

COMPETITIVE EDGE



Theatrice Vinson gives it his all for his team, the Oak Forest Fire.

National Softball Tourney

by Larry Labiak

The scenic, tree-lined, triple-diamond softball complex at Oak Forest Hospital of Cook County provided the perfect backdrop for the 17th National Wheelchair Softball Tournament (NWST), held August 27-28 in Oak Forest, Ill., just south of Chicago. The contest was touted as the *crème de la crème* of national softball tournaments, featuring 3 diamonds, 11 teams, nearly 150 players, an estimated 2,000 spectators, and a \$20,000 budget.

The 17th NWST lived up to the hype in every way—until the two-game championship series between the Chicago Pacemakers and the St. Paul Rolling Thunder. These combatants had earned the right to face each other on the strength of identical 2-1 records in the preliminary-round competition of this dual-bracket, double-elimination softball extravaganza open to all comers from across the country.

If the outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine that day, it was bleak at best for the Pacemakers when the Thunder came to play. On the strength of a second splendid pitching performance by Jerry Anderson (giving up only 3 runs on 7 hits) and an offense that exploded with 12 runs on 14 hits, the Rolling Thunder decimated the Pacemakers, 12-3, and claimed their third consecutive softball crown. With such a disparity in scores, however, the

final game was no match for the excitement of two that preceded it.

Anderson's first splendid pitching performance (1 run on 4 hits) had occurred only hours earlier in a 13-1 shellacking of the erstwhile four-time (1981, 1983, 1987, 1990) national champion Pacemakers. In that game, Pacemaker left-fielder Milton Smith electrified the partisan crowd with a lead-off solo home run in the top of the first against the Thunder. After shortstop Jorge Alfaro struck out, first baseman Steve Kirkwood followed with a single to right field, and short-fielder Perry Bender walked. The Pacemakers had at that moment what would turn out to be their one chance to break the game open. Unfortunately, third baseman Bob Trotter bounced into an inning-ending double play.

Smith's home-run shot awoke a sleeping giant in the form of the St. Paul team. The Thunder responded with more offensive weapons than an urban street gang. With one out, short-fielder Dave Eckstrom lashed a single to left. He scored off a double by third baseman Todd Anderson. Shortstop Kevin Peterson tallied Anderson with a double to deep center field, and first baseman Chas Helgeson followed with a towering triple to left center. Five batters, four hits, three runs—and the ambush was on!

Left-fielder Jesse Gonzales popped up to short center for out number two, and then the bottom of the lineup got their turn. Second baseman Hawkeye Schultz slammed a double between left and center and came home on Jerry Anderson's line-shot single to right field.

Pitcher Eric Barber, apparently rattled by the Thunder's machine-gun spray of hits, walked Dale Ellison and Dale Erickson, the number-nine and -ten batters, to load the bases for lead-off man Steen Seestedt's second appearance of the inning. "Steeper" sliced a double into the gap in right center field, scoring Anderson and Ellison, with Erickson stopping at third. Eckstrom singled to bring Erickson and Seestedt around, and Todd Anderson followed with another single, sending Eckstrom across with the tenth run. Peterson flied to center to end the inning, capping off an

unprecedented one-inning display of championship-series offense: nine hits, two walks, ten runs.

The Pacemakers never recovered, advancing only one runner as far as third base over the last four innings of play in this abbreviated contest. The Thunder punctuated their offensive onslaught with three more runs in the bottom of the fourth before retiring the Pacemakers in order in the top of the fifth to end the game. The final count: 13 runs, 16 hits. It was the first "ten-run-slaughter rule" victory by any opponent in the Pacemakers' 14-year history. [The rule: If, going into the fifth inning, the home team is ahead by more than 10 runs and the other team does not get any closer by the end of that inning, the game is over.]

Their stunning victory over the Pacemakers earned St. Paul the opportunity to rest; the Pacemakers had to play and defeat the St. Louis Rolling Rams to force a rematch—for the crown—with the Thunder. The Rams'

1993 NATIONAL WHEELCHAIR SOFTBALL TOURNAMENT TEAMS

St. Paul Rolling Thunder
Chicago Pacemakers
St. Louis Rolling Rams
Columbus Pioneers
OPH Fire
RIC Cubs
Dayton Halson Hurricanes
Greater Minnesota
SIL Northcoasters
Courage Rolling Gophers
Texas Stars

ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAM

- Jerry Anderson, Dale Erickson, Todd Anderson, Jesse Gonzales, and David Eckstrom (Rolling Thunder)
- Steve Kirkwood, Earl Jordan, and Greg Palumbo (Pacemakers)
- Steve Hanson (Rolling Gophers)
- Jim Dugan (St. Louis Rams)

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

Todd Anderson

BEST HITTER

David Eckstrom

SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD

Jim Dugan

BEST QUAD

J. R. Wynn (Rolling Gophers)

sole loss (7-6) had come at the hands of the Pacemakers in extra innings the day before.

With both the Pacemakers and the Rams facing elimination in the event of a second loss, each needed an ace on the hill. Jimmy May was available for St. Louis. Across the diamond, however, the absence of twirl-ball specialist Don Bulman loomed enormous in the collective mind of the Pacemakers. Second-baseman and part-time reliever Ed Brewer would have to take the mound against the Rams.

A classic extra-inning showdown developed between the Pacemakers and Rams. The Pacemakers had broken a 6-6 tie in the top of the fifth inning on Earl Jordan's two-out single that drove home Perry Bender. Bender had singled with one out and advanced to second on a liner up the middle off the bat of Bob Trotter.

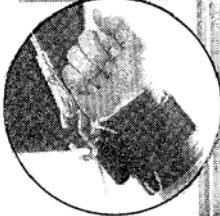
Their lead was as short-lived as a bug caught in a spray of Raid. Right-fielder Rick East boomed a sky-high drive over the head of Greg Palumbo. The ball rolled to the base of the fence in right, and by the time Palumbo could track it down, East was around third and scored without drawing a relay throw to the plate. Brewer retired six of the next seven batters to maintain the 7-7 deadlock through the bottom of the sixth.

Milton Smith hit his second home run of the tournament to lead off the seventh inning. Jimmy May then retired the number-two, -three, and -four Chicago batters in order and needed one run to tie and two for the win. The Rams forged an 8-8 tie in the bottom half on a pair of singles sandwiched around consecutive fielder's-choice ground-outs. First-baseman Dan Hall knocked in the tying run from second base with a two-out, game-saving single to right field to force extra innings.

With one out in the extra frame, center-fielder Earl Jordan delivered a mammoth home-run blast to dead center, sealing the Rams' fate and making a winner of Brewer, who worked a perfect bottom half to end the ballgame at 9-8.

The Pacemakers had dodged another bullet, totally unaware of

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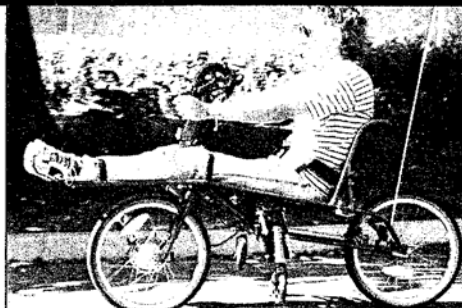
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COMPETITIVE EDGE

the ambush awaiting them on Field One and oblivious to their impending fate. It is said that lightning never strikes twice in the same place...but the Thunder does!

1993 World Team Cup

Villach, Austria, was the site of the 1993 World Team Cup, held August 23-29. This year's tournament was the best attended, with 22 countries competing in the men's field and 9 in the women's.

In men's action, Mexico almost caused a first-round sensation against Belgium, only losing 2-1 after a third-set tiebreak in doubles play. Britain's successful marathon struggle to come back from a 1-4 deficit against Australia in the deciding set of doubles lasted until 2:00 a.m.

In the semifinals, Austria (with vocal support from the home crowd) won the first set of singles against the United States before going down in defeat. France edged out Germany in a three-set doubles decider.

The U.S. entered the finals with a good record, winning every title since 1985 until last year, when they fell to France. That result was repeated in Villach: Laurent Giammartini and Abde Naili defeated Randy Snow and Brad Parks, 6-4, 7-6, in the deciding doubles match. In singles, both matches went to three sets. Snow beat Naili, 6-1, 4-6, 6-1, before Giammartini put France back in the contest with a 6-7, 6-4, 6-1 win over Steve Welch.

The Netherlands, fielding the top two players in the NEC wheelchair rankings, were the favorites for the

women's title and sailed through the competition without the loss of a match. Austria lost to the favorites in routine fashion, and France defeated the United States in a three-set doubles decider that ended at 1:00 a.m. In the final, France was no match for the Netherlands, as Chantal Vandierendonck beat Oristelle Marx, and Monique Kalkman defeated Arlette Racineux.

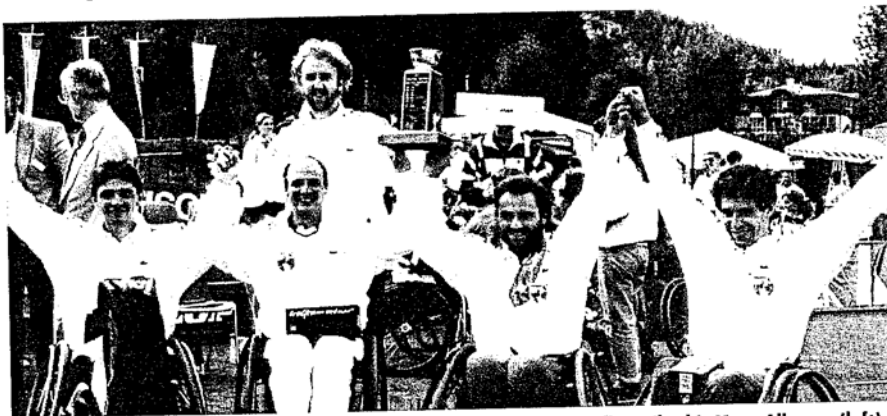
Power Soccer Championships

The November/December 1992 issue of *S'NS* reported for the first time the results of the annual Vancouver Power Soccer Championship. Held since 1989 in conjunction with the British Columbia Games for the Physically Disabled, the tournament has featured outstanding team play from an emerging group of wheelchair athletes: those who use power chairs.

This year's contest again featured speed, skill, and smarts—but with different results: For the first time, a team from the U.S.A. (the San Francisco-based BORB Bay Cruisers) emerged victorious.

After finishing last in their "maiden voyage" north in 1989, third in 1990, and with strong second-place finishes in 1991 and 1992, the Cruisers were itching to bring home the gold—and they did. As they pulled out of town on August 9, their baggage was a little heavier, weighed down by the large championship trophy.

The two games between defending champion Coquitlam and the Bay Cruisers were classic exhibitions of



Members of France's winning World Team Cup are Coach Jerome Delbert (back), Yves Albespy (left), Pierre Fusade, Laurent Giammartini, and Abde Naili.