi's the Fordham flash

Danny, Moe and family Gage
Working behind the scenes all
Listened as Will and Rob B
Took turns making the call

Bob Baird, aka Mr. 50/50
Suddenly turned off the lights
When S. Claus and posse
Disappeared into the night

But Bob heard him exclaim
As he drove out of sight
Happy Christmas to all
And to all a Good Night