

# The softball legend of Al White

By Chris McCosky  
staff writer

**C**OMPWARE, a Plymouth-based, modified fastpitch softball team, was playing a team from Mount Hope, N.J., in the national tournament. The loser of the game would be eliminated from the tournament.

Compware leads 9-8. It's the sixth inning. Up steps a mighty Mount Hope slugger with runners on second and third. The guy has already blasted two "home runs." The catcher walks out to the mound to talk to his pitcher. The pitcher has given up one of the two homers.

"You want to walk this guy?" The pitcher stares at his catcher half in disgust, half in disbelief.

"Hell no," says the pitcher. "I'm going to strike his bleep out."

The pitcher strikes the slugger's bleep out and Compware wins the game and winds up finishing third in the nation.

The pitcher's name is Al White. He is a living softball legend.

**TALES OF Al White** are told throughout the Plymouth-Canton and Livonia areas where he plays. They are told in Port Huron, Lapeer and every other stop in Michigan that he's played. They are told down in Miami, in Georgia — any place where serious modified softball is played.

Al White has a national reputation. So valued is he, a team from Florida recently offered him a salary to move south and play for them. He turned the team down. "I appreciated the offer, but I've got my family to think of," he said.

Back at last year's national tournament... White's Compware team is playing a powerful hitting team from

## people in sports

Louisiana called the Ragin' Cajuns. The Cajuns know all about this White guy. They know about the wicked hard knuckleball he throws.

"It's not moving. It's not moving," the leadoff hitter shouts ecstatically to his teammates as he watches White warm up.

He steps up to the plate and watches helplessly as a White knuckleball dances over the plate.

"It's moving," he says dejectedly to his teammates.

White went on to no-hit the Cajuns.

"He's the best pitcher there is," said Compware catcher Dave Brubaker, who has been playing modified ball for 10 years.

**THE STATS** will support that claim. In 17 years, the 38-year-old Canton resident has amassed an amazing 600-75 won-lost record. In three seasons with Compware, his record is 98-11.

**How did I lose 11 times?** White said, shaking his head.

He has 16 career no-hitters. And he has led two teams to third-place national rankings — in 1978 and again last year. In 1978, White's record was 74-4.

"Al is a team ballplayer," said Tim Hawkins, Compware coach and longtime friend of White's. "He knows his baseball and he plays to win. He'll get real upset when he's behind."

Hawkins, who caught White for 11 years, is the man responsible for keeping track of White's feats.

"He's been named to the All-American team five of the 10 years it's been around," Hawkins said. "One day, I'll

never forget it, he pitched seven straight games in one day. Won them all."

White has a bit of Jekyll and Hyde in him.

There's the off-the-field Dr. Jekyll White: "I really enjoy this (playing softball). After the game, everybody's friends. We have a few beers. Everybody's happy."

**THEN THERE'S** the on-the-field Mr. Hyde White: "There are a lot of guys in the league that I have played with for many a year. But, when they step in the box against me, they're the enemy. If my mother came up, I'd have to strike her out."

Off the field, White is a soft-spoken, family man. He speaks fondly of his wife, Marilyn, and his kids Curtis and Shannon.

"Originally, I wanted to play until the day when my son could be my catcher," White said. "But, I don't think that's going to happen. He's too good a hardball player. I'd like to see him play college ball somewhere."

Curtis lettered in baseball as a sophomore at Plymouth Salem.

On the field, White is the fiercest of competitors. He'll scowl at his own players for making an error. He'll knock down a batter to move him off the plate. If the ump misses a call, he'll be sure to let him know about it.

Last Tuesday, Compware (6-0 in the Plymouth League) hooked up with sec-

ond place Total Foods (4-2). It was a bad night for White and his team. Total Foods hammered Compware 11-4. Both the Jekyll and Hyde inside White were evident.

At times, his knuckler danced like Fred Astaire. At other times, it came in like a grapefruit. At times, White cracked jokes and smiled with his teammates and even with opposing pitcher Ken Casey. At other times he cursed his teammates' and his own mistakes and exchanged unpleasantities with the hitters.

**WIN OR** lose, White has the respect of everyone in the league.

"I'll tell you what," said Cary Gray a former teammate of White who now plays against him in Plymouth. "I'd much rather play with him than against him."

It wasn't always that way for White. He came to Michigan from West Virginia in 1966. He had been an all-state baseball player. He hadn't pitched softball since the fourth grade.

When he first joined up with Hawkins, he couldn't throw strikes and he had trouble with his delivery. To make it worse, he was given the jersey number of 0.

"The first year was terrible. I was this hillbilly who couldn't throw strikes and I think I was the first person ever to wear 0. I took a lot of ribbing," he said.

Times have indeed changed. Now, nearly every team sports a No. 0. Most times it's the pitcher who wears that number. White, once the most-hooted player in the league, is now the most-admired and imitated.

A befitting tribute to a living legend.



BILL BRESLER/staff photographer

Tales of Canton's Al White are told wherever serious fast-pitch softball is played throughout the nation.

## Wolves defeat Canton

The Livonia Wolves remained unbeaten in Great Lakes Men's Soccer League play Sunday with a 4-2 victory over Canton at Whitman Park.

Craig Pickard and Dave Kusza scored second-half goals to give the Wolves their sixth straight win. Kusza, of Livonia Stevenson and Eastern Michigan, also scored in the first half along with teammate Walt Barrett as the two teams battled to a 2-2 tie.

The Wolves meet the Dearborn Kickers in a GLMSL showdown at 5 p.m. Sunday at Whitman Park, located on West Chicago between Merriman and Farmington roads.

## sport shorts

### • FALL SOCCER

The registration deadline for the Farmington Soccer Club's fall outdoor season is Saturday, June 30. The league is open to boys and girls ages 6-16. A \$25 entry fee includes eight games and uniforms. Register by mail to PO Box 162, Farmington 48024.

### • COACHES NEEDED

The Farmington Public School District is seeking coaches for the 1984-85 school year in the following areas: freshman football and basketball, middle-school football, assistant varsity swimming, girls varsity gymnastics and varsity wrestling. These are non-teaching positions. Interested candidates should call Ron Holland, director of athletics, at 471-6337.

### • SPORTS CAMPS

Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation and the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community Col-

lege are co-sponsoring instructional sports camps throughout summer.

Basketball, diving, volleyball, softball, golf and soccer are among the courses offered. Classes, which are limited in size to insure more personalized attention, are designed specifically for boys and girls in middle school and high school.

Camps will be offered on a one-week basis, some beginning as early as June 18.

Minimal fees are charged. Registration is in progress. For a brochure or more information, call 474-6115 or 471-7533.

Birmingham Groves High School coach Jim Crosby is conducting baseball clinics during June and July for youngsters ages 9-17.

Sessions still available are for boys 9-11 (July 2-13, 9-10:30 a.m.); boys 12-14 (July 2-13, 10:30 a.m. until noon) and boys 14-17 (June 25-July 13, 1-4 p.m.).

Cost of each clinic is \$30. Areas of instruction are

in hitting, bunting, throwing, pitching, catching, first-base work, outfielding, infielding, sliding and base running.

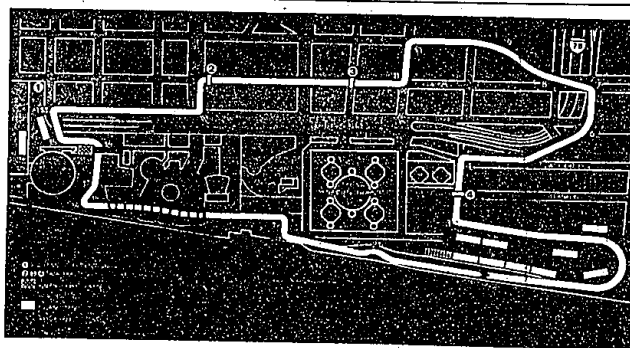
To register, send check to Jim Crosby, 1410 Shaker, Troy 48063. For more information, call Crosby at 559-3287.

### • JUNIOR OPEN

Stony Creek Golf Course will conduct its third Junior Open Golf Tournament Friday, July 13.

The tourney is open to all boys and girls between the ages of 13 and 17. The field will be limited to the first 100 entries with fees received.

For further information, call 781-9166.



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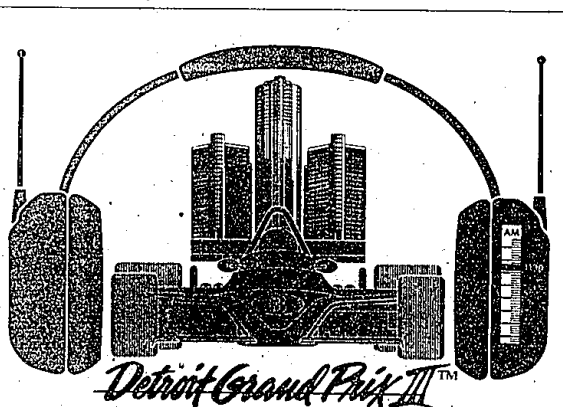
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