

*A Narrative History of the
Montgomery County Senior Softball League
A Continuing History – 2015*

THE BOYS ARE BACK

One could say that “The Boys for All Seasons” were back in 2015, but it probably would be more accurate to say that they never went away.

Another successful and fun-filled summer season officially came to a close at the end of October, 2014, capped off by yet another great end-of-year picnic, organized once again by Super Social Director Manny London. Each year as long as the weather continues to hold, some of the boys keep right on playing non-league sanctioned “choose-up” games until the cold and wet ultimately brings things to a halt, and the late fall season of 2014 was no exception. The end of 2014 saw some pick-up game activity almost up to Thanksgiving before the field conditions in Hatfield became unplayable. But in the minds of all the members of the *Montgomery County Senior Softball League*, however, the months of November and December are actually only a temporary interruption for a few short weeks until the boys can get into the facility at the BucksMont Indoor Sports Center the first week in January to start the winter league.

Plans for the upcoming summer season had already started by the end of 2014, and summer league player applications were distributed followed shortly thereafter by applications made available for the indoor winter season. League dues were set at an even \$100 each for both the 2015 summer and winter leagues, which was only a five dollar increase over the previous years. Like every other year prior, the 2015 indoor winter league rosters filled up fast, and by the end of December there were enough players signed up to fill eight teams with a solid league roster of 85 players.

OLD MAN WINTER

What a season it turned out to be over the winter months of 2015! The entire Northeast became locked into some of the worst weather in decades, both from ice and snow events, and plunging temperatures. Before the real bad weather took hold, however, the Marauders Travel Team managed to trek out to Palmyra to play a doubleheader against the Harrisburg team, where the Marauders won both games. Then things got worse weather wise. The bad weather didn't stop the boys' enthusiasm from playing in Hatfield, however, but on three occasions over the winter the games for the day were postponed and the BucksMont facility was closed because of the awful bleak conditions. Not only were regularly scheduled games postponed, but also the Travel Team re-match against the Harrisburg gang, not once, but three times until the contest was finally played at the end of March. The boys also managed to get in a travel game doubleheader in Hatfield against the Schuylkill County team late in the season. The BucksMont facility was very accommodating to the league this year, as they extended usage right through to the end of March.

The boys were anxious to get things started outside for the summer season in early April, but Old Man Winter just wouldn't let up. The School Road Park field was in awful shape from the ravages of ice and snow, and Hatfield Township kept the field closed until the grounds could be recovered. It delayed "spring training" by only a week, and the township did a terrific job putting the field back into playable condition. The practice schedule for early April remained in effect, but some of the teams did lose time preparing for the start-up of the regular season because of cold and rainy weather. Old Man Winter might have gone away, but Mother Nature just wouldn't let go, and the season opening day had to be canceled due to rainy weather. The season opened the next day on April 22nd.

THE TIMES THEY ARE A'CHANGING

The 2015 summer season saw a number of changes that all turned out for the betterment of the league's continuing successes. One of the first major changes happened almost right away at the conclusion of the 2014 season when the league officers held the annual Board of Directors meeting in early November. Two new officer positions were created. One was the **MCSSL**

Liaison with Hatfield Township position, which was filled by Bud Hyndman, who already serves on a township committee. The position functions to maintain an information link to the Commissioner on matters that may affect the league and the School Road Park facility. With the terrific success of the history project initiated last year by Joe Juba, the league officers also created a second new officer position, *MCSSL Historian*, filled by George Schreder. The position functions to maintain a continuing history of the league and to archive all key materials and documents in addition to creating anecdotes that reflect the enjoyment of league participants.

Near the end of each summer season, one of the key mechanisms used by the league to help improvement is the suggestion process. League members are encouraged to submit suggestions for changes, upon which the Board will review individually and act upon should there be a two-thirds consensus to adopt the change or suggestion. This past year saw twenty-five new suggestions for 2015, of which ten were adopted or acted upon. In addition to the new officer positions, a few of the changes were rule clarifications and modification of the bylaws, a one-pitch tournament was again agreed to be held, and new shirts (new design) were purchased for the Travel Team. Two new rule changes that came about were implemented to enhance the fairness of play. One important change was made to fair/foul ball determination, which previously was a call made by the catcher. Determination would now be made by the 1st and 3rd base coaches, as it was felt they had a better view of the foul lines, especially beyond the bases. The other rule change came to plays at 1st base, focusing on enhancing the safety of both runner and fielder. The runner returning to first base would now be allowed to run wide of the base on either side to avoid collision.

The following spring at the annual Board of Directors and Manager's meeting (held once again at the Calvary Baptist Church), the league officers discussed and reinforced the new changes. During the roundtable, a new proposal was made to implement a change to the rule that provides for a team short of players to pick up a player(s) from the opposing team. Instead of the opposing manager offering only one player per vacancy, the rule change would now mandate that three players be named for the other manager to make a choice or choices. This practice had already been applied during the past winter season, and it proved successful in the spirit of fair play. The proposal passed on a trial basis by an overwhelming majority.

The biggest change came to the league structure. The topic of creating two divisions in the league had been often discussed. At this year's meeting, the focus again was on player ability and concerns regarding safety vs. injury, particularly to older players with lesser ability. The initial proposal was to create a "70 and over" division and a "69 and under" division. While this suggestion to create two divisions failed to reach a two-thirds consensus (thus not meeting approval), there was the compromise suggestion to have players 70 and older play on Mondays (in addition to their regular games Tuesdays through Thursdays), providing, of course, that there was sufficient interest. This early compromise was agreed upon and the officers voted to implement the "70 and over" division only. Safety Director Jim Binsberger took the lead to coordinate the project.

By early February, Commissioner John Frantz reported to the league members that 46 players had already signed up to play, and the league moved forward to setting up the schedule of Monday games. An additional fee of \$20 for existing league members was required to offset the cost of additional insurance and shirts. For any new people entering the league who only wanted to participate in the "70 and over" division and not the regular season, the league cost for the season was reduced to \$50. By the time the new division was ready for play, 58 players had signed up, enough for the league to establish four new teams. Prior to the startup of the season, league officers appointed a team of "young sixty-something" members to "draft" the over-seventy players into four teams. The selection group consisted of Jim Marple, Bobby Sipes, and Rich Server, all of whom had a close familiarity with the playing abilities of the new over-seventy league participants. Their objective was to establish as much team parity as possible. After the four team rosters were set, the four new managers drew lots to choose the team they wanted to manage. The naming of the teams followed the longstanding tradition of keeping the "M", and thus the new teams were designated as the "Mashers," managed by Tom Dougherty, the "Masters," managed by Fred Silverman, the "Miracles," managed by John Packel, and the "Monsters," managed by George Hart.

The new division started play on Monday, April 27th, and continued to play regularly right through to the end of the 2015 summer season in October. By a quirk of the scheduling, the last game of the season actually was scheduled for the Monday following the end-of-season picnic, but unusually cold weather prompted a postponement until the following week. The four

teams did battle each Monday over the course of the season, and participants certainly enjoyed the friendly competition.

By the end of August, it had become evident that the new division had generated enough interest to potentially continue it for the upcoming 2016 summer season. To determine if there was enough interest, Commissioner John Frantz sent out a questionnaire to all league players 70 and over. The focus of the questionnaire was to find whether the members favored no change from 2015 (Option #1, allowing players to play in both divisions) or favored splitting the league into two separate divisions (Option #2 where players would only play in their preferred division.) By splitting the league into two distinct divisions, players would therefore choose either the regular division or the “70’s” division (must be 70 or over.) The Commissioner reported that 83 of 98 surveys were returned (85%.) Following is a summary of the results: 1) Fifty players preferred Option #1, 2) Fifty players indicated their intent to continue playing in the “70’s” division if Option #1 is held, 3) Seventy players indicated their intent to also continue playing in the current two-division 10-team league structure, and 4) Only thirty-three players indicated they would only choose to play in the “70’s” division if Option #2 is held.

Commissioner Frantz felt the issue was of such immediate importance to the future structure of the league that in accordance with the Bylaws, he called for a vote from the league officers in early September instead of waiting until the end-of-season meeting of the Board. By taking the vote then, the league would know which direction it would take for the 2016 season, thereby initiating early planning. The vote was 32-5 in favor of Option #1, and the league moved forward to initially plan the same structure for the upcoming 2016 season and issued the application forms for the “70 and over” division play.

THE SOCIAL SCENE AND OTHER NOTABLE EVENTS

Unfortunately back in December of 2014, the traditional Holiday Party had to be canceled due to circumstances, but it certainly didn’t hinder the continuing successes of many exciting social events during 2015.

Manny London turned in yet another spectacular performance at the first social event of the 2015 season in mid-May, Picture and Picnic Day. About a hundred and fifty league members attended the popular social gathering, posing for team and individual photos, and enjoying one great picnic spread. Mark Rosen, the league's "unofficial" bard and soothsayer, entertained everyone once again with a humorous soliloquy about how the league discriminates against left handed hitters by not providing a batting carpet on their side of the plate. It may have been hilarious, but it must have struck a chord. It wasn't long afterward that several league members (all right-handed hitters, no less!) designed a brand new batting mat that encased the entire batter's box, and all the lefties in the league lived happily ever after!

Another significant happening for the benefit of all league members was the introduction of Dr. Lindsey Carstens, who is a physical therapist with Total Performance Physical Therapy at the BucksMont facility. League member Steve Alligood – who had to sit out the winter season due to recovering from an injury – introduced Dr. Carstens, who gave a very informative presentation on sports-related injuries and discussed the services she can provide. During the past winter, thanks to Steve, the doctor had conducted a similar session for winter league participants at the facility. Dr. Carstens answered many questions from the ranks, and the league graciously thanked her for donating her time to attend the event and talk with the guys.

A popular social event that keeps growing in popularity is attendance at a minor league baseball game. In years past, league members and their guests have traveled to see the Trenton Thunder and the Bethlehem Iron Pigs, and this year in early June over fifty MCSSL "fans" traveled to Reading to see the Reading Fightin' Phillies.

The annual MCSSL Family Picnic was held on a pleasant Friday evening in June, and the predicted rains held off long enough for everyone to have yet another great time at this most popular summer event. The boys played the traditional volunteer exhibition game for family members to enjoy, after which some one hundred and sixty attendees enjoyed another marvelous picnic feast organized once again by Manny and Mrs. London. Giveaway prizes were aplenty, and not to be outdone, amusement was again provided by MCSSL's resident soothsayer and bard, Mark Rosen. Mark's comedic skits are always entertaining, and this picnic Mark picked on Tommy Corcoran. His comedy sketch included using Tommy as a prop while Mark outfitted him

with all the newly proposed safety gear, including a mad bomber winter hat, which by the way, fit Tommy perfectly! It was a great laugh for everyone, and Tommy loved being on center stage!

The end of the season always seems to come too early. But once again, the master of all social events in the universe, Manny London, outdid himself by putting on a scrumptious Oktoberfest spread for the end-of-season picnic. Manny announced plans for the annual Holiday Party upcoming in December, and encouraged everyone to come join in the ever-popular social event. Once again, the league's resident soothsayer, Mark Rosen, put on a comedic skit that focused on all the "necessary" items all senior softball players should be carrying in their equipment bag. It was a real "Trojan" effort by Mark, who also brought a lot of laughs singing John McCann's rendition of Sinatra's "My Way" to honor the many contributions of the league's beloved Manny London. Everybody walked away, once again, with the same sentiment – it doesn't get much better than this!

THE TRAVEL TEAM MARAUDERS

Thanks to the generous support of Harleysville Saving and Loan – and special thanks to Ron Geib of the Marvels for arranging the sponsorship! – the league was able to upgrade the appearance of the Travel Team Marauders through the purchase of new shirts of the type recently purchased for the league's ten regular teams. The new shirts, sporting a new team look of gold accented by black and white lettering and sleeves, proudly show off the Harleysville Savings and Loan display on the back. Gordy Detweiler, of course, again proudly wears Number One on his new jersey. The Marauders new team look first appeared late in the winter season.

Despite the awful winter season, the Marauders still managed to play three travel team events (two wins at Harrisburg, two wins against Schuylkill County, and a split with Harrisburg at Hatfield) to come away with a five win and one loss record. Gordy's guys attempted to kick off the 2015 summer season by hosting an opening week doubleheader at the School Road Park field against the team from Candlewick in the Doylestown area. Yet again, Mother Nature wouldn't cooperate, and the game had to be canceled because of wet and cold weather. A week later the weather took a turn for the better, as the Marauders traveled westward to open summer travel team play against their long-time rivals and fellow senior colleagues from West Chester.

As always, competition between the boys was both enjoyable and intense. The bats were lively on both sides, but Gordy's "marauding" Marauders pulled off a win in both games to kick off the summer travel team season. The gang from Allentown came down to Hatfield next, and in the first game simply tore into the Marauders for a big win. Gordy's boys came back in the second game to complete a split of the doubleheader. Next was a trip to Harrisburg for two nine inning games with the Burger Boys. With only eleven players, Gordy and the boys could only manage a tie in the second game against a most formidable team.

The summer weather was anything but cooperative, as the next round of travel play scheduled for home against Allentown had to be cancelled due to the rain. The sun came out for a few weeks, but more rain came in and the next home game against the boys from upstate Schuylkill County also had to be cancelled because of heavy rains throughout the whole northeast. The Marauders finally managed to get in a re-scheduled double header against Allentown at the Sellersville field, and suffered disappointing losses in both games. Back to Allentown next, but the boys suffered two losses against a challenging lineup. West Chester visited next, and Gordy's guys pulled off two victories, one by the score of 21 to 20!

The boys finally managed to get in previously rained-out games against their upstate rivals from Schuylkill County, and the local Candlewick team from Doylestown. The Marauders lost both games upstate, then split with Schuylkill County in the rematch in Hatfield. In the only evening competition of the season in Doylestown, the Marauders lost both games to a fine hitting Candlewick team. Not to be put down, the boys went on a winning streak. They next traveled to West Chester and defeated their longtime rivals in both games. The team next went to Philadelphia and pulled off an impressive doubleheader victory. West Chester came back to Hatfield for yet another rematch, and the Marauders rolled to another doubleheader victory.

The biggest highlight of the season for the Marauders was the Phillies Charities doubleheader games against the *Philadelphia Phillies Ball Girls* softball team held on Saturday, August 22nd at the Hatfield School Road Park field. Gordy Detweiler, who is a relative of one of the ball girls, organized the event. All MCSSL players who participated in the game contributed \$25 to the charity, and a total of \$600 was contributed to this worthy charity fund. The boys found out quite early in the first game just how good and how competitive these young ladies are! One of the requirements of the Phillies organization to be a ball girl is to have an excellent

background in playing sports, and it certainly showed. To make sure the competition was even, Gordy volunteered to pitch both games for the girls' team. The two games were close, but Gordy's Marauders managed to win both. But this was an occasion where the score didn't matter. Everybody won. It was a great promotion for senior softball, as Channel 6 Action News and the North Penn Reporter were both there to report on the event. It was a great experience, and the MCSSL is prouder than ever to have hosted such a notable event, another great milestone in the continuing history of this great senior league.

The Marauders continued to schedule play into the fall, but weather again interrupted some of the competition. The team made a visit upstate where they managed a split with the boys from Schuylkill County. The last travel team game of the season was held at Hatfield in early October against the Harrisburg gang, and the Marauders rolled to two impressive victories to close out the season.

All-in-all, it was another great winter and summer season for the Travel Team Marauders. During the winter months, the boys racked up a 5 – 1 win/loss record, and the summer team fared well by posting a record of 15 wins against 10 losses and one tie. Overall, the Marauders compiled a 2015 softball season win/loss/tie record of 20 – 11 – 1. More importantly, the Marauders exhibited the spirit of good, clean competition among senior softballers, and the league couldn't be any prouder of the boys!

THE ANNUAL ONE-PITCH TOURNAMENT

It has become an ever-growing popular event. Every player comes up to the plate with a 3-2 count. You either hit the pitch or let it go. If it's a ball, you walk. If it's a strike, you're out. It's a fast-paced game and loads of fun! This year the participation level grew enough to have six teams entered into the one-day event, each team with a league member volunteering to be manager-for-a-day. Organizers Jim Marple, Bob Weaver, and Tom Lane did one superb job of setting up the drafting of participants among the managers, and establishing a new type of format for this year's event. The new format established for this year's play was a modified 5-inning set-up, double elimination. A maximum of 5 runs per inning was allowed, no open innings (i.e. still a 5-run max in last inning,) and games could end in a tie. Each team played two games, one

as the home team and one as the visiting team. If you lost both games, you were automatically eliminated. At the end of the first round, the remaining teams were ranked according to the Tie-Breaking System formatted by the committee, which consisted not only of victories, but run-differential, runs-allowed, and number of outs-saved. The system worked very well, eliminating teams according to the format. The top three remaining teams were then ranked and played for the title.

In addition to the great job done by the organizing committee, the field crew consisting of Tom Dougherty, Charlie Weigle, Tom Lane, Bob Weaver, and Tom Corcoran once again did a superb job of preparing the field for the tournament, even to the extent of coming out to the field the day before and placing tarps on the field to ward off the weekend rains! But the tournament wasn't only about having fun. A grand gesture made by the league was to ask participants to donate a small sum of money, which was then donated to the Volunteer Service Medical Corp of Lansdale in appreciation for the job they perform for the community, including "keeping an eye" on all the senior softballers who participate in our great league. The request for donation was extended a few days after the tournament to the annual MCSSL Family Picnic for those league members who did not participate in the One-Pitch Tournament, but who wanted to donate. In the end, the sum of \$1,000 was given to the Medical Corps later in September, which was extremely appreciative for such a generous gift.

THE LEAGUE HISTORY IN BOOK FORM

Making the most of the success of the narrative history published on the MCSSL website last October, 2014, the history's initiator Joe Juba took the project to the next level. Joe gained a level of support from the majority of league members, who welcomed the opportunity to have the league's history published in book form. The book publication, however, was pushed back until 2016 until a selection of more meaningful photographs could be decided upon to include in the hard copy edition of the history. It was agreed to hold off actual publication until later into the 2016 season.

THE LEAGUE REMAINS ONE OF OUR OWN

It was not only a fun year, but 2015 was a year filled with many interesting surprises, accomplishments, and promises that this league of senior softballers isn't going away any time soon. With so much support from sponsors, patrons, families and friends, the **Montgomery County Senior Softball League** ranks high on the list of community activities and continues to make local news and gain support from friends and supporters of this fun-filled "old-timer" activity. If nothing more, it keeps these seniors off the streets. If nothing less, it keeps them all laughing and having the time of their lives.

The 2015 season of senior softball games came to an end. But not sadly by any means. These "Boys for All Seasons" have never let any schedule determine an end to the simple fun of playing ball. The end of fall is just a time to reset oneself and reflect on what has just passed. Looking back, they will certainly realize that many more hits have now been recorded in the great book of softball by a bunch of old guys who never dreamed that someday they'd still be playing like a bunch of young kids. But the number of hits will never surpass the number of memories that will have gone into the grand score book. They all might stop to take a breather, but rest assured, these words are in the minds and on the lips of all these boys... *just wait 'til next season...*