

MULTI-LEAGUE BASEBALL (est. 1974): A BRIEF HISTORY

By Dottie Rich, Co-Founder, 2005

I had always been athletic, but in my childhood and teen years, there were very few opportunities for girls to play in competitive sports. I gave a big cheer when Title Nine passed, and worked with the Acalanes District and the intermediate Schools in Walnut Creek School District to implement the program. (There were two intermediate schools then.) Outside programs such as WCYAA were just getting started also, and soccer was barely on the horizon- certainly no soccer league existed.

My children attended Tice Valley School, which is now the Jewish Community Center. One day, in the late afternoon, I saw several girls throwing baskets, and a couple of dozen boys and two adults practicing on another court. I asked the girls where their coach was, and they replied that they didn't have one. I raced down to the WC Recreation Department and had a hissy fit, ending up coaching the girls myself for five years. I didn't know much about coaching, but after many years in Girl Scout leadership, I knew a lot about girls; so we took the basketball championship for all of the five years.

We played baseball in the spring, and while my own son played on a Little League team at Walnut Heights, my best friend's son didn't get on the team nor did any of the girls I was coaching. My friend, Joan Larsen, was bemoaning that her son couldn't play, and I said, darn it, Joan- let's start our own league! We put it together in two weeks. She handled the paperwork and I recruited the players, coaches, and umpires, made up the rules- a modification of the rec department rules, and ordered cheap T-shirts and hats. (We advanced the money for the shirts and used the rec department equipment, bases, etc- also found the small, soft balls.)

By multi-league, we meant all the things you said in the revised set of rules, but also, that the girls got to play. You can't believe how many arguments I had with various mothers of boys because I was letting the girls play on the teams!! We also planned that every child played in the field all the time and batted- no bench sitters. We named the teams for the things around us- the Saklan Indians, Blue Jays, Peacocks (in Rossmoor at that time), Quail, etc. I think the presidents in the 1990's- Pat Litkiss and Tom- I think his last name was Snyder or some such, had that info on their computer. When the men took over, regular baseball names were used, but that's ok. It is the attitude that counts, not the names!!

We started with four teams of 2nd and 3rd graders. No one had any experience, but everyone had fun. The first games were a riot, and the kids really got into it. One little girl, Noel, fell down halfway to first base, crawled the rest of the way on hands and knees and still beat the ball to first base. She later was a Fullbright scholar- gutsy little girl!!

The second year (I think- 1975), we extended the league to upper division for the 4-6 graders. (Intermediate school then was for 7-8 grades) I don't remember how many teams

we had, but it more than doubled, and my own son moved over to our league and played for two years. ((Much more fun than the Little League.) We started the pancake breakfast and the barbecue. I moved on when he went to intermediate school point, but lots of good people took over the positions and kept it going. The league at that point was only for Tice Valley students.

When the school was closed, most of the students were transferred to Murwood, and the league went with them. Another friend, Rita Hughes, was the treasurer at that time; so she had the funds under her control. A Murwood father wanted to take the funds, start a Little League program, and leave out the girls. Rita is one tough lady, also with a daughter who still wanted to play, and she refused to give him the money until he agreed that Multi-league would continue in the same way.

My first grand- children were ready to play in the mid-ninties—Joshua Perkins, Ben Perkins, and Amorette Rich. Ami played several years and her last year was one in which they let the 6-7 grade girls form teams, and she got to pitch. It didn't work out too well, and she went on to play baseball on a boy's team in Pleasant Hill for two years. It was such a wonderful experience for her. She asked if she could come to the pancake breakfast on Saturday!! She is almost 21 now.

I was so glad to be back again, and especially happy that the same attitude still prevailed in the league. I was so amazed at how the league had grown from the very simple beginnings. We celebrated the 20th anniversary then. This is my third time around, and I won't be surprised to see some of the old players coaching or attending the games. They are in their early 40's now. Donovan is the last of my grand-kids, and I am looking forward to the season!!