Boys of summer

Keowee seniors play softball for love of the game

BY BROOKS GALLMAN
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CLEMSON — If you were to mosey over to Nettles Park in Clemson on a Tuesday at 1 p.m., well, you'd surely be entertained.

With springtime rolling around, it means it's time for the Lake Keowee Softball team to begin its near-yearlong season of practices and games. However, this isn't just any softball team.

This squad is made up gentlemen 50 years old and up, and they won't let any onlookers forget that fact.

Amidst a plethora of wisecracks about one another's ages, the practices consist of batting practice followed by an intersquad scrimmage, with a lot of fun to be had by all.

While having fun is the central message given by the members of the team for participating, the truth is there are a myriad of ancillary reasons why many of them choose to keep playing at an age when others simply retire and relax.

In fact, there are just as many different reasons why they play as there are different states the members originally hail from.



JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

Lake Keowee Softball player Bill Shimel swings for the fences during batting practice Tuesday at Nettles Park in Clemson. The squad, made up of gentlemen 50 years old and up, played nearly 105 games last year between their weekly intrasquad scrimmages every Tuesday during the season and competitive games with fellow senior teams from all over the region.

"It's just fun," said Paul 'G-man' Goldman, who's originally from the Big Apple. "I go to the gym every day so I can't say I'm doing this to work out, but it's nice to run around. Really, it's the fellowship. I'd probably come down here even if I weren't playing just to say hello to everybody. We're a nice mixed, diverse group. We just have fun."

Goldman, who is former high schoo

and coach and grew up playing in and attending sporting events, a common theme that runs through the Lake Keowee softball team.

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Gene Fehler, 70, thinks nostalgia, at least for him, is one of the reasons he continues to play.

"I think that is part of it," Fehler said. "What's interesting is the fact that we get out here, and it's 50 and up, but the average age is probably closer to 65. Most of us, when we were kids, our summers were basically getting up in the morning, going to the ballfield and playing ball all day."

The team's season stretches from March until October, and last year they played nearly 105 games counting their weekly scrimmages and the competitive games with fellow senior teams from all over the region.

The unique thing about their scrimmages, though, is that they don't count errors, and they bat two innings at a time to keep from having to run in and out of the dugouts so often. In addition, they have a five-run limit per inning, with exception of the final inning.

While the format may sound different, there's no doubting the member just love the game, as witnessed by many of them playing through the aches and pains of old age, and a number of them having had hip or knee replacements in the past.

"I have aches and pains whether I play or not," Goldman said. "I have a bad knee with arthritis probably from an old football injury. It hurts to run, but so what? It's just pain."

That's an attitude shared by team manager Bill Kimpton, who will turn 66 soon and originally hails from Arkansas, as he faces an upcoming hip surgery of his own.

"I'll probably be out here about three weeks from the surgery on crutches managing, and hopefully by sometime in July I'll be back on the field," Kimpton said.

When you get down to it, though, it just feels good to get out and play the game, a fact to which Ray Nault, 72, can attest.

"I don't care how old you get, it feels good when you get a base hit," Nault said. "When you make a good play, it just feels good."

So if you ever find yourself with a free Tuesday afternoon, feel free to drop by on a practice to witness a true good time, and — if you're of age — bring a glove and a bat as the 33 members are always looking to expand their squads.

"Any skill levels are welcome," said one of the members. "You don't have to be good to play here."