



The Stratford Brakettes recently completed their 77<sup>th</sup> season of women's fastpitch softball with a third-place finish in the 2023 Women's Major Softball (WMS) Nationals. Rookie Manager Lauren Pitney's club finished the year with a 22-8 record and looks to return a strong core for 2024.



2023 Stratford Brakettes

The Central Jersey Lightning clinched the 2023 WMS title on August 6<sup>th</sup> with an 8-4 win over Stripes & Strikes (PA), becoming just the fourth team to win the crown in the tournament's 15-year history. The NYC Havoc won the inaugural 2009 WMS, while the St. Louis Saints took the 2017 title.

The Brakettes have won the other 12 WMS titles, but the Lightning are primed to defend their title, and Stripes & Strikes will again return strong.

The Junior Brakettes will again be managed by Mary Scigliompaglia-Brainard and assisted by Rob Scigliompaglia. The coaches have received 14 commitments and will again compete in the WMS.



2023 Junior Brakettes

Legendary Brakettes manager John Stratton was recently given a long-deserved hero's welcome on October 28<sup>th</sup> in Oklahoma City, as he was inducted into the USA National Softball Hall of Fame.

Stratton, who recently turned 86, joined his wife, former Raybestos Brakette catcher Rosemary "Micki" (Macchietto) Stratton (1969), as the only husband and wife team to be inducted into the National Hall of Fame. Micki was the first of 24 Brakettes to be inducted into the Hall, while John became the third Brakettes manager (Vincent "Wee" Devitt in 1977 and Ralph Raymond in 1993) enshrined in Oklahoma City.

John was accompanied at the Hall of Fame Induction by his son, Jay (John Jr.) Stratton, who also led the Brakettes to a national ASA Women's Major National title. Jay co-managed the 2006 ASA champion Brakettes with Rich Roessner and served as John's assistant for many years.

Coach Stratton gave a compelling acceptance speech to the delight of the 500+ people in attendance and received a thunderous ovation. He talked about his love for softball and his players, and noted how much he misses those we've lost in recent years, including his wife, Micki, plus former Brakette and softball legend, Joan Joyce, and his longtime partner, former Brakettes GM Bob Baird.

Current Brakettes GM Rob Baird (Bob's oldest son), Brakettes Assistant Coach Mark Dempsey and his wife, Barbara, also made the trip to Oklahoma City to honor Stratton. Fellow National Hall of Famer/Brakettes legend Diane "Schuie" Schumacher and Sharon Schmickley also attended in support of Stratton.

Schumacher's first year with the Brakettes was 1976, when Stratton replaced ailing manager Ralph Raymond and led a young Brakettes team to an

unexpected ASA title. She said Stratton's induction was like "the icing on the cake" for her former coach. "I'm so pleased to be here to honor John for his contributions to the Brakettes and the game of softball. John is a tremendous coach, human being, and ambassador of the game... It's remarkable to see him join Micki in the Hall of Fame, as she was the very first Brakette to go in".



Newly Inducted Hall of Famer John Stratton (r: with son, Jay Stratton)

Stratton guided the Brakettes to 17 National titles, including five ASA and 12 Women's Major Softball crowns. Stratton's record as Brakettes Manager was 1,492-141 (91.3 %), including two perfect seasons... 2011 (63-0) and 2013 (68-0). Stratton and the Brakettes also enjoyed an unprecedented 168-game winning streak from 2010-2012.

John was one of eight individuals in the 2023 Hall of Fame Class, which also saw the induction of Stratford's Sikorsky Aircraft Men's Slow Pitch Team. After the ceremony, Stratton mingled with the Sikorsky Aircraft players and other new inductees, taking pictures, and sharing old softball stories.

"I am just so very fortunate to have grown up in Stratford, and with the Raybestos Brakettes and Cardinals. If I was born in Brooklyn, I wouldn't be here today," said Stratton. "I am very lucky to have played, coached and lived softball my whole life, to meet my wife Micki and later coach with my son with the Brakettes, and now this... it's incredible."

The Brakettes' franchise is still feeling the void of legendary GM Bob Baird, who passed away Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022. Baird was honored by the team in Stratford on July 8<sup>th</sup> before the night's games with the Mass Drifters. Pre-recorded tributes by players and coaches were played over the PA, with speeches delivered by John Stratton, former Raybestos Cardinal Ken Bruno, and Rob Baird.



Longtime Brakettes GM Bob Baird (1947 - 2022)

Big Bob was also honored this off-season by the CT Scholastic and Collegiate Softball Hall of Fame, with their annual program in Southington on September 10th being dedicated in his memory.

Former Brakette star pitcher Rachele Fico (Stratford Brakettes 2008-2012, NPF Akron Racers/Chicago Bandits 2013-2019) was among those inducted, as was former Brakette ace Allyson Fournier (Stratford Brakettes 2014, NPF PA Rebellion 2015), former NPF Connecticut Brakettes Asst. Coach Julie Brzezinski (2006), and umpire, Michael Giorgetti.



(l-r) Rachele Fico, Allyson Fournier, Julie Brzezinski

The evening also served as a public welcoming for a great friend of the Brakettes, former Umpire-in-Chief Cliff LaRose, whose amazing recovery from a life-threatening infection and subsequent leg amputation continues to inspire all he knows. Cliff awaits a prosthetic and continues his rehabilitation in Hamden and hopes to return to DeLuca Field in 2024. Friends are encouraged to contact him at [clarose1@aol.com](mailto:clarose1@aol.com). Keep up the great work, Cliff!

“Joan Joyce! The Musical!” recently wrapped up an October run at Waterbury’s Seven Angels Theater. The critically acclaimed musical celebrates the life and impact of the trailblazing former Brakettes star. The play follows Joan’s career from her childhood to the Brakettes, to her pro softball and golf careers, and coaching at Florida Atlantic University.



On the play’s final night, Joan’s niece, Meghan Joyce Bolesta, plus John Stratton and former Raybestos Brakette catcher Barbara Clark (1970-1978) were included in a pre-show discussion panel. Other former Brakettes were featured as pre-show speakers throughout the musical’s run.



Former Brakettes/Guest Speakers Peggy Kellers and Linda Finelli

The Brakettes Broadcast Crew, led by Will Gallagher and Moe Scioletti, webcasted all home Stratford High softball games at [www.brakettes.com](http://www.brakettes.com). The South West Conference (SWC) playoffs were also at DeLuca, with webcasts provided by the Brakettes.

The Brakettes hope to increase local webcasts going forward on [www.brakettes.com](http://www.brakettes.com) and provided the live broadcast for 2023’s Thanksgiving Stratford vs. Bunnell football game. Select Stratford High School home baseball games from Penders Field will also be carried by the Brakettes in 2024.

The Brakettes recently celebrated the installation of a new scoreboard at DeLuca Field. Both the Stratford Brakettes and Stratford H.S. Red Devils will benefit from the new Northeast Scoreboard, which was purchased fully by the Brakettes.

The total cost of the scoreboard was over \$27,000, including its physical installation and the removal of the old scoreboard.

We would like to thank several generous fans who donated recently to help defray the costs of the scoreboard project, including former Brakettes Brandice Balschmitter (2006-2008, 2010-2018), Diane Seery (1976), as well as Karen Ormiston, Billy Green, Edward Agvent, and Dave Schroder.

The Stratford Brakettes are a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, and all donations are fully tax-deductible.

To donate via Venmo: @Brakettes-Inc

Checks can be made out to “Brakettes Inc.” and sent to:

Brakettes Softball  
185 Lordship Road  
Stratford, CT 06615