

# Boys of summer played ball for Watsonville

"All ballplayers should quit when it starts to feel as if all the baselines run uphill." — Babe Ruth

The following is from the Pajaro Valley Soft Ball League Official Program dated 1952: "The Association (softball league), started in 1938, is now in its 11th season. During the four war years, play was suspended and even now the Korean War is siphoning off many young men who would ordinarily be playing this year. The league has been a self-supporting organization but the cost of fielding a team takes several hundred dollars out of a sponsor's pocketbook. Many forms of recreation here are financed at least in part out of tax dollars paid to the schools, city or county. The Pajaro Valley Softball association costs the taxpayers nothing."

In 1938, the Pajaro Valley night softball league's first game was in June of that year with 18 teams involved. "Preceding the ceremonies, the players of every team in the league marched from Main street to the park, led by the Pajaro valley band." The high school baseball park had been improved and illuminated with lights that were used for the first time that night.

Some of the "old-timers" that gather around the dinner table at the VFW Hall on Friday nights played in this Softball League over the years. Such names as Hill, Tsuda, Wiggins, Bliske, Gross, Fiorello, Johnston, Taylor and Correa remember those baseball games on such teams as Jack's Log Cabin, Carroll's Flowers, DeMolay, Al Massera Co., Watsonville Pirates, Berman's Steel, VFW, Ralph and Carl's, Charles Ford, Crosetti, Nisei



**Betty Lewis**

That was Watsonville

Vets and others. According to the official program the teams were cut down to nine in 1952.

"Jack's Log Cabin, defending A section Pajaro Valley softball league champions, bowed to their closest rivals for the 1949 crown Monday night when the Al Massera Co. entry took the opening game of the season, 4-3, before an overflowing crowd at the high school park. In the second game of the evening, Ralph and Carl's got off to a B section lead in besting the Watsonville Pirates, 3-2 in a battle of pitchers." — Register-Pajaronian, May 24, 1949

That same year, R.F. Hill of Jack's Log Cabin and Sam Yamamoto of Ford's were the batting champions. Hill collected 11 hits in 25 trips and Yamamoto swatted the ball 15 times out of 33 at bat. Hill beat out his closest rival, Henry Wempe, by a 440 to 378 average.

One of the outstanding players on the Carroll's Flowers-Wilmar Manor team was Sid Rock, ace softball pitcher, who had been pitching since 1933. He had played with the Los Angeles Red Devils and in 1937, he pitched 16 no-hit no-run games — certainly no slouch on the mound! His teammate in those early years was King Kong Kelly who would become very insult-

ed if anyone got a hit off of him! "Sometimes, after a couple of innings, he'd call in the outfield. They'd sit down around second base and play cards with the infield for the rest of the game." — Register-Pajaronian, May 4, 1950 in a column by Dick Stannard.

Members of the Carroll's team in 1950 were: Ben Aaron, Hal Raley, Ernie Chitwood, Ronnie Hill, Jack Newby, Dick Rathbone, Harry Crofoot, Zane Russell, Sid Rock, Tomio Tsuda, Pat Carroll, Ray Bliske and Ferman Tavarez. This same year the A teams were: Marriotts Shell Service, VFW, Heights Market, Ralph and Carl's, Jack's Log Cabin and Economy Drug. In the B division were: Freedom Merchants, Idle Hour, Aromas Eagles, Peck's Country Store, DeMolays, Nisei Vets and Cal's Club. Taking on the umpire duties were Johnnie Wallace, Jerry Bernstein and Shorty Sherman.

"Elmer Skillicorn had a perfect night at the high school field Thursday. He threw a no-hit, no-run game against Peck's Country store and then won his own ball game when he drove in two runs with a single. The final score — DeMolay 2, Peck's 0." Register-Pajaronian, June 1950. Admission to the games in the early days was ten cents and then went up to \$1.00 in 1950 with the opening of the new softball field at the high school park.

In talking with Tomio Tsuda, he told me that he started with the Nisei team in 1947 and they were the champions of the B division in 1947 and 1948; he also played with Carroll's Flowers, Ralph & Carl's and the Crosetti teams — a total of 11 years playing softball in Watson-

ville. Floyd Wiggins tells of pitching and coaching for the Berman team from '47 to '85 — they won the championship 23 times! He also told me of going to a game as a youngster in Oklahoma City and seeing Babe Ruth play — what a thrill that must have been!

According to Wiggins, when a ball was hit out of the playing area onto Blackburn Street, Watsonville, whoever retrieved it was given a candy bar for returning it to the team — little money was available for baseball equipment though the shirts were also provided for players by the sponsors.

Some of the advertisers in the official programs were: Trent's Drive-in Fountain, Parisian Cleaners, Blue Bird Barber Shop, Height's Market, Cal's Club, Daly Bros., Idle Hour Caf , Harold's Waffle Shop, Jack's Log Cabin, Al's Snooker Club, Happy Jack Music Company and the Star Cash Grocery. All gone today but not forgotten!

There are many, many stories to be told about these Watsonville softball teams and it is my hope that these "boys of summer" will record their remembrances of those early years when people flocked to the high school field to watch the favored Watsonville team battle for the championship. As Ed Hall readied to do the announcing and Dick Lynn or Bob Marsh sharpened their pencils to keep score, "play ball" floated over the crowd and the game began.

"When we played softball, I'd steal second base, feel guilty and go back." — Woody Allen

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Photo courtesy Tomio Tsuda

**The Nisei Pajaro Valley Softball Team, 1947. Back row, from left: J. Shoji, S. Kimoto, Shig Etow, Shigi Morimune; middle row, from left: George Tanimasa, Bill Yamada; bottom row, from left: Dick Tada, Aki Arao, Tats Nagase, George Ura, Coach Tomio Tsuda, Sully Matsui, Ben Tada.**



Photo courtesy Floyd Wiggins

**Berman's Steel Pajaro Valley Softball team, c. 1965. Top row, from left: Les Rasmussen, Bill Davidson, Gary Beller, John Sipin, Floyd Wiggins; bottom row, from left: Willie Marquez, Jack Coffey, Art Rodriguez, Angelo Rodriguez, Tony Oiiva.**