

League fills need for older players

By JAMES DELCIOPO
PRESS STAFF WRITER

For many softball players, there comes a time to hang 'em up. Not so for the members of the New Jersey Senior Softball Association.

The NJSSA is an organization designed for players 50 years old and older who still want to play recreational softball.

Mike Christy, Plumsted Township, founded the organization in September 1988 after reading about a similar league in a senior citizen's magazine. He got together with a few of his friends and started spreading the word about the league he was starting.

"When we first started the league we had about 750 people in the league," said

Ocean County president John Londres. "Now we are probably around the 4,000-player mark."

After months of organizing, the NJSSA began playing in April 1989.

There are 15 leagues in New Jersey this year. Each league is comprised of teams which are made up from players in or around a specific county. Monmouth and Ocean counties are both participants of the NJSSA along with Bergen, Burlington, Gloucester, Mercer, Middlesex, Morris, Salem and Union counties. Each league is either sanctioned by the American Softball Association or the United States Slo-pitch Softball Association.

Each county varies as far as the amount of teams, all according to the response they received. Some counties take the 50-plus age group a step farther by

breaking the league down to more specific age groups for the players to keep the league balanced.

Ocean County has the most players in the NJSSA with 20 teams.

There are three different age groups of competition. In the summer league, there are 16 teams, 10 in the 50-57 age group and six in the 58-64 age group. In the fall, four teams will compete in the 65-and-over age category. The Monmouth County league offers a summer league with 12 teams, all in the 50-plus age group.

"The competition is mostly recreational, but there are a few teams which are very competitive," said Londres, a charter member of the NJSSA.

Ocean County teams play a 20-game schedule at four fields, Winding River Park in Toms

River, and Shenandoah Park, D'Zio Park and Pine Park, all in Lakewood. The season culminates with a best of three playoffs at the end of the year.

Monmouth County teams play between 27 and 32 games during the season, at various sites throughout the county, until the end of the year when all of the teams are involved in a single-elimination tournament with the top two teams going on to a best-of-three series for the league title.

"The league has expanded greatly over the years," said Londres. "We plan to keep growing as long as we have the fields to play on."

The summer leagues started in April and will run to the end of August.

SOFTBALL NOTEBOOK

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EXTRA INNINGS

Extra Innings

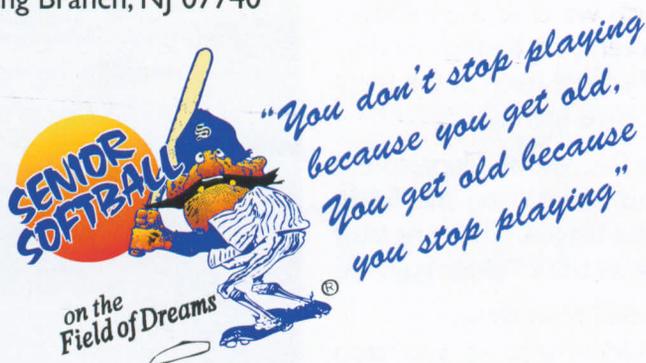
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