

A Return to Adult Softball

Written by Story and Photos by Tom Hartsock Sun Correspondent
Friday, 24 July 2015 04:40



It's been a while since I've visited the Sports Plex, and that was just a brief visit last year to watch Miyamura and Gallup High baseball utilize the large field that fronts the entryway.

A personal invitation by Women's League director Sheila Battles Silva was all the encouragement I needed to return. Back in the day – mostly before the Sports Plex had been built – the other softball fields around town had been my second home; Washington Park, Indian Hills, Father Dunstan Park, and the softball field at Ford Canyon were the places where I spent most evenings or days of every week, from May through August.

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In the first years, fast pitch was the only game, though I continued through the evolution of slow pitch and even started the initial co-ed league. Now it is all about slow pitch with just a hint of the fast pitch glory that used to prevail, even state-wide. I remember one state tournament here in Gallup where the local teams locked up five of the top six places in women's fast pitch and one of those teams went through regional play with no losses.

Yes, those were the days, but they are not today. Now it's all about slow pitch and even that game has changed a lot; one umpire per game instead of two, and the batters start with a 1-1 count to shave time off the game.

Yet it is still softball and the game is the game, with all the attendant smells of the concession stand, yells from the players as they encourage each other, and lots of appreciation for effort from the fans. Progress may have taken away or changed some rules but it cannot deny the basic aspects of the game itself.

Where once I knew everybody that stepped on the field, now I was almost a complete stranger. The players were friendly enough, considering their concentration was on the game, as it should be in any tournament.

And this was the final tournament of the regular season for the women, brought to a more sudden close than planned earlier in the season. Blame motherhood for that, and the early start of school. The men's league does not worry about that as much.

There were some old friends at the complex, notably members of the Holtsoi and Barton families, who seem to always be at the park if a game is being played. I'm sure there were others at the lower fields where the men were playing, but the sun was going down quickly and forcing me and my camera to leave, so I had to make a promise to come back next week when the men go through their brackets.

Many thanks, Sheila, for inviting me and for assisting me in keeping all the names straight. Let's do it again next year!

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Another weekend coming up, and there is another youth tournament taking place in Ford Canyon. That's where I will be, in the PeeWee Reese scorebooth, for the Willie Mays Regional World Series. Pool play was set for Thursday with a single elimination bracket to start on Friday and finishing on Saturday with the championship game.

Now you know where I will be, and though I can't invite everyone to the scorebooth, I will have some time between games to visit with you in the bleachers, I hope. We'll see you then!