Chick-fil-A of Seneca
Sign up for E-mail Specials



The boys of summer: You're never too old to hit it out of the park

E-mail story | Discuss story | iPod friendly version



By Jessica M. Sibley (Contact / Staff Bio)
June 11, 2009 - 12:00 a.m. EST

SALEM — Not many people have seen a 76-year-old choking up on a bat just before he fires a swing that sends the ball flying to deep center.

Not many people would believe that a senior softball league plays more than 100 games each season and could easily play 100 more if the league allowed it.

Not many people would believe that a 60-something shortstop could backhand a ball and get it to first base before the runner.

Not many seniors (50 and above) think an opportunity like this exists in the Upstate. And they would be right, except for in the Lake Keowee Senior Softball League.

The league is headed this year by Don Borth, who is in charge of line-ups, uniforms and the like, and has been playing in the league for nearly 10 years.

"It's surprising that a league like this doesn't exist in Greenville or Anderson," he said. "But that's exactly the case. We have a couple of guys from both areas that play with us, and they are very happy we are here."

The roster, made up of 39 men — but don't worry ladies, the league welcomes you too — was originally started by three local guys in Keowee Key 12 years ago.

The group is comprised of all skill levels and meets each Tuesday for practice, followed by a pick-up game during which they split into two teams and battle for the win.

"It's all in good fun, but we all really like to play," said Gene Fehler, team member. "You don't have to be great; it's just a good way to have a good time and stay active."

With the oldest team member going on 77, there are six players in the 50-59 age range, 11 players in the 60-64 range, 12 players in the 65-69 range and nine players in the 70+ range.

"We have guys out here with hip replacements and knee replacements," Borth said. "And then we have the occasional guy who will come out and pull a muscle because he hasn't worked some of them in a long time."

But overall, no one has been injured while in play, partly because of the safety precautions the league takes.

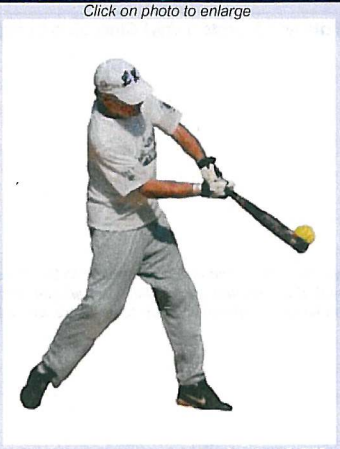
"For example, the pitcher will throw from behind a screen, there are two first bases to avoid collisions, a separate home plate for the base runner and a rule for overrunning the bases so we don't have to slide," Borth said.

And the squad has made plenty of improvement over the years as well.

"We used to play Hendersonville, N.C. and just get stomped," Borth said. "Now, we always have a chance to win."

Photo

Click on photo to enlarge

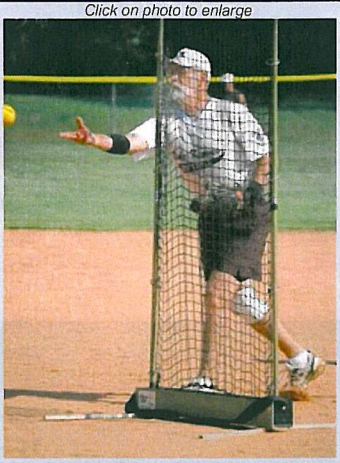


Jessica M. Sibley

John Hawbecker, 71, connects with this pitch for a rip to left field during batting practice on Tuesday, June 9, 2009 at Nettles Park in Clemson.

Photo

Click on photo to enlarge



Jessica M. Sibley

Certain modifications have been made to make sure safety is always number one.

ADVERTISEMENT



ADVERTISEMENT



ADVERTISEMENT

CAROLINA HOME REAL ESTATE, INC.

Most Discussed | Most E-mailed

Most Discussed

1. **Westminster man accused of wielding knife** (26 comments)
2. **Family squabble ends in arrests** (1 comments)
3. **Dear President Obama, here comes Willie** (7 comments)

They also travel and play teams from Franklin, N.C., Augusta and Charlotte, while those teams return the favor and come to the Upstate for games as well.

"We really need more people to get interested in joining," Fehler said. "This is something we want to keep going, even when some of us are no longer here."

And while softball continues to bring these guys together, three players found out something amazing about their pasts. Perhaps they would have never known it if not for the Lake Keowee team.

"Gary Savercool, Don Borth and Larry Gabe all lived within three miles of each other in Long Valley, N.J. for years, but they never knew each other until they joined the team here in South Carolina. Talk about a small world," Fehler said.

But as far as their families are concerned, the feedback is heartfelt.

Nancy Borth, Don's wife, has been alongside her husband for years while he played on various ball teams as she keeps stats for the books.

"I love this," she said. "I really do. And more than anything, it's inspiring to their kids and grandkids that come out to watch them play. They see their fathers and granddads out here and think 'Just because I have to get older, doesn't mean I can't still play the games I loved as a kid.'"

For more information about joining, call Don Borth at (864) 247-1517.

Pitchers throw behind a screen, there are two first bases to avoid collisions and a side home plate for runners to stomp without having to slide to beat a throw.

Photo

Click on photo to enlarge



Jessica M. Sibley

The Lake Keowee Senior Softball League team plays more than 100 games each season, with their oldest player going on 77 years old. From left, Gene Fehler, Don Borth and Bill Shimel.

Get home delivery of the Daily Journal/Messenger for as little as 30 cents a day! Click here to sign-up.

Comments

Readers are solely responsible for the content of the comments they post here. Comments are subject to the site's terms and conditions of use and do not necessarily reflect the opinion or approval of Upstatetoday.com. Readers whose comments violate the terms of use may have their comments removed or all of their content blocked from viewing by other users without notification. Please read our entire posting policy before commenting.

Post your comment

Commenting requires free upstatetoday.com **registration**.

Username:

Password: **(Forgotten your password?)**

Comment:

Preview comment

Online Contents of this site are © Copyright 2008 Edwards Group . All rights reserved. See our terms of use for RSS feeds .