

Power teacher strikes up honors as umpire

BY CHRIS MCCOOKY
STAFF WRITER

It was a big night for Bob Kaump, teacher at Farmington's Power Middle School.

He was being inducted into the Amateur Softball Association hall of fame, only the fourth umpire ever so honored by the association.

The crowd at the Northfield Hilton in Troy was packed with longtime friends, colleagues and associates.

His introduction was long and somewhat unnering. There was talk of his 29 years of service, the 4,000 games he's worked, the four national championships and countless state championships. They mentioned that he has trained and organized umpires and run the softball leagues in Redford since 1978, and that he's introduced safety requirements to the game that have since been adopted nationally.

He heard them say that of the more than 80,000 registered ASA umpires in this country, he is one of only 1,600 accepted into the National Indicator Fraternity.

By the time it was his turn to speak, he was blushing and sweating. He pulled out his speech and then stopped abruptly. In a tiny voice he called out to his wife in the audience, "Jeanne, um, could you bring my glasses up here, please? I can't see my speech."

The place broke up. Certainly Bob Kaump's bearded mug belongs on a plaque in the ASA shrine in the Bailey Center in Westland, and his name belongs on a plaque in the national hall in Oklahoma City, Okla.

But to acknowledge him only for his services as an umpire is to recognize only a small part of

what makes this man special. Bob Kaump, you see, may have discovered the secret to eternal happiness.

"Most people his age think their lives are ending," said Jeanne Kaump, Bob's wife of 14 years. "But Bob is just beginning to do things that he's wanted to do his whole life. It's actually quite inspiring."

Olympian at 56

At age 56, Bob Kaump is still teaching. He has been teaching in Farmington Public Schools since 1973. He still organizes the umpires and the ever-growing softball leagues in Redford.

He still umpires a full schedule of games, including state and national tournaments. And he still plays ball for one of the best senior-division teams in the country (Nothurst).

In fact, at age 56, Kaump became an ASA All-American pitcher and won a Senior Olympics gold medal.

"It's really been a heck of a year," said Kaump, who has lived in Redford since 1978. "I mean, winning the gold medal in the (1993) Senior Olympics and winning the national championship are two of the biggest achievements of my life, and they both came after my 50th birthday."

Kaump recently had arthroscopic surgery on both knees.

"I had that done so I can continue to play and umpire for another 20 years. I worked the National Senior Championships at Canton a couple of years ago. There were 105 55-over teams and five 75-over teams. That's how long I want to keep doing it."

Kaump's legacy to Redford
While Kaump continues to

write new and exciting chapters in his life story, the early chapters have made a lasting mark on the Redford community.

Under his guidance, Redford softball has grown from 90 teams to close to 130. He has initiated industrial and cood leagues. And, as anyone who has played softball throughout the metro Detroit area will tell you, Redford umpires are among the most well-trained and respected around.

"When I first came to Redford, I found that the umpires weren't as properly trained as I had been by George Gilles in Westland," Kaump said. "What I was able to do was bring in some better people and bring more structure."

Kaump is a strict, by-the-book umpire. Most of the time. When he's working the national tournaments, he makes sure everything is done right, from checking the depth of the batter's box to confirming that the players' hats are on straight.

But he has been known to have his fun, too. Like the time, in a lopsided game, when he tossed a coin to determine if a runner was out or safe at first. Or the time, when he was officiating a basketball game, he actually helped inbound the ball for a team.

"The team was getting killed and they couldn't get the ball in. I knew the guy, so I yelled for the ball and he passed it to me. The next time, I yelled for the ball again. When he passed it, I just walked away and the ball went out of bounds."

Funny guy. But the true measure of what Kaump has meant to Redford came two Saturdays ago. At Claude Allison Field, a season-opening softball tournament was being played on two fields. There



ART EMANUEL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

were three little-league baseball games going on, the volleyball pit was full, and the kiddie park area was jammed. It seemed the whole town was there and everyone was having a blast.

"Neal Ross, Redford's parks and rec supervisor, looked around and said, 'This is what recreation is all about,'" Kaump said.

"That made me feel good. We really do have an extremely good program in Redford. There are so many things for people to do."

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