

Braking News

The Official Newsletter of the Stratford, Junior and Select Brakettes

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The holiday season is long gone despite the fact my Christmas Tree continues to shine brightly every night in the family living room. The one song I couldn't get out of my head was "I Need a Little Christmas." With 2022 Brakettes season just around the corner (134 days to be precise), I've begun humming a new carol, "We Need a Little Softball!" It has been an extremely long off-season, considering the way 2021 ended in a rainout final of the 13th annual WMS last August 8. Prospects of a third consecutive Covid-19 season has cast another dark cloud over DeLuca Field. With the Omicron variant spreading like a Southern California brush fire, my dream of a month's vacation in Florida has been extinguished. I'm told **Punxsutawney Phil** will see his shadow this year, giving us at least 6 more weeks of Coronavirus. Combine the disturbing daily health news releases with the deaths of way too many friends, neighbors, and Brakettes Booster Club members (**Dick Kennedy, John Mackback and Bob Lang**) in the past four months, and it's easy to diagnose my malaise. The Brakettes family suffered another gut punch December 5 with the passing of third baseman **Carol LaRose** (1963-70) in Cape Coral, FLA. A member of four ASA National championship teams she is ranked No. 15 overall in career runs scored (258), games played (485), hits (445) and RBI (200).

In past years I could always rely on two old stand byes when life without softball became almost intolerable. The Fighting Irish of Notre Dame earning a CFP berth gave me hope, until they drew Clemson or Alabama. Now that traitor Coach Brian Kelly has left for LSU, I hope he loses every game and gets put on probation for his fake Southern accent. The UConn women's basketball team never let me down before. But having to play without touted guards (**Paige Bueckers and Azziz Fudd**) is like expecting Brakettes Manager **John Stratton** to win nationals without an **Ali DuBois** or a **Sarah Lawton**. Hopefully the first of our five monthly newsletters, *Braking News*, will rekindle the flame that has burned brightly since I assumed the duties of Brakettes General Manager in 1988.

The first ray of hope for a sparkling 2022 softball season comes with the announcement of our new Select Brakettes coaching staff. Last year's assistant coach **Jack Pritchard**, who has a rich background in both baseball and softball as a player and coach, is our new manager. Former Stratford Brakettes infielder **Cassie Ruscz** (2014-16) of Wolcott, who played at Tufts, is the Associate Head Coach. Her best season was 2015 when she hit .306 and drove in 34 runs in 43 games. She is a Spanish teacher at The Gunnery School in Washington, CT, where she coaches basketball and softball. Lauren Pitney led last year's Select team to a 32-9-1 record. She is now an assistant at Manhattan College, while Select assistant Jaymie Sommers is a first-year teacher in Cheshire. The 2022 season opener is scheduled for Friday, June 3 between the Stratford and Junior Brakettes in a 7 p.m. twin -bill at DeLuca Field. It concludes with the WMS, August 3-7.

JUNIOR BRACKETTES BID ADIEU TO MIKE BRITT; THERE'S ANOTHER PRO LEAGUE COMING

We offer our sincere thanks to **Mike Britt**, the first base coach for the Junior Brakettes since their inception in 2019. Mike announced his retirement last fall. His softball expertise, love of the game and overall enthusiasm will be missed by all, except the umpires. . . USA-CT Softball has instituted several rule changes for 2022 for its 18U division. Here are some of them. Leaping now will be allowed by female pitchers (never too late to make it official since it's rarely called in games). One extra player will be allowed, meaning 10 players may now bat (something we've been using for years). The official "time limit" for games will be 1 hour, forty minutes and finish the inning (we play 'real' softball, meaning no time limit for all home games) . . . USA Softball of CT has scheduled division state championships for the July 29-31 weekend. The Select Brakettes will be playing in the 18U event that is scheduled for DeLuca Field. . . Brakettes announcer **William Ivanko**, a.k.a. Billy Cash from his days on Wall Street, recently was named the "Voice" of the newly formed Connecticut Cobras minor league basketball team that will participate in The Basketball League (now that's original) that debuts in March. The Cobras will call the University of Bridgeport's Harvey Hubbell Gym home and they open March 4 . . . There will

be a new professional softball league starting in 2022, although little has been heard from the **Women's Professional Fastpitch** (WPF) since the original announcement September. Once we have information, we will pass it on.

Stratford voters elect GM Bob Baird to Town Hall with resounding ZBA victory

If you don't remember the Academy Award winning film "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington", starring James Stewart in 1939, you will have the opportunity to watch its sequel play out over the next four years.

Stratford Brakettes General Manager **Bob Baird** is a man of many hats, most of them possessing a Brakettes logo. In early fall Baird threw his proverbial hat into the political ring and November 2 he punched his ticket to the Stratford Town Hall through 2026 as a member of the Zoning Board of Appeals.

"It was my first venture into the realm of politics," said Baird, who captured the Town's ZBA First and Second District position by a 478-vote margin. "I learned early on that you can't give away free tickets to Brakettes games as a voting enticement. So, I just kept 'office hours' in my daughter-in-law's Lordship Corner Market and introduced myself to everyone that came in. It didn't hurt that I've resided in the district for 67 years."

Despite collecting 1,726 votes to 1,248 for his Democratic opponent, Baird is not considered a threat to anyone in Washington, DC, right now, unless they are appealing a decision by the zoning board to get a permit for a backyard addition or swimming pool.

"I'm looking forward to the challenge. When I taught Civics at Stratford High School, I always told my students that they had to exercise their right to vote and should also volunteer to work for your community. And the best thing, the ZBA doesn't meet on any scheduled Brakettes game dates."

JUNIOR BRAKETTETS PITCHER EXEMPLIFIES THE TRUE MEANING OF STUDENT-ATHLETE!

To say that Junior Brakettes pitcher **Sophia DiCocco** has a lot to look forward to this coming spring and summer is an understatement. And it doesn't all revolve around softball.

The highly decorated student-athlete at Tufts University in Medford, MA, will soon begin training for what she hopes is another outstanding collegiate season for the Jumbos. Now in her sophomore season, Sophia dazzled her teammates and New England Division III last spring by leading Tufts to the New England Small College Athletic Association championship and the NCAA Bangor, Maine, Regional title with her skillful left-handed pitching, resulting in a pair of championships and a berth in the D3 World Series in Salem, VA.

Once her collegiate season ends, hopefully in another world series appearance, it's off to Pavia, Italy where she will participate in a five and one-half week program which aims to provide students with the opportunity to immerse themselves in the Italian culture while also earning course credit. She will attend the University of Pavia, one of the world's oldest institutions with evidence of teaching as early as 1361. In addition to taking two courses, the program offers many cultural activities designed to engage students in the unique history of Pavia and Italy. They will be traveling to Milan and Le Cinque Terre as well.

DiCocco has been studying Italian for six years, becoming immersed in it while at Norwich Free Academy. She hosted an Italian exchange student and now is excited about finally being able to visit and study in Italy. Upon graduation from NFA she received the Connecticut Seal of Biliteracy in Italian. She chose Tufts for its emphasis on globalization and language studies. She is majoring in International Relations and minoring in Italian.

Upon completion of her trip, she will join the Junior Brakettes in mid-season where she has been a big part of their success in 2020 and 2021, both pitching and with the bat. The Bozrah, CT, native compiled an 11-1 regular season record with a 1.22 ERA for Tufts after leading NFA to the CIAC Class LL finals in 2019. In two years with the Junior Brakettes, she has been their most successful pitcher with a combined 17-7 record which

included a 3-2 win over the Stratford Brakettes in the Caroline Farley Invitational tournament in Concord, NH last July. She has hit .366 and .380 over that period.

When pitching this season, if she doesn't like an umpire's call, she can always tell them what she thought of it in Italian! Hopefully, the ump is not bilingual, and his name doesn't end in a vowel.