

BAJA wraps up season in style

By Christopher Boan
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The 20th season of Born Again Jocks Association softball concluded in a flurry of homers, highlight reel plays and late-game heroics.

The league held its end-of-season playoffs for the Catino and Allison leagues on March 23, a blustery Wednesday, at the Chuck Catino Softball Complex at Canoa Preserve Park.

The tournament started on March 21 and saw the Jeff LeFave Edward Jones Investments team win the Catino League championship, while Hickley Automotive took home the Allison League crown.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

The Catino championship was the second in a row for the team's manager, 81-year-old Jim Hill, who coached the team alongside his son John, 59.

The father and son were determined to capture the crown, pouring over every detail when they drafted their team in January and using the elder Hill's 14 years of league experience to scout every player available to them.

"Last year was my first year managing, so I did a lot of research," Jim said. "And I've been playing down here for so long that I knew a lot of the capabilities of each of the players. It's been fun. Knowing each of the players and the camaraderie, and seeing the cohesiveness itself on each of our teams. There are no arguments. We keep a disciplined team. And that helps."

The Hills' team squeaked by their first two opponents on Wednesday, beating the Insurance Center teams twice by a combined score of 34-33, including

an 18-17 victory in the Wednesday afternoon championship game.

John, who's playing in his first season of BAJA softball, believes the copious amount of time he's spent with his father throughout the season has brought them closer. "It's just been very interesting," John said. "I've gotten to know a whole different side of my father in softball."

He added that their team's success this season — including their regular season Catino League-best 24-8 record — is a direct result of the bond shared by players and coaches alike.

"Nobody gets down on one player making an error," John said. "Everyone makes errors out here, so no one player can lose a game for their team. It's a long game."

Jim added that it's rewarding to have the chance to share such a memorable experience with his son.

"It's been very satisfying, being able to draft players to compete and perform as a cohesive unit," Jim said. "And it's been wonderful seeing them put in their best effort at all times. We were down in a lot of our games, and some of us didn't think we were going to come back and win. But all of sudden a few spectacular plays sparked comebacks and we ended up winning games."

SISTERS ON THE FIELD

Speaking of family, it's hard to find a closer-knit group than the middle infield of the Animal Care Center club in the Catino League, where sisters Doris Carroll and Donna Harrison played.

This year marked the first time the two have played together in the league. Carroll has been ac-



Jim Brewer for the Green Valley News

Doris Carroll gets ready for action during a Catino League game earlier this season.

tive for 12 years, while Harrison recently completed her second season with the club.

The two were eliminated early in the Catino League tournament, but say their season was an overwhelming success nonetheless.

"Some poor, unlucky manager drafted both of us," Carroll quipped. "And I think he just wanted to make sure there was conversation on the bench."

And we laughed. We laughed the whole season. I don't think anyone had as much fun as we had this season."

Harrison, who decided to join the league before its 2015 season at the recommendation of her older

sister, says she's hooked on softball.

"The people make it fun," Harrison said. "We're all out to have a good time, and then to be on the same team with my sister — that was an extra plus. We always laugh and we always have fun. Ninety-nine point nine percent of the people here are very positive, and they're always pumping you up."

Carroll added that the league's acceptance of all community members, regardless of their age or talent level, is what she loves most.

"Just because you're over 50 doesn't mean you have to sit in a rocking chair through your golden

years," Carroll said. "You don't have to be an ace player or a jock. Just come out and have some fun, and you'll enjoy your time."

A TRAILBLAZER

Another first this season came when Connie Schultz took over as the manager of the Twist & Shout team of the Catino League, becoming the league's first female manager.

Schultz wanted to challenge herself, so she agreed to manage a team and set an example for female members in the process.

"Obviously it was a challenge for me, because it's a male-dominated sport, even here," she said. "But it was a great experience

for me, and I'm glad I did it. And I learned a lot this year."

Schultz has played softball in leagues across America for 45 years, but had never coached men before taking over this year. She said the learning curve was steep at times.

"I learned when to keep my mouth shut," Schultz said. "And there are times when I didn't, and I hope it made a difference ... I acquired quite a few people skills."

Schultz, who has lived in Green Valley seasonally for five years, said managing a team is an experience she'd recommend to anyone interested.

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