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Bronze division softball: Old guys rule

By RUDY DAVIS Senior Softball League
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Steve Seall, 80, gets a hit.

Just a few years ago, if your softball skills diminished as you got older, you likely had to hang up the glove and put the bat away.

Not anymore.

“We had a number of guys who wanted to keep playing that turned 80 or older, and the movement of players from the ‘kids division’ to the Silver division pushed a number of us out of the league,” said Randy Harrold, division coordinator.

The solution? Start a division comprised of those guys that had essentially “aged” out of the Silver division, and create an environment in which they could still play, get some exercise, and enjoy the camaraderie of guys just like themselves.



The Bronze division was the brainchild of Rich Entlich and Bill Rice, both former league commissioners.

Through their hard work, the division was formed with modified rules and a smaller diamond, so as to facilitate greater safety against the backdrop of slower reaction times in this age group.

“We really wanted guys like me to continue to have an opportunity to play the game they had so enjoyed in the immediate years prior, and frankly, that they loved to play,” said Entlich, who now plays in the division. There are some great stories around the league.

Russ Evans, 93, has played ball all his life. “I started playing softball — fastpitch — at age 13 back in Ohio and have played organized softball ever since,” he said.

Evans followed his brother to Englewood in 2001 and joined the league playing on the same teams. He also often played in tournaments. “I gave up tournament play at age 89,” he said. “And fortunately the Bronze division was formed. It’s been a blessing to keep playing.”



The guys in Bronze division range from late 70s to the early 90s. “We had another 93-year-old, Khaki Markell, but he was too good for our division so we booted him back to the kids division!” said Harrold.

The Bronze division plays on the Little League field, with shorter bases and shorter fences. There are other special rules: The batter can be called safe if he reaches a line drawn about two thirds of the way to first before the first baseman catches the ball. Three are other rules designed for maximum fun, safe and balanced play. And they have some big hitters, so much so that a player is limited to one home run per game. After that, the hit is just a single if it clears the fence a second time or more.

“Don’t be fooled, many of these guys can still really play, and while the point of the division is fun and exercise, these guys still have competitive juices flowing,” said Bill Ward, who umpires the Bronze games. “And they are *not* afraid to speak their mind to me about a close call!”

The league expects the Bronze division to add more players and teams in the next few years, as players in the Silver division are “nudged” up as more, younger arrivals to the area join the league.

“The truth is, every one of us in either the Silver or Gold division look over there and, hopefully, see ourselves still playing the game we love,” said Mark Johnson, league commissioner. “We should all be so lucky.”

Indeed, in every sense of the word, when it comes to Englewood Senior Softball, “Old Guys Rule!”

For more information, visit www.Englewoodseniorsoftball.weebly.com or contact Mark Johnson at 717-982-8456. Or, come on out to the fields, watch the guys play and then join the league. Games start at 9:15 a.m. Tuesday thru Friday starting at 9:15 at the Englewood Sports Complex, 1300 River Road.



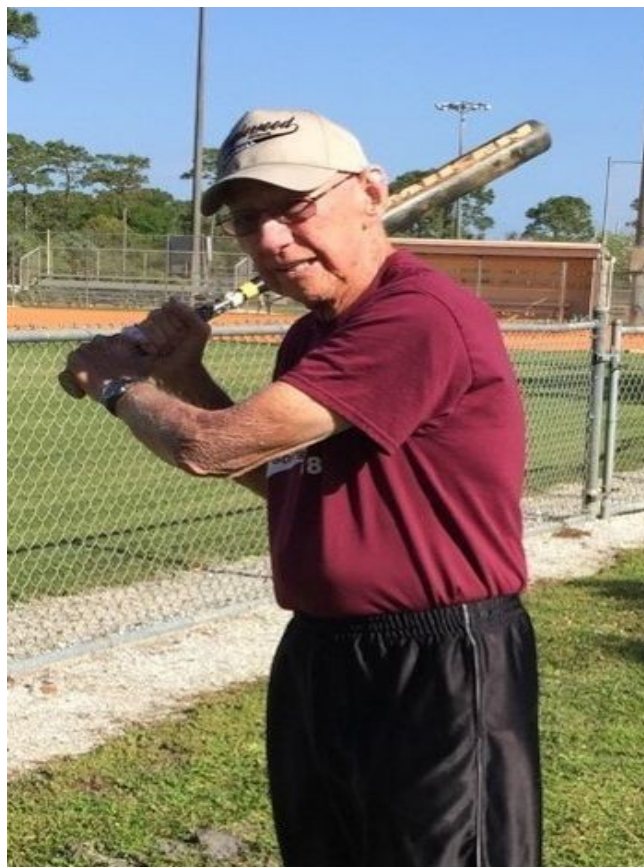
Randy Harrold, left, mans first base while Bill Gormly looks to advance.



Paul Williams



Rich Entlich



Russ Evans