

observing sports

Call it "slo-pitch" or "blooper ball."
Call it the "old man's game" or a "sport for fat men."

But, whatever the name, it's a great activity to have around and certainly has brought out of "retirement" many a would-be Al Kaline, Mickey Mantle or Ted Williams.

"Slo-pitch," as the game most commonly is known, is a branch of softball — except that those who thought up this version of the sport had enough sense to make it fun for its participants and give them all a chance to become stars.

Softball over the years was a game where the pitcher dominated. He'd fire with such speed that seldom did a batter connect.

You still have this version of softball going where the scores are 1-0, 3-2, or maybe 4-3.

But, by leaps and bounds, the slo-pitch or blooper game has taken over.

The scores in such contests are astronomical — 18-12, 32-25 ... more like football and sometimes reminiscent of basketball.

But, the main idea is to give the batter a chance to swing and connect ... and that's what you have.

IT HASN'T TAKEN any of the various skills away from playing softball. You still have to be able to swing a bat with a certain degree of dexterity.

The fielding has become more taxing. Unlike in fast-pitch softball, where the outfielders stand around and the infielders don't have as great many opportunities to see what the ball looks like, there's something to do in the field on almost every pitch.

Batters seldom strike out. When one does ... he's so embarrassed he runs and hides in some distant corner.

But the beauty of slo-pitch is how "slo-pitch" has become a family game.

The other night we saw a dad, spruced in his playing uniform, hanging onto one child on each hand while mother walked in front with a couple of other youngsters at Ford Field.

It's a pleasant way to spend an evening. While dad has fun playing, mom and the kids get a chance to cheer for the "old man."

In some instances, slo-pitch games take on a picnic atmosphere.

One night we spotted players in between bats roasting hot dogs and broiling hamburgers and also enjoying a bottle of soft drink ... or was it a beer?

Everybody has a good time ... at slo-pitch games ... and, believe me, the participants take the sport seriously.

TAKE THE GANG from the Friendly Press sports department. What they do each Monday excites them far more than what Denny McLain or Gordie Howe might do.

George Cantor, who follows the Tigers, was delighted that the Detroit team's schedule was such, he could slip back from Minnesota, before going on to Chicago ... and thus he was able to sock a couple for the FP team.

Executive sports editor George Puscas bemoaned the fact he went hitless ... but gee, was he proud of his nifty fielding. And what about big Jack Saylor clubbing a couple hits, Grant Smith making like a Will Chamberlain at first, or Ken Clover finding that it's not as easy to handle shortstop as he thought?

Slo-pitch proves that because you're 30, you don't have to throw in the towel and quit playing on the sandlots.

IT'S A SPORT recreation officials have wanted to get older fellows back playing some brand of baseball or softball.

Around Observerland, the number of slo-pitch teams keeps growing. Understandably so. The rules aren't much different than what you find in baseball.

The pitcher must arc his tosses so that the ball at one point hits a point above the batter's head. The runner must remain on his base until the batter swings and connects or the ball is in the catcher's mitt.

The base paths naturally are shorter ... for who at age 35 could run 90 feet four or five times in one game?

Umpires find slo-pitch game's grueling chores. With the balls sailing merrily around, there's no chance for an ump to relax or take it easy ... not that he should. But they do.

9 Titles, 8 Runnersup! That's Record At East

When the week started, Garden City East's baseball team knew it was certain at least a share of the Mid-Wayne League championship.

East merely had to sweat out what happened when Taylor and Riverside finished out their respective schedules.

When the news was in—it was East all alone atop the loop with a 6-2 record.

Coach John Kulasek continued his brilliant record of producing only winners or runners-up at East.

In 17 years as coach of the East baseball team, Kulasek now boasts nine champions and eight second-place teams.

Top that record!

East has won the flag the last three years in compiling its amazing success story on the diamond.

Four members of the 1969 team were named on the all-star loop squad picked by the coaches.

Leading the way was catcher Kevin Wilkinson, named the most valuable member of the East team.

Wilkinson finished with a .370 hitting mark and has been awarded—and accepted—a scholarship from Kansas State University.

Besides baseball, he starred in football and basketball, but the indications are that he will concentrate on baseball in college.

John Chute, East's third baseman, also was named on the all-league team. It marked the second year in a row for Chute, who hit .310.

Pitcher Tim Whitson and Dave Bailey, a rightfielder, were two other league choices.

Whitson turned in a 5-0 league record and a sensational earned run average of 0.75.

Bailey emerged as one of the area's leading hitters with a .529 mark.

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Morrison Day Held To Sponsor Athlete

Saturday is John Morrison Day at McDonald's Redford Township drive-in.

The owner, George DeDecker, has pledged to contribute \$500 of the day's proceeds to send the Redford Union star hurdler and Coach John Mackenzie to the Golden West National Invitational Track Meet in Sacramento, Calif.

The eight hottest U.S. high school hurdlers will compete in each hurdlers event of the Golden West.

Morrison qualified because his times in the regional meet were best in the nation in high school competition this year. He was clocked at 15.0 in the high hurdles and 18.9 in the low hurdles.

Action pictures of the star will decorate the drive-in on John Morrison Day, but the champ will be competing among the eight best hurdlers from 15 midwestern states in the Golden Midwest at Elmhurst, Ill. that day.

The McDonald's drive-in, owned by DeDecker, is located at 26830 Plymouth Road, between Beech and Inkster.

Admits \$2.50. Children 6-12 41¢. Time Trials 8:30 p.m. Race 8 p.m.

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