

Amateur Softball

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Pitch Softball Association (USSA) World Tournament in Atlanta Labor Day weekend.

Under USSA rules, the Stars cannot take time off. They must continue to play regularly. So they will compete in a regional tournament Aug. 8-10 and the state tournament Aug. 15-17.

"We laid off two weeks earlier in the season," Bailey said. "Then we played poorly. Once you get into the habit of losing, it's what you call 'one of those things.'"

"So we are not going to take time off. We earned that trip to Atlanta."

Bailey has been coaching the Stars since 1977. His first team fashioned a remarkable 95-9 record. But he believes his current group is a better all-around team.

"I've always had good-hitting teams," he said. "But this team makes the plays in the field, too."

The Stars have been particularly hot in the last month, winning a qualifier for the World Tournament and an invitational.

"It's been sort of an up-and-down season," Bailey said. "But we've peaked the last month or so."

Before their current hot play, the Stars looked listless in a tourney at Cedar Grove. The culprit was a two-week vacation that interrupted their season.

"We can't take weekends off anymore," Wellman said. "Weekends off are disastrous later. So we'll keep playing. We're going to Atlanta to win."

But the disasters have been few, thanks to the outstanding play of Wellman, pitcher Tim Sullivan, third baseman Willie Hunt and outfielder Winfred Watkins. The four shared the MVP award in the qualifying tourney.

Sullivan's play has been integral to the team's success.

"How good the pitcher fields is crucial in slo-pitch," Bailey said. "The hitter can spot a pitcher who's not a confident fielder and hit the ball his way every time."

Wellman boasts that Sullivan is the "best defensive pitcher around. He pitches the ball and gets back to field fast," Wellman said.

Other team standouts are first baseman Worth McCloud, who hit .800 in a Class B Amateur Softball Association tournament earlier in the summer, and short-stop Darryl Miller, the MVP of a tourney at Smith Grove. Other team members are infielder Jerry Price and outfielders Michael Conrad, Willie Williams, Ricky Finley and Paul Porter. J.B. Dunlap serves as assistant coach.

Class C rules don't allow for the home run derbies that pro softball players put on. One of Bailey's former players, William English, would have to forget his 100-homer seasons. For only one batter can hit home runs in Class C. Other home runs count as outs, under USSA rules, or singles, under ASA rules.

The Stars travel extensively, playing tournaments almost every weekend during the spring and summer. They also compete in the city's American League, a Tuesday and Thursday circuit. The Stars finished in a first-place tie with Puckett Enterprises.

"When you run up and down the highways like we do, you run up the bills," Wellman said. "You've got to love this game to play. A lot of people don't know what it takes for us to get to these tournaments. It's more expensive than it might seem."

The Stars' expenses come out of their own pockets and from the team's treasury, which is filled by proceeds from car washes, raffles and team-sponsored tournaments. But a full treasury is emptied quickly by the purchasing of balls, which run \$50 a dozen, and hotel expenses, which will run \$2,100 on a discount for the Atlanta trip.

But Bailey and his players are determined to win the World Tournament. Monetary considerations take a backseat to that goal.

"I planned to quit two years ago," said Bailey, a second baseman when he went to Atkins High School. "But I'm still here. I want to see these guys win and

play the right way. Everybody makes mistakes, but I can't sleep at night if these guys aren't playing right."

Bailey, who lives in Advance,

drives approximately 20 miles to Civitan or Blum parks for daily practices.

"We enjoy playing," he said. "That's why we play. I still can

play a little, but my knees are getting bad. My knees get better when we win."

Because the Stars are a small team -- only 13 players -- they

work together in harmony.

"This is a family-oriented team," Wellman said. "Most of the guys will take their wives and children to Atlanta."

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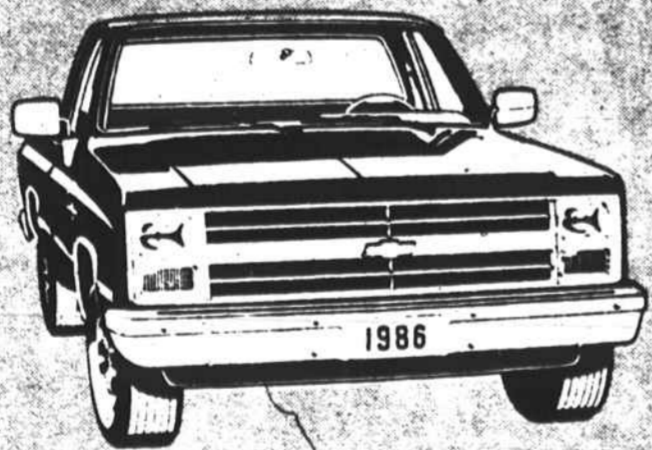
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