

Englewood senior softball season begins with practice

By RUDY DAVIS

SPECIAL TO THE SUN

ENGLEWOOD — Undeterred by the continuing warm weather, players have returned to the adult softball fields at the Englewood Sport Complex.

Between the return of seasonal residents and newcomers to the area, the Englewood Senior Softball league has moved into full swing with open practice sessions underway. The 8:30 a.m. practices are each Wednesday and Friday for the Gold Division, and Tuesdays and Thursdays for Silver and Bronze. Monday is an open practice.

Going into its 27th year, the league continues to attract players from Englewood, North Port, Venice, Rotonda, Boca Grande and Port Charlotte.

"The League's mission is to create an opportunity for men over 60 to play recreational softball," stated Rich Entlich, a member of the league's executive

committee. "With the expanding population in the Suncoast area, we've seen a record turnout so far this fall."

Despite the number of returning players, the past three years have seen the league focus on recruiting more players to the league.

"We've worked hard the last few years to increase the numbers, and it seems to be paying off," said Rudy Davis, who plays in the Gold Division. "Last year we had over 50 players at the draft tryouts. In addition, there are many guys playing well into their 70s and 80s, so much so that we're creating a new division for those over 80 or with otherwise diminishing skills."

Davis noted that most players attending the draft end up on a team.

"We love to have more guys trying out, so we encourage anyone with an interest to come out," said Davis. The typical new player is one who hasn't played in some time, and has moved to the area,



Neil Meneghini looks to catch the ball into his glove.

though many new players have played in summer leagues "up north." The practice sessions, which run through the end of December, give players a chance to refresh their skills, and prepare for the upcoming season's draft.

"The skill level ranges from first-timers to advanced players, with one common goal — get some exercise and have some fun," said Entlich.

The league has three divisions, the newly formed Bronze division, the Silver division for players over the age of 67 who have slowed a bit or are not drafted in the Gold division, and the Gold division for players 60 and over.

New this year, though, if you are 63 but not quite ready for the Gold division, you can play in the Silver division. As well, if you're 70 or over, and still have skills, you can be drafted into Gold division.



SUN PHOTOS BY
STEPHEN MCKAY

Walter Voll patiently awaits a pitch.



Dave Featherston, right, resupplies batting practice pitcher Walter Voll with extra softballs.

based purely on skill level. We hold a draft the first week January to fill out the teams, and then play a 21-game schedule, plus an end of season tournament," explained Davis.

This year's draft is Jan. 7 for the Gold division, Jan. 8 for Silver and Bronze, with registration required.

Entlich stresses that the league is supported by local businesses that sponsor the teams. "We are fortunate, and grateful, that they do. It helps to supply teams with jerseys, equipment and the cost of umpires ... got to have umpires!"

Until the draft, it's practice, practice, practice, which is open to anyone 59 or over. "Everybody bats, fields and gets to



The approaching clouds don't deter Merrill Norton from pitching and batting practice.



After taking a dozen or more cuts during batting practice Claude Sniezek wipes the sweat from his brow.



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"We're in the second year of a move towards divisional alignment

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Until the draft, it's practice, practice, practice, which is open to anyone 59 or over. "Everybody bats, fields and gets to play in a practice game if they choose to," says Fred Weber, who plays for Norma Jeans. "We started to use a fly ball launcher at practices this year for outfielder practice, too." The launcher was built by league members.

The Englewood Sports Complex is at 1300 S. River Road, Englewood. You can also find the fields just off the northern end of Pine Street. Entlich encourages all to come out and give it a try, regardless of when you last played.

"You'll have some fun, and don't worry if you don't have a bat. We have them to spare. All you need is a glove."

For more information about the league, contact Rich at 941-460-9645 or visit www.Englewood-seniorsoftball.weebly.com. Registration for the draft is required and can



After taking a dozen or more cuts during batting practice Claude Sniezek wipes the sweat from his brow.



Claude Sniezek summons his inner Babe Ruth as he sends one deep to right.



Merrill Norton takes cover while serving up some fat pitches.

be done by filling out a registration form available at the Englewood Sports Complex, or by downloading the form from the website.

Unidentified second baseman who identifies with Ohio University.

