

*A Narrative History of the
Montgomery County Senior Softball League
A Continuing History – 2017*

THE BOYS ARE BACK FOR MORE AGAIN

The end of the 2016 *Montgomery County Senior Softball League* season came too soon as it seems to do every year when October rolls around. Whoever thought a simple American pastime could bring so much enjoyment, so much camaraderie, and so much personal satisfaction just playing a game once thought to only be invented for little boys? But so much more than the game, senior softball brings to all of us the realization that playing in a league of like-minded peers makes the quality of our lives so much better. This is the feeling they all came away with when the 2016 season ended. But like in all years past, the season of 2017 held even more promise.

STRENGTHENING THE ORGANIZATION FOR 2017

The gentle wind blowing through School Road Park had barely blown the crumbs off the end-of-season picnic tables when the league jumped right into business for the coming year ahead. On Tuesday, October 25th, 2016, the annual Board of Directors meeting was once again held at the KC Prime Restaurant in Warrington, PA. Attendees included the thirty-three board members (league officers and managers), and by special invite, non-voting managers from both the Red and Blue divisions. Stan Schwartz distributed the interim treasurer's report, which indicated that the league was in stable financial condition. On the agenda at this year's meeting were two major items – re-structuring the league and use of the pitching screen – both of which would have a major impact on the future course of the organization. This year also saw a record number of 73 suggestions submitted by the membership, which were grouped into topical categories to minimize the discussion periods on each theme.

The 2016 board meeting was viewed by most members as being one of the most important since the inception of the MCSSL as an organization. The main topic of discussion was the proposed re-structuring of the entire league, which would entail splitting the league into two separate core divisions. Near the end of August, Commissioner John Frantz had sent out a survey to the membership soliciting feedback on the topic of the levels of play in the three divisions of summer 2016 (core *White*, where all league members play, and supplemental *Blue* [recreational-driven play] & *Red* [ability-driven play]). The prime purpose of the survey was to gain insight to player preferences, NOT a commitment to any particular level of play. The results of the survey were tabulated by the end of September with 133 members responding. Seventy-one members indicated “no change”, while the remaining sixty-two indicated changing to another structure or split of the league. The results were enough to initiate further dialogue on the issue of re-structuring the league for the 2017 season.

As the suggestion process began to indicate that the re-structuring issue was going to be a primary topic, Commissioner Frantz opted to “bundle” the suggestions into a single proposal that could be presented at the annual board meeting. Anticipating that an open forum discussion could potentially take more time than the board meeting could accommodate, Commissioner Frantz decided that the best option was to formulate a prepared compromised re-structuring plan to take to the meeting for discussion. With that notion, a few days before the board meeting, Commissioner Frantz assembled a small work group composed of himself, Assistant Commissioner Mike DeStefano, Treasurer Stan Schwartz, Secretary Jim Marple, Summer Director Bruce Williams, Blue Division Director Jim Binsberger, and Red Division Director George Schreader. The group discussed all current input regarding re-structuring, and ultimately came up with a formal proposal to present at the board meeting. The gist of the proposal would include the following: 1) a new *Blue Division* would consist of four teams (potential total of 64 players) playing two games per week (Mondays & Wednesdays); this division is for players seeking a more relaxed style of play, 2) a new *White Division* would consist of six teams (potential total of 96 players) playing two games per week (Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday); this division is for players seeking a more competitive style of play, and 3) a new *Red Division* would consist of four teams (12 per roster plus an extra players list of 10 for a potential total of 58 players) playing one additional one game per week (Monday only); this division is for White Division players (only) seeking an advance competitive style of play.

The re-structuring proposal was presented by Commissioner Frantz as the main topic on the business agenda. After an extended discussion, the vote was taken, resulting in only a few members dissenting. Commissioner Frantz advised the members that the league would move forward on the re-structure. In the week following the meeting, the official 2017 summer application form went out to the membership, on which each member would indicate their preference of Blue Division or White Division play (league fee being maintained at \$100), and if indicating White, whether the player also wanted to apply for play in the supplemental Red Division (an additional \$25 fee.) The winter league application had already been distributed in early October, the fee also remaining at \$100. (See *The League's New Structure for Summer 2017* below.)

There were four additional changes made to the rules and procedures for the upcoming 2017 summer season. In no particular order of importance, they were as follows: 1) pitching screen – use is optional during games, but mandatory during batting practice; a line will be placed in the mound area for proper placement, 2) between-inning warm-ups will be limited to three pitches and one throw per infielder to first base, 3) an additional line will be placed on the plane of second base to provide a visual assist for the third base umpire, and 4) courtesy runners from home will be allowed to commence running upon the swing of the batter, which makes the rule consistent with on-base runners.

THE LEAGUE'S NEW STRUCTURE FOR SUMMER 2017

Beyond a doubt, the league's new structure for 2017 became the highlight of the MCSSL's nineteen year history to date. Following the annual Board of Director's meeting in October that resulted in the league moving forward with re-structuring, Commissioner John Frantz assigned Summer Director Bruce Williams the task of putting together the new White Division teams. A special selection committee consisting of Bruce, Bob Gaugler, John Packel, and Jim Marple spent a considerable amount of time and effort to structure the new White and Blue Divisions. The re-structuring process also opened up an avenue to bring into the league additional players who might otherwise have been on the waiting list as in previous years. The league roster of available players expanded beyond the standard 160 (the cap in previous years.)

The committee determined that there were enough players (125) signing up for White Division play to field eight teams (15 to 16 players per team) instead of the previously projected six teams. There were enough players signing up for Blue Division play (under Director Jim Binsberger), which resulted in an initial division set-up of four teams. To fill out the minimum of a 14 man roster for each new team, a few additional players from the White Division were offered the option to also play in the Blue Division. The Red Division generated enough interest to establish 12-man rosters plus an extra list of 15 players.

Perhaps the biggest emotional impact to the league's re-structuring process was the re-naming of the eight new White Division teams. The long-standing history of the progression of team names came to an end. Well, sort of to an end. Commissioner Frantz and Summer Director Williams made the decision to re-name all eight new White Division teams, keeping the caveat that the names still carry the traditional "M" standard. Since the league's credo is all about camaraderie, it was thought best to retire the old names and move forward to establishing a new brand of solidarity and friendships. So as not to dissolve the lasting memory of the early years of building the MCSSL, it was decided to preserve the first four original team names for the new Blue Division. The Magics, the Marshals, the Marvels, and the Mavericks names would all be retained for the new Blue Division teams. The new eight White Division teams would become: the Magicians, the Maniacs, the Marathons, the Missiles, the Monarchs, the Mountaineers, the Musketeers, and the Mystics. The four Red Division teams (organized later over the winter by Red Division Director George Schreder) would assign new team names, familiar to all baseball fans: the Mantles, the Musials, the Mazeroskis, and the Mays. In addition, the league would also retain the Marauders name for the travel team. (As a side note, because of prior insurance transaction, the 2017 winter indoor league retained the old team names of Mustangs, Marvels, Minutemen, Midnights, Majors, Mavericks, Marshals, Maulers, and Magics.)

THE BUSINESS SIDE

The 2017 season saw a few changes to the league from the business side, all for the betterment of the league and its structure. With the re-organization of the summer league and the expansion of two additional teams, the MCSSL was in need of two further prime sponsors. The

league was also in need of a replacement sponsorship due to one of the businesses dropping out, bringing the total to a need of three new prime sponsors. In late December, Commissioner John Frantz put out the call to the membership to assist in soliciting the business community for anyone interested in providing sponsorship to the senior league. The call was answered. By early January, the league welcomed three new business organizations into the fold of prime sponsorships of the teams of the MCSSL. The new sponsors were: 1) North Penn Gulf, one of Upper Gwynedd Township's (Lansdale) premier automotive service and repair centers, 2) the Conicelli family of auto dealerships, and 3) Financial Independent Planning, a sound financial group. In addition, a fourth new sponsor, Hatboro Federal Savings, graciously opted to sponsor our MCSSL website after all teams had sponsors.

The other important change to the business side affected the winter indoor league. The long-time owner of the BucksMont Indoor Sports Facility sold the business to XL Sports World in late 2016. The changeover in ownership, however, had little to no impact to the league's continuing business relationship with the facility.

THE 2017 WINTER SEASON

Once again under the direction of Gordy Detweiler, the MCSSL's winter indoor season got off to quick start in early January. The Hatfield facility came under new ownership (XL Sports World), and fortunately the league's structure and participation was not affected. This year, there were enough players (a total of 96) signed up to field nine teams. Gordy was able to arrange a better playing schedule this year that included two additional time slots on Wednesday mornings at 9:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. On Tuesdays there would be a full four games scheduled (9:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 12 noon, and 1:30 p.m.), and on Thursdays there was only three games with the elimination of the 1:30 p.m. game. The weather stayed cooperative all through January and into early February until old man winter finally arrived to shut down the facility causing game cancellations for one day. The missed games were made up on March 21st, and another successful and fun-filled season came to an end with no further delays from the winter woes.

THE MCSSL HALL OF FAME

The second year of the league's program to honor those who have contributed their time, talents, and determination to mold the MCSSL into the organization as we know it today saw five new league members inducted into the hallowed hall. At the annual league kick-off meeting in late April, Commissioner Frantz and Historian Schreder presented a short overview of the process, in which all league members are encouraged to nominate those individuals whom they feel deserve consideration for recognition. The process remained the same, and the window period for nominations was opened to the membership until early May. In keeping with the guidelines, nine nominees (not elected last year) were automatically carried over into 2017. This year, there were an additional six nominees who entered their first year of eligibility for a total of fifteen nominees. The Nomination Committee (consisting of chair Historian George Schreder, three current Hall of Fame members – Manny London, Stan Schwartz, Dennis Lapin – and three members-at-large – George Hart, Bob Wellington, John Lancaster) reviewed the achievements and qualifications of all the nominees. As the guidelines allow for up to five individuals to be placed on the ballot, the committee came to consensus and placed five members onto the ballot – Jim Binsberger, Tom Boyd, Joe Juba, Ben Modica, and Larry O'Malley. The ballot was forwarded to the Commissioner, who in turn submitted the ballot to the 42-person Board of Directors for their voting FOR or AGAINST. The open voting period lasted until May 15th. A margin of 70% is required for the individual to be inducted, and all five aforementioned members were elected. The results of the Board voting were conveyed to the membership at the first social/photo picnic of the season in late May.

Formal induction into the MCSSL Hall of Fame took place at the annual Family Picnic on June 23rd. League historian Schreder presented to the crowd the accomplishments of each individual, who was then presented the award by Commissioner Frantz and Secretary Marple. A very poignant moment was had when the late Ben Modica's children, Joe and Maria, accepted the award for their dad and made known to all league members just how much Ben loved the game and all the guys he played with for all those years. The MCSSL Hall of Fame now has inducted ten league members since its inception in 2016.

SUMMER FIELD MAINTENANCE ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

The league was sad to see the retirement of Joe Juba, who had been one of the founding league members and who had unselfishly dedicated sixteen years to the league. Joe played his entire MCSSL career as one of the original Mavericks. But more than that, Joe endlessly contributed his time and effort as head groundskeeper, establishing a crack team of guys to maintain the field. He was also the hotline guru and was the moving force in starting the history project that culminated in the publication of the league's official history in book form. Joe would later be inducted into the Hall of Fame for his selfless contributions over the years.

With the retirement of Joe, the tough job of *Director of Field Operations* went to one of Joe's dedicated team members, Tommy Lane. Tommy jumped right into the new position without breaking stride, and the field team continued its superb performance of always having the field ready for play under all conditions. Tommy's team this season consisted of Tommy Corcoran, Dan Brady, Jeff Jordan, Tommy Dougherty, and Roger Rinker. Howie Schwartz joined the team as expert mechanic/welder to maintain the league's tractor and other related equipment.

One other important addition was appropriated for field maintenance. Because of the growing volume of equipment, the league purchased an additional metal storage box that was positioned next to the original Job Box at the field. Safety Director Jim Binsberger made the necessary arrangements to procure the new box. Field maintenance team member Howie Schwartz modified both boxes by welding new lock hasps to each box to ensure all league supplies would remain secured for league use only.

THE 2017 SUMMER SEASON

The MCSSL's summer season kicked off with all new core teams, eight in the White Division and four in the Blue Division. In addition, also commencing play were four teams in the supplemental Red Division consisting of players only from the White Division. The league's new playing schedule that went into effect was structured as follows: Blue Division games were all scheduled for Mondays and Wednesdays in the 9:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. time slots; White

Division games were scheduled for Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m., and 12 noon, and Wednesdays at 12 noon and 1:30 p.m.; Red Division play was scheduled for Mondays at 12 noon and 1:30 p.m.

The season was filled with several significant highlights (some of which are presented in detail in other sections). One of the exciting highlights of the summer season was the media coverage of the league and several of its players. Early in the season during May, Commissioner John Frantz, Summer League Director Bruce Williams, and League Historian George Schreder were interviewed and videotaped by representatives of Caukins Media. The group develops video documentaries for a series titled *Navigating Life*, which focuses on senior living and activities. This on-line video segment about the Montgomery County Senior Softball League was aired in June. *The Bucks County Courier Times* also ran a companion article. In July, the front page article in the Community section of *The Intelligencer*, entitled “A Player for the Ages”, was a fitting tribute to the MCSSL’s senior of all seniors, founding father Angelo Malizia, who turned 90 and continued to play in the Blue Division through the 2017 summer season.

Overall, the summer season lasting from April 25th to October 19th was subjected to a few heat cancellations, but quite a few more rain-outs due to an unusually wet summer season. The season ended on a positive note, with the Red Division capping off regular season play with an end-of-season one-pitch tournament that shuffled all the Red division players onto different teams. Also, two additional “nostalgia” games were held after the close of the regular season between the old-time Midnights vs. the Mongrels, and the Midnights vs. the Mustangs.

THE TRAVEL TEAM MARAUDERS

The travel season started off once again this year with a traditional January trip to Palmyra to play a doubleheader against the Harrisburg gang. Gordy Detweiler was still smarting from last year’s performance against the Burgers, which went winless up until the last two games at home. But the streak continued. The Marauders, with only eleven guys making the event, put on two great defensive games along with the bats exploding to log two impressive victories. A month later, however, the boys made a return trip to the Palmyra facility to play the Burger gang again. The Harrisburg boys clobbered Gordy’s gang, handing them two defeats that by all

accounts weren't even close. Gordy's long time senior rivals – and longtime friends – were all set for the upcoming summer season and more fun in the senior sun.

Summer didn't start out exactly as Gordy had planned. The first summer travel game away at Candlewick resulted in two astounding defeats, followed by two more at West Chester, which noticeably fielded a much improved team. The Marauders' first win of the season didn't happen until the charity game with the Phillies Ball Girls. Again, Gordy took the mound for the girls against his Marauder team. This year's contest was more one-sided than the previous two years when the Marauders played the ladies. In the first game, the Marauders prevailed 8-4. The second game was a 17-3 win to sweep the double-header. One of the highlights of the game was a long blast over the fence by rookie Tom Levins. Once again this year, the charity event took in \$625, which was contributed to the Phillies Ball Girls charities.

The remainder of the travel team summer season saw almost as many rain-outs as games. The Marauders managed to sweep two games from Allentown's Blue Team, but split two and two with the Allentown Red Team. Gordy's gang also split with West Chester at three apiece, split with Northeast Philly at one apiece, but lost three games to Lyons while only managing one win. Unfortunately, the Marauders were unable to complete any play dates with the Schuylkill County gang or the Harrisburg gang because of weather. Overall, the Travel Team Marauders came away from another fun-filled winter and summer season with a combined record of 13 wins and 11 losses.

THE SOCIAL SCENE

The league's most excellent social director, Manny London, wasted no time in preparing for yet another spectacular annual holiday party at the beginning of December, 2016, again held at the Church of the Messiah on Route 202 in North Wales. Over a hundred members and their dates were in attendance and enjoyed a catered feast of plenty as only Manny and Mrs. London could put together. Manny arranged this year for some entertainment that exceeded everyone's expectations. A gentleman named Eric Kearns put on a terrific one-man show that he bills as "Voices of Legends." Mr. Kearns vocal impressions of many of the legendary singers of our time, accompanied by the original music scores, took everyone on a trip down memory lane. All

in attendance could have sworn they were listening to such greats as Sinatra, Louis Armstrong, Neil Diamond, and many, many more legends of the music industry. Following the show, there was plenty of music left for dancing. The event capped the end of a great 2016 season in the MCSSL.

Moving into the spring and summer months for 2017, on May 19th, the league members enjoyed the first outdoor social event of the season, which again combined team photo day with a great picnic. Manny once again put together a great feast, and was happy to announce that the attendance at this year's gathering set a record for attendees, which included quite a few of the league's new "rookies", all of whom certainly enjoyed the extravagant spread.

On Thursday evening May 25th, the league sponsored its annual outing to a baseball minor league game. Due to its growing popularity, once more the Lehigh Valley Iron Pigs team, which plays in Bethlehem, was the choice. Again this year, over a hundred league and family members attended this popular event despite some uncooperative weather.

On Thursday, June 22nd, the league held its annual golf outing, once again at Skippack Golf Club. (The event had been scheduled a week earlier, but had to be re-scheduled due to the township re-scheduling its annual police day activities.) The event was organized this year by Vince Torno, who assembled a committee consisting of Mike Destefano, Steve Czyzewicz, Ben Fiore, Jimmy Flynn, Chuck Favata, and George Schreuder. The boys did a lot of legwork contacting a number of golf courses throughout the county for pricing packages, and finally settled on Skippack. The cost was kept at \$45 per person, which included green fees, cart, refreshments following the round, and prizes. Due to the last minute re-scheduling, the field resulted in only about 45 golfers able to commit. It certainly did not diminish the fun. It was a great weather day and all had a great time. Prizes (many of them donated by league members) were awarded for longest drive, closest to the pin, low gross individual and team, low net individual and team, and prize giveaways. This year's low net team winners were Steve Czyzewicz, Dan Brady, Bruce Williams and Joe Spiecker, and low gross winners were Steve Mallozzi, Ray Forlano, and Tom Weinman.

The weather again threatened the Family Picnic activities on Friday late afternoon and evening, June 23rd. Manny's feast was spectacular as anticipated, with many league members and

family providing extra dishes and desserts. Fortunately, the attendees made it through the banquet and follow-up activities, which included the Hall of Fame induction ceremony, One-Pitch tournament team award, annual golf outing team award, and prize giveaways. This was immediately followed by the evening entertainment. Manny arranged for a local Doo-Wop group, “A Perfect Blend”, which was excellent. They no sooner got into their act when, unfortunately, Mother Nature took over and the rains came, sending most people to shelter. The rains continued off and on and the group continued playing as the crowd thinned. Overall, it was yet another fun-filled and successful family get-together.

The traditional end-of-season picnic was a spectacular success as always. Manny arranged for an “Italian Banquet” in honor of Angelo Malizia, who recently had celebrated his 90th birthday, which was also celebrated with much fanfare in the local news media earlier in the summer. A special thank you was also extended to the field maintenance team, under the new leadership of Tommy Lane, which went far beyond the call of duty on many occasions throughout the season to prep the field after heavy rains made it almost impossible to play. The boys enjoyed one heck of a round of applause for their efforts.

ANNUAL ONE-PITCH TOURNAMENT

Once again, the tournament resulted in one of the most popular events of the summer season. The preparation committee of Tommy Lane and Jimmy Marple did a super job of organizing the teams while Manny London and Cheryl Marple kept the tournament moving and did the scorekeeping for the ranking system. Tommy Dougherty did a superb job of field preparation. It was another great turnout of players, as six teams were assembled. The teams were managed this year by Bruce Williams, Bob Weaver, Steve Alligood, Dale Bishop, Wayne Bailey, and Jimmy Kotz. The tournament started bright and early on Monday, June 12th, and the warm weather cooperated all day. The format remained the same as in previous years, each team playing two five-inning games. The field would then be pared down to three teams for the semi-final round based upon wins/losses, runs scored for/against. A system of tie-breakers is used to determine the winners. The first three teams to be eliminated were Team Weaver, Team Bailey, and Team Kotz. The championship game was played between the top-ranked team and the semi-

final winner. Team Alligood lost in the first game of the tournament, but bounced back twice to qualify for the championship game against Team Williams, which hadn't lost. Team Williams pulled off an impressive come from behind 11 to 8 win to have their team name put on the league's One-Pitch Tournament Trophy for the second year in a row.

The tournament again this year also served as a charity event. Helping worthwhile causes in the Hatfield area has become a mission of the league's business activities. The league is very appreciative of the support it has received from the township over the years, and this year's tournament raised money for the William J. Chapman Memorial Scholarship Foundation. Donations this year totaling \$436 were collected during the event. Additional later donations were made by non-attending league members and their families. Long time league member, Ben Fiore, for the second year in a row sent out a call to all the golfers in the league asking them to "clean out the garage" of all used golf balls. Ben collected the balls, sold them to a local driving range, and donated the money back to the charity event. At the end of November at the township meeting, the final total of \$1,000 was donated and presented to the township by Treasurer Stan Schwartz and Hatfield Township Liaison Bud Hyndman. Special thanks went out to all those league members and supporters who generously contributed to this worthy cause.

ANOTHER FUN-FILLED SEASON COMES TO AN END...

... but it won't be long before it all starts up again. The 2017 season was another outstanding success for the MCSSL. Once again, we can't emphasize enough how much Tommy Lane's field maintenance team did one spectacular job of preparing the field each and every day that a game was scheduled! These guys are the best, and it just goes to show again how dedicated the membership of this league is when it comes to volunteering and to making each continuing year a better success than the year before.

The 2017 season came to an end with the close of the end-of-season picnic. The talk of the day was about how fast the summer season seemed to zip by this year. It seems to be that way when you get older, somebody said. Somebody else said that it also means that the start-up of the winter season is approaching faster than we think. Good thing. We're ALL ready to start playing again after a few weeks off.