

Braking News

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

Volume 3, Issue 1

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November 2020

IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, IT WILL BE SOFTBALL SEASON AGAIN

The calendar says it's November. The World Series has ended. And the New York Jets remain perfect - and winless! And before you know it, the 34th straight season of Brakettes Softball at Frank DeLuca Hall of Fame Field will debut. What's going on here? The answer is an easy one. The editor of "*Braking News*," Bob Baird, is simply insane, much like Crazy Eddie (Eddie Antar), the owner of a consumer electronics chain in the 1980's who filmed his own 'simply insane' commercials.

Christmas decorations are displayed in stores all over the place. Bathing suits are on sale in various department stores. Airlines - as if anyone is planning on flying - are making flights as popular as purchasing a Big Mac, buy one and get one free! So why shouldn't we start thinking softball? After all June right around the corner.

The 2021 season will be a special one for the Brakettes Softball organization, which was founded back in 1947 by the late William S. Simpson, Chairman of the Board of Raybestos-Manhattan, Inc. in Stratford, CT. They manufactured brake-linings for cars and trucks until ceasing operations in 1984. That's where the name "Brakettes" originated. 1947 was the same year that 10-year-old John Stratton (current Stratford Brakettes Manager) began his softball career as the team batboy, and current Brakettes General Manager Bob Baird, as legend has it, tasted his first ice cream cone right after delivery.

This will mark the 75th year of Brakettes softball and the first for our newest family member, the 18U Select Brakettes. They join the Stratford, formerly a.k.a. the Raybestos Brakettes, Hi-Ho Brakettes, and just plain Brakettes. A lot of special events have been planned, and others will be forthcoming. Nothing is going to prevent this from being the greatest moment in our history, not even another wave of Coronavirus, as we celebrate our Diamond Anniversary. Despite a two-week delay in starting the 2020 campaign, we managed to overcome, adapt, and persevere as Chuck Norris would say, along with the help of a diligent and responsible fan base and grateful opponents, combined with a set of all-encompassing protocols, to complete the season without incident and continue our distinction as the nation's longest consecutive running women's softball program.

Each newsletter is posted on our website, www.brakettes.com, after being mailed and e-mailed to our booster club members, advertisers and sponsors, our players and their parents, and alumni. Here are some of those events to look forward to. Don't be a stranger. Go to our website to get the latest in Brakettes news. And don't hesitate to drop us a line about something of interest that we should include.

- All 3 teams will kick off the 2021 season by marching in the Town of Stratford's Memorial Day Parade
- Opening weekend June 4-6 at Frank DeLuca Hall of Fame Field
- 4th annual Joan Joyce/Brakettes "Pitch & Putt" Golf Tournament Saturday, June 26 at Short Beach Par-3 course
- Brakettes Reunion Weekend, July 10-11 (over 100 former players returned for the last one in 2016)
- Third annual Micki Stratton Memorial Round Robin Saturday-Sunday, July 17-18 at DeLuca Field

- 13th annual Women's Major Softball National Championship Tournament August 5-8 at DeLuca & Short Beach Fields with all 3 teams participating
- Annual Booster Club, Parents, Players Party August 8 (site TBA)

ADDING THIRD TEAM WAS A NO-BRAINER FOR BRAKETTES ORGANIZATION

In case you missed it, or were hiding out in your basement the past few months, the Brakettes Softball family has grown with the formation of a third team for the 2021 season. The newest member of the organization is the 18U Select Brakettes, joining the nation's longest consecutive running women's program in the Stratford Brakettes and the Junior Brakettes, who will be playing their third season.

The Select Brakettes will play half of their schedule in weekend tournaments, something all their players and parents have grown accustomed to during their travel/showcase softball careers. All but one will be played within Connecticut, the exception being the Caroline Farley Invitational in Concord, NH. All three teams will be playing in it with the Select combine in the 18U field and the Stratford and Junior teams in the 18+ field. The Select team will also play several mid-week doubleheaders at DeLuca Field.

Coaching the Select team, which currently lists 15 talented players on its roster, will be four-year Stratford Brakettes second baseman Lauren Pitney of Ansonia. Pitney is a graduate of St. Joseph High School and Manhattan College, winning post-season acclaim at both schools. She is currently completing a two-year graduate assistant's program at Springfield College, where she is assisting ex-Brakettes standout Kate Bowen of Newtown, CT, Springfield's head softball coach. Jaymie Sommers and Jack Pritchard, two knowledgeable coaches, will be assisting Pitney.

"We were caught off guard when Lauren said she was interested in applying for the position," said Brakettes Softball General Manager Bob Baird. "She's at the peak of her playing career, but after speaking with her about her goals for the future it became clear that this is what she really wants to do."

"Lauren's goal is to become a college head coach. And I think she'll make a very good one," said Stratford Brakettes Manager John Stratton. "She's always been a leader on the field. She approaches the game from a coaches' perspective. She just needs some experience and this will provide her a great opportunity." Pitney said she needed to get some head coaching experience on her resume. "There's no better place to do that than with the Brakettes," said Pitney, who is enthusiastically looking forward to the 2021 season.

Despite playing only four years with the Brakettes, Pitney ranks ninth all-time in career home runs with 30 and she is 25th in runs-batted-in with 142. A two-time batting champion (2018 at .489 and 2019 at .524), she finished with a .353 batting average this year with four home runs and 35 RBI in an abbreviated season because of the Coronavirus. At St. Joseph High School she was a three-time All-State pick.

When asked why the organization decided to add a third team, both Baird and Stratton never hesitated. "There are so many talented young ladies who want to play softball at a higher level and to be part of the Brakettes family, it wasn't a difficult decision to make," said Baird. "We've had so many players contact us about trying out for the Brakettes. It's really amazing when you look at their resumes and the college programs they will be attending. They all can play. Part of our mission statement is to provide women the opportunity to continue their softball dream after high school. It would be a shame not to see that happen," added Stratton.

<p>BRACKETTES ACCEPTING ORDERS FOR EMBROIDERED RED WINDBREAKER PULLOVERS</p>

We are accepting orders for the red embroidered windbreaker pullovers that are worn by players on the Stratford and Junior Brakettes and soon by the Select 18U Brakettes. In order to place an order we have to purchase one dozen at a time. They are \$50 each (our cost) and we will have them before Christmas if the order is placed within two weeks. No payment up front is required, just a verbal commitment. Call Bob Baird (203) 218-1066 if interested!

And the survey says. . . .

There have been volumes written about the Brakettes illustrious softball history. More often than not the author runs out of superlatives before finishing their piece. It's almost too crazy to imagine this awesome resume really happened, even for those of us who have witnessed it!

As part of the Stratford Brakettes 75th anniversary season we are preparing a season program book for the ages. It will feature stories, incredible statistics, and even a survey. We are asking our fans to chime in with their opinions by answering a survey designed to solicit the most amazing, impressive, and noteworthy accomplishments in team history.

We asked a panel of 5 Brakettes softball junkies, each one with 30-plus years of viewing pleasure, to submit their suggestions. From their offerings we have compiled a Top Eleven list (below) from which we are asking you to pick the five most astonishing accomplishments. You may fill out the survey on the Brakettes website, www.brakettes.com, until April 15, 2021. The results will then be featured in the season program book.

___ 238 consecutive **HOME** wins (2010 thru 2015)

___ 8 consecutive ASA National championships (1971-78)

___ 30-0 win over Washington, DC, Metros in 1992 ASA tournament in Redding, CA, which set 12 National records

___ 23 National ASA Hall of Famers

___ 14 members of USA Olympic teams

___ 74-year record of 3,975 wins against only 408 defeats, a 90% winning percentage.

___ 38 national championships (28 ASA and 10 WMS tournament crowns)

___ 117 Brakettes (112 players & 5 staff) who have served as a head or assistant college softball coach

___ 168 consecutive wins (2010 thru 2012)

___ 22 consecutive tournament championships (2010 thru 2016)

___ 9 straight loser's bracket wins in 48 hours to win 1983 ASA National title in Salt Lake City, UT (10-1 record)

ABBY OTA COMMITS TO SOUTH FLORIDA; PA ANNOUNCER HAL BAIRD NEEDS A PICK-ME-UP

Congratulations to Junior Brakettes standout Abby Ota who has committed to the University of South Florida in Tampa. USF Coach Ken Ericksen also is the head coach of Team USA which will be playing in the Olympics in Tokyo next July after this year's Games were postponed. Assisting Ericksen at USF is ex-Brakettes third basemen Jessica Mouse, who played three years at LSU before one as a grad student at USF. . . Team USA will be visiting DeLuca Field on Friday, June 18 for a 6:30 p.m. doubleheader against the Brakettes. If you purchased tickets for this year's game that was postponed, they are good for the 2021 makeup. . . It's never too early to start thinking Christmas Stocking Stuffers. Brakettes season tickets are already on sale (the form is

on the website). Once again the price remains the same with box seats \$100, reserved with back rests (behind home plate) \$80, and first & third base bleachers \$60. Each subsequent ticket purchased is one-half price. They are good for every home game of our three teams. Tickets will be mailed out the day order is received. . . **We ask Brakettes fans to keep Hal Baird (no relation to me) in your thoughts and prayers. The Brakettes PA announcer of 35 years has been hospitalized since August 22. If you are able send him a get-well card at 327 Allyndale Drive, Stratford, CT 06614 that would help cheer him up!**

JOHNSON AND OTA CAPTURE 2020 BATTING CROWNS

What do Rebecca Johnson of Seymour and Abby Ota of Redding have in common, other than the fact they are part of the Brakettes softball family? First, they are both left-handed batters who throw right-handed. Second, they are both extremely fast. Third, both players were named Connecticut's Gatorade Softball Player of the Year, Johnson in 2018 and Ota in 2020. All were good answers, but the one we were looking for is they are both Brakettes batting champions in 2020.

Johnson, a sophomore at Colgate University, followed up her 2019 batting championship on the Junior Brakettes when she .400, by capturing the title for the Stratford Brakettes this past summer with a .489 total. She had 43 hits, including three doubles and one triple and she drove in 14 runs. The swift center fielder stole 17 bases in 18 attempts and she scored 34 runs.

Ota currently is a senior at Joel Barlow High School and a two-year Junior Brakettes player. The 5-foot-2 infielder won the team batting crown with her .552 average (48-for-87). She led the Junior Brakettes with 38 runs scored and she led both teams with 29 stolen bases in 30 attempts. Ota compiled 105 hits in her first two varsity seasons for the Joel Barlow Falcons.

A player must have at least 2.5 plate appearances for each of the team's total games played to qualify for the award. Johnson and Ota will receive a commemorative plaque prior to the 2021 opener at DeLuca Field.

BRAKETTES FEATURED OUTSTANDING PITCHING ON BOTH TEAMS

Pitching plays a big part in winning games and the Stratford and Junior Brakettes both enough mound talent to lead them to outstanding seasons.

The Stratford Brakettes were 34-2 and won their third straight Women's Major Softball National Championship. Leading the talented staff, which combined for a 1.31 ERA, was first-year ace Sarah Lawton of Waterbury, who fashioned an 11-1 record in 78.1 innings with a 1.16 ERA and a team high 162 strikeouts. She recorded seven of the team's 15 shutouts.

The Stratford Brakettes also received outstanding efforts from Shelton's Kaycee Talcik (6-1 with 59 K's in 46 innings), Torrington's Ali DuBois (8-0 with a team best 0.84 ERA and 101 strikeouts in 50 innings), Cheshire's Abby Abramson (5-0), who is unbeaten in her four years with the team, and North Branford's Sydney Senerchia (4-0).

Bozrah's Sophia DiCocco, a freshman at Tufts University, led the Junior Brakettes staff with an 8-3 record and 1.91 ERA. Seymour's Jenna Geffert, a sophomore at Colgate University, was perfect in 2020 with a 6-0 record and 36 K's in 41.1 innings. Ex-Masuk High All-Stater Madison Procyk (4-2) of Monroe, who is a freshman at WPI in Worcester, MA, led the team with 44 strikeouts in just 29.1 innings.

RECORD FIELD EXPECTED FOR 13TH ANNUAL WOMEN'S MAJOR SOFTBALL NATIONALS

While the 12th annual Womens' Major Softball National Championship concluded only 2½ months ago, next year's event could be the biggest, and best, ever. Although several possible entrants had to withdraw last year because of the Coronavirus, but the WMS still drew a talented nine-team field. "We're projecting between 12 and 16 teams this year," said General Manager Bob Baird. Teams submitting Intent-to-Enter forms recently are Stripes & Strikes of Hazeltown, PA, Central NJ Lightning, and Maryland Chill. Only the Lightning participated in 2020. Add that to the Stratford, Junior, and Select Brakettes, the CT Rogue, and CT Eliminators Women and CT Eliminators 18+ and you can see why we may need a third venue for the four-day event. Other teams who have expressed interest are the Maine Pride, Massachusetts Drifters, New Hampshire Lightning, Lyons, PA, Spirit, and the 2017 WMS champion St. Louis Saints.