

The Barristers OF SUMMER

By Angus Love

The scene is a late-season clash between two longstanding quality teams in the Philadelphia Recreational Lawyers Softball League. Pinnola and Bomstein is squaring off against the First Judicial District in a game with playoff implications. The game is being played at Pinnola's home field, the W.B. Saul Agricultural High School in Roxborough. This year 43 teams battled for the coveted 15 playoff spots and eventually bragging rights in the city.

This is also the first year in decades that there is only one division of the softball league as the competitive division was folded into the rec league. About 25 years ago when my team (Pinnola) entered the fray, there were five divisions in the competitive league and only a handful of rec teams. We employed the European soccer model of having to win your division to advance to a better division as the last-place team descended. There are several theories as to why the migration came about. With apologies to our former mayor and governor, Ed Rendell, "a nation of wusses" is not one of them. Title IX and the opportunity for female company may have more to do with it as each team is required to have two

women on the field at all times. The competitive league was dominated by Pepper Hamilton LLP and Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP for many years. They regularly squared off for the championship with Pepper getting the better of it. Our team started in the fifth division and won it along with the fourth,

third and second divisions but never got further than the final four of the first division only to suffer humiliating defeats at the hands of Pepper or Morgan.

This particular night is what was once known as "Ladies Night" but is now "Significant Others Night" when mimosas and strawberries are served to our guests. We are an aging collection of current or former legal aid lawyers who have been playing together for more than 30 years. We are so old that we have five father-son/daughter combinations that allow us to be competitive and give us a hand for odd jobs at the firms. FJD is one of the better teams paced by Court of Common Pleas Judge Daniel J. Anders, who hits the ball a country mile.



Deep Pockets pitcher Mark Maguire delivers to Blank Rome's Eric Weschler during an Aug. 7 playoff game in Fairmount Park. Photo by Jeff Lyons

Playing against the judiciary poses new challenges, so an umpire is required as the usual deference to the judiciary doesn't come into play. Although there are often disputed calls during the course of the game, each game ends with a traditional lining up of the teams and shaking of hands as a show of sportsmanship.

After growing up with dreams of playing major league baseball, softball provides an excellent antidote for a lifelong devotee of the game of baseball. There is no place I would rather be and nothing I would rather do than play softball with my longtime friends and teammates on a beautiful summer evening. Occasionally legal business is transacted, a referral here and an exchange of specialized knowledge there but usually it's talk of sports, family and occasionally politics. Diversity has always been an important component of our team, which has always had a strong Latino component. Our founder Peter Pinnola, a former CLS attorney, started his career some 40 years ago playing for Taller Puertorriqueno in the Spanish leagues along with former City Councilman and shortstop Angel Ortiz. Angel hung

up his cleats a few years ago after a short retirement speech, "I no DH."

Our motley crew spent 10 years previously in the Architects and Engineers League under the moniker of the Community Legal Services Crusaders with three surviving members including myself, before switching to the Lawyers League around 1990. We are a self-funded team and have members representing seven or eight different public nonprofit and private law firms. This year we are hoping to make a donation to the ALS Association in honor of our fallen teammate Al Phillips who contracted the dreaded disease many years ago and succumbed to it a year or so later. I still remember Al watching the games from his wheelchair down the left field line. Ellyn Phillips, Al's wife, founded the Philadelphia chapter of the ALS Association along with former Phillies pitcher Curt Schilling's wife, Shonda, many years ago.

Most of the large law firms field at least one team and the public sector institutions are also well represented. The U.S. Attorney's Office fields Team USA that was once managed by Zane Meminger, our current U.S. Attorney.

The Public Defenders field two teams, one federal and one city. The city team, known as the Nerds, actually won the rec division last year after many years of futility as their longtime pitcher David Rudovsky proved much more capable in the courtroom than the playing fields. In a bit of a stretch, Chico's Bail Bondsman fielded a team for a few years. Some teams make up fancy or cute names such as the Unwarrantable Failures (who usually live up to their name), Camden Benchwarmers (judges from the U.S. District Court for the District of New Jersey), Harmless Errors (judges from the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania), the Lefty Fielders (National Lawyers Guild), Deep Pockets (City Solicitor's Office), Barely Legal and Lightning. The District Attorneys' Association, which was traditionally one of the stronger units with multiple teams, has returned to the fray this year with the Flounders.

Much of the credit for our existence and that of the league goes to Jackie Dungee and Bonnie Hoffman of Hangley Aronchick Segal Pudlin & Schiller; Ken Racowski of Morgan; and Hyung Steele of Pepper for the great

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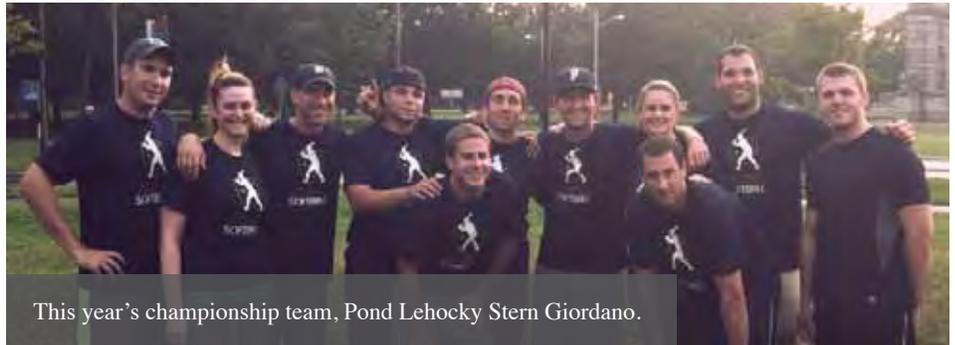
administrative burden that they have shouldered through the years. Jackie is our current commissioner and deserves extra credit as she keeps everything on track and settles the occasional dispute/protest. These folks have graciously given of their time to develop the rules, organize the teams, put together the schedules, keep the scores, set out the playoff form and crown a new champion each year. My hat is off to them for their tireless dedication.

I have always been a firm believer in the need for regular exercise, which is especially important in a profession, like ours, where stress levels are high and the primarily physical exercise is lugging around a briefcase. A healthy body is a healthy mind. While it is important to look good on your resume,

it is more important to look good in person. We're all better off when we get out and let those other body parts have their day. What better way to do that than play in the Lawyers League where you can get that exercise, engage in some healthy competition, enjoy the camaraderie of our friends and

teammates and enjoy a lovely summer evening and maybe even toast your teammates with your favorite post-game adult beverage. ■

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This year's championship team, Pond Le hockey Stern Giordano.

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