



ERNIE FLOWERS Fast Pitch Player

When one thinks of fast pitch softball in Metro Detroit, the name of Ernie "La Fleur" Flowers comes to mind. Ernie's softball career began in 1939 when he was a member of the Red Robin team in the Detroit Metro Westward League.

The first baseman and right fielder also played on Arthur's Clothes team before serving on six ships in the United States Merchant Marine from 1943-45. Flowers continued his fast pitch softball career in 1945 playing on the Wyandotte Chemical team. Ernie also played on Monte Casino Wines, Fort Wayne Zollners and on a General Motors squad.

The longest stint Flowers played with was on the Fort Wayne Zollners which captured national titles in 1945, 1946 and 1947. "I am delighted that at this stage in my life I am being recognized for doing what I love to do as a younger man," said an elated Flowers, who now enjoys his winters in the sunshine of Placida, Florida.



LEON GRUNALT Manager

For more than 35 years Leon Grunalt has been participating in amateur softball. During that time his name has become synonymous with the word "winner".

Grunalt began his career playing in 1955 as an outfielder on a local fast pitch team. In 1958, he began his managerial career with local teams in Warren and Detroit. His rise to fame took off in 1971 when his team, East Side Sports, won the State Championship.

In 1973, his team - Strohs - captured the Major Metro Travel League championship in its inaugural season and also grabbed Manager of the Year honors. In 1977 with Burke's Sport Haven, he again won the league title and was named Manager of the Year.

Grunalt's greatest success came in 1984 when he and Andy Kovalcik gathered the best 35 and Over talent in the area and won the ASA national invitational tournament. Budweiser sponsored team then won consecutive national titles in 1986-87. In 1988, Grunalt took his three-time national championship team and joined forces with successful sponsors Fred and Karl Nothdurft capturing national titles in Men's 35 and Over in 1988, 89, 90, 92 and 93. He also added the 40 and Over national championship to his awards in 1993.

Grunalt is the only manager in softball history to win nine ASA national championships, including six in a row from 1985-90. At one time his team won an astounding 37 consecutive games in national play. His record in ASA nationals is a remarkable 63-5.

Grunalt credits his success mainly to good sponsors, especially Fred and Karl Nothdurft, who he considers the greatest sponsors and gentlemen in the sport. "The highlight of my career is winning two national titles in 1993, being inducted into the MDASA Hall of Fame and also to have Fred and Karl as sponsors," said a delighted Grunalt.



ROBERT KAUMP Umpire

For 29 consecutive years, Bob Kaump has been a registered ASA umpire having officiated more than 4000 games. Bob has worked with the Westland, Farmington and Walled Lake officials associations.

Kaump is presently the head of the Redford Umpire Association and has been the Redford Township softball coordinator since 1978. Kaump, a recent member of the ASA National Indicator Fraternity, has officiated at the national level in fast, slow and modified pitch tournaments for both men's and women's competitions.

There are not many people who can play the game of softball and blend in umpiring the way Bob has done over the years. Equally active as a player, Kaump spent his youth pitching for the Dees Sport Shop team and Hamilton Oakman softball clubs playing in two national tournaments. Kaump is currently a member of the Nothdurft Softball Club, which won the 1993 ASA national 55 and Over championship. Kaump was selected first team All-American pitcher at the 1993 tournament. Again with Nothdurft, Kaump was presented with a Gold Medal at the Senior Olympics also in 1993.



ANDY KOVALCIK Manager

Andy Kovalcik's softball career spanned from 1963 to the present. Kovalcik began his managerial career in 1963 with the St. Patrick's K of C team and he eventually captured numerous city and metro titles.

Kovalcik was instrumental for starting the Men's 35 and Over league at Detroit's Jayne Field in 1982 under the direction of the late MDASA Commissioner Bill Svochak. Since that time, Michigan Masters 35 and Over teams have dominated tournament play throughout the country.

One of Kovalcik's first accomplishments in ASA national competition came in 1971 at the Class A nationals. In 1985, 86 and 87, Kovalcik along with colleague Leon Grunalt, spearheaded the effort of the Budweiser 35 and Over team en route to capturing the national titles. Andy also was involved in the championship teams of the 1991 Masters 45 and Over team sponsored by Nothdurft and the 1993 Nothdurft 55 and Over squad. Kovalcik managed teams have won numerous invitational tournaments throughout the years as his contributions to the game of slow pitch softball has been instrumental for more than 30 years.

"My philosophy toward life and athletics is very simple and similar," said Kovalcik. "First, you can't control what happens to you; second, you can control how you react to what happens to you. You have to accept losses without being defeated." Kovalcik's biggest accomplishment as a manager was in 1991 when his team got merced in the first game of the 45 and Over national finals in Colorado before capturing the "1st" game 24-23.

GARY LADUE **Slow Pitch Player**



Gary Ladue is yet another in a long list of top quality players from the infamous Little Caesars championship slow pitch teams of the 1970s. Ladue started playing slow pitch in 1960 with the original Little Caesars team, which included player/sponsor and MDASA Hall of Famer Mike Illich.

From 1962-68, Ladue played on such notable teams as Daly Drive-In and Detroit Sports World. Ladue, who predominantly played left center, was a household name when it came to mentioning outstanding outfielders in the game of softball.

Ladue once again began playing with Little Caesars during their glory years from 1969-74. He played in the 1969 ASA national tournament as his team came in third place. In 1970, their Little Caesars squad captured the national title as Ladue was named to the second team All-American squad.

Ladue played with some of the best in the game of softball - Carl "Tex" Collins, Bob Auten, Bill Cole, Mike Gouin and Mickey Axelsson, just to name a few, who are all MDASA Hall of Famers.

"The highlight of my career was capturing the 1970 national tournament after coming so close the previous year," said Ladue. Although many years have passed since the championship years for Ladue, he continues to play with his two sons in a Dearborn league...for some softball fanatics, the game will never end!

SALLY WHALEN **Meritorious Service**



Sally Whalen's devotion for the sport of softball is incredible since she first became involved in the 1950's. In the mid-1950's, Whalen formed and developed a fast pitch league in Harrison Township when a group of players wanted to get out on the diamonds.

In 1965, Whalen became a volunteer with Joe Delia and Sterling Township Parks and Recreation. As the township grew and became a city, Whalen's involvement not only included adult softball but also men's volleyball, football and basketball. Her actual title is now men's sports coordinator.

Whalen annually conducted two ASA tournaments for more than 12 years. She has also served one year as MDASA Secretary. The past nine years has seen Whalen doing sports broadcasts on the Sterling Heights cable television network.

Since 1987, Whalen has also been a volunteer and an honorary member of the Association Senior Citizens Open Travel Softball League (ASCOT). Her duties included writing the rule book, newsletter, scheduling and conducting tournaments. In 1989, Whalen became affiliated with the National Association of Senior Citizens Softball (NASCS) where she is an Editor for their magazine and also member of their Board of Directors.

1994 begins Whalen's 30th year of caring for Sterling Heights softball players. "Diamonds" are a women's best friend, especially in Sally Whalen's life!