

## Former Farmington coach

# Famous softball pitcher picked for Hall of Fame

By KEN VOYLES

When it comes to reminiscing about softball and baseball on the old west side of Detroit during the years when amateur teams dominated the scene, Harry DeBash could tell enough stories to fill a book and then some.

DeBash, a long-standing member of a small band of people who have been involved in amateur athletics for a long period of time, has been recognized by the Michigan Amateur Sports Association and will be inducted into the Amateur Sports Hall of Fame early in the fall.

The Livonia resident has been active in fast-pitch softball and fast-pitch baseball approximately 45 years of which he spent 22 years as a player. He has been a player, manager, coach and an umpire during those years. He also has played in more than 1,600 games in both sports.

DeBash will be honored along with 11 other outstanding names in Michigan amateur sports.

"This is a tremendous thing for me, without a doubt," said DeBash. "It's been a long career but I've enjoyed every minute of it."

It was during the early years of the depression that DeBash started playing ball and he didn't stop until several years ago when he retired from the sport.

"I was destined to be a violin player. I came from a very strong music family," said DeBash. "I think I could have gone farther in baseball if it hadn't been for the music."

"During those years, we really didn't have anything else to do so we would play baseball. We played it from morning to night all of the time. I had to worry about my hands because of the music, but that didn't stop me much."

In those days, on the west side, the games were rough and tumble. Everybody played and everybody knew how to play.

"We would do everything we could to make the games good. We kept the fields in shape ourselves with rakes and shovels and we always had a lot of fun," DeBash said.

In 1931, playing for the Kronk Recreation team, DeBash paced the squad to a city recreation title. It was to be his first of many championship teams.

In fact, he has played, managed or coached nine championship teams in

one league alone. That was the West Side Courier League which was considered one of the fastest day leagues in the state during its heyday. The game was fast-pitch softball and the competition was always tough.

From 1937 through 1947, DeBash played with several outstanding amateur squads including Latham, Keller Vending, Blue Ribbon, Ford Local 600 All-Stars, Kelsey-Hayes, Oakman and George Edwards.

He played for and managed Ford Local 600 to consecutive championships in the Courier League in 1943 and 1944. The same squad also won titles in the CIO-UAW League in those years.

In 1945, he played first base for M & S of Flint, a team which took runner-up honors in the "World Softball Series." DeBash was honored by being named the most colorful first baseman of the series.

"I played with the great Charlie Justice on that team and I still consider him the greatest softball pitcher (fast pitch) of all time," said DeBash.

DeBash is full of memories of those games. One he recalls with relish was when Ford Local defeated Holly Carriers 2-0 in a contest without even one

hit for either side. Justice was the winning pitcher that day.

Another time when DeBash was in first playing for Keller he failed to make one put-out during the entire game. It was a no-hitter for Keller which was 1-0 on a solo home run.

Early in his career, DeBash had a chance to sign with the old Philadelphia Athletics but declined because he had just recently been married and the financial situation wouldn't have been the best if he had opted for a baseball career.

"I must say this. Not many people may remember Nap Ross but he was and always will be the best baseball coach in this state. I learned all of my baseball from him," said DeBash.

DeBash and Ross combined as coaches in 1947 and brought a lackluster Springfield Detail team from Class D baseball in the Federation to Class A in one year. They also defeated the then national champions Pepsi-Cola twice that season.

DeBash, who started playing organized ball at 15 and who never played in high school also managed and played with Chick-Ann's, another fine baseball team.

DeBash played with a lot of outstanding, but not too familiar names during his long career. Some of the more outstanding players included Ross, Garn Griffin, Harold Johnson, Nick Schenk, Pete Heady, Pete Burley, Arnold Smith, Roy Morre, Stan Green and the infamous Anggie Burns.

"I remember how Anggie would walk the streets with three or four contracts stuffed in his back pockets. He would have one from St. Louis or the old Boston team. The major league teams were always after him. He was an excellent pitcher. He could throw a marshmallow through a brick wall," DeBash recalled.

Unfortunately, Burns never made the majors. He was convicted of killing a man and spent most of his life in prison.

DeBash, who considers himself older than mud, moved to Chicago in 1951 but later returned and started to coach in Farmington Hills and Livonia.

From 1971 through 1976 he managed teams in the Colt League and the Livonia Adray League.

"I didn't want to take a little league team because the only thing that league does is keep parents off the

street and that is the truth," said DeBash.

The 68-year-old DeBash has several strong opinions about the Adray League and the way it is run.

"The league has one or two power houses and everybody else in the league goes along for the ride. The powerful teams like Redford Adray and Livonia Adray have all of the big horses," DeBash explained. "It's probably the best league around for sandlot ball. All of the scouts go there to watch the players."

"The problem is you can't go into the league with just high school players you have to have outsiders. If you look at the records in the past 12 years two teams and maybe one other have dominated the league," he continued. "I really think Mike Adray is a little too trophy happy."

Although he says he'll never get any credit for it, DeBash was one of the first people to really recognize the potential talent Ron LeFlore had. He remembers when one of his squads played at Jackson Prison and no matter what they did they could not get LeFlore out.

## Thoroughbreds to run at Detroit Race Course

Thoroughbred racing's big switch in the area comes off this weekend.

After Saturday's 10-race program is completed at the Hazel Park Race Track, the horses will be vanned across the city to the Detroit Race Course in Livonia where the second phase of the 1979 thoroughbred campaign will open July 16.

Ninety days of action is carded for the one-mile DRC oval, after which the thoroughbreds will return to Hazel Park in late October where they'll run until the end of December.

Six-day-a-week racing will be presented at the DRC with the first post-parades Mondays through Fridays at 3:15 p.m. and on Saturdays and holidays at 2 p.m.

There'll be one exception - opening day - when 10 races will be staged with the first at 3 p.m.

Admission charges at DRC will be \$3.50 for the clubhouse and \$2.50 for the grandstand. Parking is \$1. Gates open two hours before the first race.

DRC's betting format will be identical with the one which has proven successful during the Hazel Park meeting.

There will be two daily doubles at the DRC - the first on the first and second races and the second on the day's final two races.

Also, DRC will offer three daily perfectas (four on 10-race programs) and three trifectas (picking top three fin-

ishers) along with the regular win-place-show wagering.

"We're looking forward to a banner season at DRC," said track president Herbert Tyner. "The plant has undergone major changes in the last year and with the condensed schedule and en-

closed grandstand facilities we think we will make the track far more attractive to our fans."

E.J. (Bud) Sears, veteran racing secretary at Hazel Park, will again be in charge of the racing program at DRC for the second season.

He has put together a stakes program which will be highlighted by the \$100,000-added

Michigan Mile, the state's most famed thoroughbred race. This year's Michigan Mile is slated for Sept. 15.



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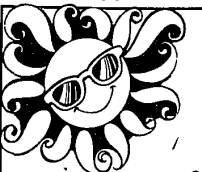
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