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“Great Softball Teams”

by
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In the five-plus years I have lived in The Villages I had never gotten around to seeing a local softball game so I thought it would be a good opportunity to do so when my son Marc was visiting. We piled into the golf cart, along with 18-month-old baby Tucker and trekked over to the Saddlebrook Softball Complex. We got there just as a game was beginning between the Cardinals and Pirates, members of the Division 2 (East) league.

I was impressed by the athleticism of the players and their ability to motivate around the field as they do. Some of the players were relying on knee braces, A-bandages, spandex stockings and other supportive aids to keep everything held together while they batted, fielded, ran, pitched and threw, but again, that just highlighted their desire to be there and continue getting out of life everything they can.

I've always enjoyed slow-pitch softball and I remember when I first moved here I entertained thoughts of playing the game here, but when I read that some Major League baseball players were on the teams, and that tryouts and a “draft” system determined who played where, I decided against the idea of getting involved. I remembered that in my Rotary club's annual game against the local Lion's club I was the only player that struck out three times without ever getting the bat off my shoulder, so I was sure I would be out-gunned in this league here.

Anyhow, Marc, Tucker and I sat on the bleachers and watched the full 7 innings of a very close game... at least close until the 6th inning. Through the 5th inning the score was tied 9 all, then in the 6th the “visiting” Pirates scored the maximum allowed 5 runs with no answer from the “home-team” Cardinals to make the score 14-9. Since we were sitting on the home team side we rooted for the Cardinals to make a come-back but to no avail. The Pirates scored an additional 7 runs in the 7th inning to no runs for the Cardinals, and the game ended 21 – 9 in favor of the visitors.

Marc and I did meet some nice people sitting in the bleachers with us. Yolanda, a nice lady from “Long-gyland” New York, whose husband Bud played left center for the Cardinals. Two knee braces didn't prevent him from hitting the ball well and running the bases and going after fly balls much quicker than I would have been able to. Yolanda said that Bud had been playing softball for over 30 years, long before they were married almost 4 years ago. She said they have lived in The Villages for 3 years and discovered this wonderful place by accident. Her granddaughter saw the Villages commercial on TV and had ordered the video so she could learn the song they sing on the spot, and then she told Yolanda about it. Even though Yolanda never saw the video she and Bud decided to visit here while on vacation nearby, and on the third day they bought a home. She said that once Bud saw the softball facilities and heard of the organization of teams, he said, “That's it. We're buying!” And they did in

Poinciana Village. Needless to say they love it and Bud plays 3, sometimes 4 times a week during the 4 seasons. They only travel during the off-season of softball.

Sitting with us was Dick, another friendly individual who also plays softball 3 or 4 times weekly. When asked what he does in his spare time he said, “I come here and watch them play softball.” He brought me up on the facts that during the winter season there are almost 2,000 players who come out regularly to play in a total of 5 Divisions, 5 being the lowest and 1 being the highest. He also said even someone with “limited talent” would have a chance to play in one of the divisions, and I should try. There is actually a 6th Division but I didn’t hear why it wasn’t treated like one of the others. There are a total of 9 softball fields and on average 2 to 4 games are played each day during season.

So... a great game, with great company and topped off with a chili-dog and a coke from “Fran’s Bullpen,” the concession stand at the hub of the 4 fields. Who could ask for a nicer afternoon? Get out in the fall season and see a game for yourself.

Have a great week.

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