

# Braking News

The Official Newsletter of the Stratford Brakettes/Junior Brakettes

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***Destination: Become the first female MLB umpire-***

## **Ex-Brakette Jen Pawol enjoying each stop on her journey!**

It was a sunny and extremely muggy Sunday morning in Auburn, AL, August 15, 2004 when the Stratford Brakettes and Storm USA of Lake Forest, CA, met at Jane B. Moore Field for the ASA Women's Major softball tournament championship.

Scoreless entering the home seventh inning, Erica Sobel lined a 1-2 pitch into right-center for a one-out double. Manager John Stratton quickly inserted the versatile and talented Jen Pawol as pinch runner. Pawol, an experienced 27-year-old utility player, offered a better chance at reaching home on a close play than Sobel. It was a nail-biter when 12-year veteran Donna McLean on a 2-2 pitch, hit a soft liner down the left field line. Off on the pitch, Pawol's speedy legs and softball savvy produced the game's only run and the Brakettes 26<sup>th</sup> national title.

The result wasn't expected when the team opened its season after losing virtually the entire roster from consecutive championship campaigns of 78-1 and 65-5. The majority of those players left for the new National Pro Fastpitch League, leaving Stratton with a lot of holes to fill in the lineup. The chance to win a national title was the main reason Pawol, primarily a catcher, came to the Brakettes.

When I recently spoke with Jen for this newsletter feature, I couldn't resist telling her how I was yelling with each stride she took from second base. I didn't think she would beat the throw home. Jen replied, "I was thinking the same thing, but I was able to slide under the tag."

Pawol had joined the Brakettes after stops with the New Jersey Shilohs, Clifton, NY, Charmers, New Jersey Chips, Montclair Majestics, Waterbury Diamonds and Topton, PA, VIPs. "Playing with the Brakettes was the height of my softball career. I loved every minute of it."

Her softball days are now over, but the memories are still fresh in her mind as she continues preparing for the most important journey of her life. The destination is to become the first female umpire to be assigned to a regular-season Major League Baseball game. There are many roads

remaining to be traversed, however, her persistence and strong work ethic continues to pay off with each passing season.

Here are some of the highlights of her journey:

- Began a love affair with baseball at the age of 2.
  - She was a two-year soccer and softball All-State selection at West Milford, NJ, High School.
  - 1995 high school grad earned softball scholarship to Hofstra University, where she hit .332 in her career.
  - Played for USA Baseball Women's National Team
  - Umpired Division I baseball for 10 years and was discovered at a clinic in Atlanta in 2015 by MLB umps Ted Barrett and Paul Nauert, who asked if she would be interested in going into professional baseball. Pawol responded, "You do know I am a woman?" They replied, "We've been watching you. We're more interested in your umpiring proficiency than in your gender!" They opened the crack in the door and Jen is the one who kicked it open!
  - Invited to try out at MLB camp in Cincinnati, attended by every MLB umpire supervisor. Made the cut and was one of 31 umpires invited to the Umpire Training Academy in Ft. Myers, FL.
  - After 5-week course, earned a spot in the advanced course and was offered a job in the Gulf Coast League in 2016.
  - Spent 2017 in the short-season New York-Penn Class A league.
  - Began 2018 in NY-Penn League and was promoted in July to the Midwest League.
- (See Pawol on next page)**

## PAWOL

- In spring training, Pawol worked (plate ump) the Detroit Tigers-Florida Southern exhibition game Feb. 22, 2018 in Lakeland, drawing the praise of Tigers manager Ron Gardenhire. He made it a point to personally compliment her. “You did a helluva job, very nice.” That game was the first time a woman worked a game involving a major league team. Gardenhire added, “She handled herself really well. There was no pissing or moaning from the dugouts.”
- She reports in March for spring training, already having signed a contract to work in the long-season South Atlantic League, which has teams from Ft. Myers to Lakewood, NJ. The season runs from April 1 through Labor Day with umpers getting only one day off every 30.

Jen is the seventh female to umpire in an affiliated league and the first since 2007. Pam Postema (1977-89) advanced as high as Triple-A. Paul Habgden, a reporter for MLB.com wrote, “There is no guarantee that Pawol will be the first woman to break through to the Major Leagues. Just like a player, she’ll have to prove herself at every level. But it’s obvious she’s off to a good start.”

“I’m working out every day to stay in shape and I’m constantly studying the game to be the best possible umpire I can be. I’m always thinking of answers to the various questions I will be asked. There’s no time to take it easy.”

I concluded by asking Jen this hypothetical question, “What would you do if you called out, say, Aaron Judge on a close play at a base and he vehemently disagreed with the call?” She answered, “Nothing at all, but he better be polite!”

## OLYMPIC TEAM VISIT POSSIBLE FOR 2020

**Nothing has been finalized, but it’s quite possible that Team USA will be visiting Frank DeLuca Hall of Fame Field in 2020 on its Junket to Japan! More later.**

## *The Cat is Back with Team USA*

The Cat came back, the very next day... The Cat came back, thought he was a goner... but he just couldn’t stay away. This 1893 comical lyric, written by Henry Miller, describes the softball path of Cat Osterman, who ended her three-year retirement from competitive fast pitch softball last fall to make a comeback with one goal in mind - earn a berth on Team USA for the 2020 Olympic Games in Japan.

Following a five-day trial in Clearwater, FL, on Jan. 6, the 35-year-old Osterman, who pitched for the Stratford Brakettes (2001, ’02, ’05), successfully completed the first test in her quest. She was one of 18 players selected to Team USA which will compete in games still to be determined before the roster is reduced to 15 for the Pan-American Games in Peru this summer.

The left-handed Osterman was the losing pitcher against Japan in the 2008 Olympics, the last time softball was on the agenda. The current assistant/pitching coach at Texas State University won a gold medal in the 2004 games. Team USA played the Brakettes at DeLuca Field in preparation for the ’04 Games in Greece and ’08 Games in Beijing, China.

Osterman retired from international competition after the 2010 world championships and she retired from the National Pro Fastpitch League after the 2015 season.

Joining Osterman on the team is southpaw Moncia Abbott, who is still pitching professionally in both the NPF and Japan’s pro league. They are the only remaining members of the 2008 team on the roster.

Osterman (Texas) and Abbott (Tennessee) still rank first and second, respectively, in NCAA career strikeouts, while Abbott remains the all-time leader in wins and Osterman the leader in strikeout rate.

Kelly Kretschman (Alabama), who played for the Stratford Brakettes in 2003 and the pro Connecticut Brakettes in 2006, failed to make the cut after playing in the 2004 and 2008 Olympics.

University of South Florida head coach Ken Erickson is coach of all USA Softball women’s national teams.

## Junior Brakettes roster boasts a talented group of players

Despite the fact that the Junior Brakettes got a late start in the recruiting battles, the team has a 'championship look' to its roster that currently numbers 14 players. Heading the list of talented Junior Brakettes is the latest signee, Rebecca 'Becca' Johnson of Seymour, the 2018 Connecticut Gatorade 'Softball Player of the Year.'

Head coach Mary Scigliompaglia Brainard and her dad Rob have done an excellent job of lining up players and they're not done yet. Michael Britt is assistant coach. "We still are awaiting word from two, and possibly three, more players," said Mary. "I think that Brakettes fans, the most knowledgeable in softball, will be pleased with our team. I expect many of these young ladies to eventually earn a spot on the Stratford Brakettes. Some of them may see fill-in action for John Stratton's club this year."

The Junior Brakettes will debut in the Cornfield Classic in Lyons, PA, June 8-9. The Stratford Brakettes also will be playing in that event, which features many of the top women's major teams in the east. There are still some openings on the Junior Brakettes schedule, which presently features between 30-35 games. Their home games will be played at Frank DeLuca Hall of Fame Field.

Johnson, the MVP of the 2017 CIAC Class M tournament, hit .732 in 2018 at Seymour. The speedy left-handed leadoff hitter had 35 stolen bases, 44 runs scored and a .780 on-base percentage. Named first team All-State, she also was a second team Max Prep All-America. The Colgate University freshman is joined by former Seymour teammate Rebecca Findley. The three-time All-State pick is expected to start at third base for Maine, where another All-Stater at Luralton Hall, Emma Larke, is a freshman outfielder and a touted Junior Brakette player.

Five other college freshmen will be playing for the team. They are Katie Scigliompaglia of Norwalk at St. Peter's, Niagara University pitcher Savannah Smalls, ex-Notre Dame pitcher/infielder Tiffany Diao at Delaware State, Trinity's Maura Keary of Luralton Hall, and Gillian Kane of New Canaan High, who will pitch for ex-Brakette Katie Bowen at Springfield. Kane holds both the school and FCIAC record for career strikeouts.

### **DANNI STRONG Night at Bridgeport Sound Tigers**

Danni Kemp left us way too soon. She was taken by DIPG (Diffuse Intrinsic Pontine Glioma), a rare and inoperable form of brain cancer in 2016. However, her memory will always be part of us. Let's get out on February 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> and show our support to the Danni Kemp Cancer Support Fund.

The Bridgeport Sound Tigers of the American Hockey League will be honoring Danni and others who have lost their battle and those who continue to fight against cancer. It will be DANNI STRONG Night at the Sound Tigers with a portion of each ticket going back to the Danni Kemp Cancer Support Fund.

There are two options for those games at the Arena at Harbor Yard in Bridgeport. Option #1 is purchasing a game ticket for \$20, while Option #2 is purchasing a game ticket and a pre-game wine tasting from 4:30-6 p.m. for \$25.

If you would like to purchase tickets contact Tarah Kelly of the Sound Tigers at (203) 345-4859 or [Tarah.kelly@harboryardse.com](mailto:Tarah.kelly@harboryardse.com). The order form may also be obtained by visiting:

<https://fevo.me/dannistrong> or downloading it from [www.brakettes.com](http://www.brakettes.com)

Ticket orders must be received by February 6.

Touted catcher Kaitlyn Flood of Pomperaug (Southbury), the South-West Conference Joel Barlow tandem of pitcher/first baseman Claire McCann and shortstop Abby Ota, Luralton Hall outfielder Maggie Britt, Hamden High infielder Kiana Robinson, and Masuk High outfielder/catcher Gretchen Bunovsky, who will also see action with the big team, are the current high school players on the club.

The Junior Brakettes will compete in the Linden, NJ, Majors tournament June 15-16, the Micki Stratton Round Robin July 20-21, the Farley Invitational in Goff, NH, July 26-28, and the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Women's Major Softball National Championship at DeLuca Field and Short Beach Rec Complex, August 1-4.