

SPORTS

On the diamond

Oregon's queer softball league begins its second season of play on April 21

▼
by Burnie Gipson

Oregon's first and only lesbian and gay softball association is starting its second season on April 21. Rose City Softball Association will pitch off as Margie Boulé, *Oregonian* columnist and jazz vocalist, sings the national anthem, accompanied by the Rose City Gay Freedom Band.

LaVerne Lewis, Lesbian Community Project executive director, will throw the first ball for the women's division and will be a guest speaker. Barry Pack, executive director of Right to Privacy, will throw the first ball for the open division and will also be a guest speaker. The ceremony will begin at 11 am, and teams will play at 2 pm.

"With 250 members, Rose City Softball Association is one of the largest organizations in the state this year," says Scott Franklin, RCSA Open Division commissioner.

In February of 1995, RCSA became Oregon's first nationally sanctioned gay and lesbian softball league. Then, RCSA had a total of seven teams and a mailing list of 105 members. This year RCSA expects 12 to 14 teams between the two divisions.

Over 70 people participated last year. Franklin said this year most new players are women—the women's division will likely need to either make a new team or create a waiting list.

The open division comprises men's, women's and co-ed teams. RCSA created a women's division in September 1995 to bring more women into the league. This February, with the new division, the RCSA became a full participant in the North American Gay Amateur Athletic Alliance, a non-profit international organization with member leagues in 29 cities in the United States and Canada.

"[NAGAAA] sponsors tournaments, so we can choose to go play other gay teams," says Kim Conner, women's division assistant commissioner and team member of Scarlet Letter.

Teams look forward to participating in local and regional tournaments during the regular softball season, including the Emerald City Softball Association's Cascade Cup in Seattle, and the San Francisco Bay area's Golden Bear Classic.

As a prerequisite for membership in NAGAAA, each division must send a team to compete in NAGAAA's Gay Softball World Series, an annual series for 19 years. This year's Gay World Series will be held in Minneapolis.

"The teams and the league anticipate significant expenses associated with sending 30 people across the country for an entire week," says Franklin about the Gay World Series.

A charity "All-Star" Softball Game fund-raiser featuring players from RCSA and members of the Portland Police Bureau is under discussion for Portland's Lesbian and Gay Pride weekend.

The event would benefit RCSA, Pride Northwest and a charity to be designated by the Portland

police. The organizations are working with police officer Katie Potter. Information has been presented to officers with their paychecks, and Franklin says the outlook is promising.

RCSA derives other funding from sponsorship. The league as a whole has sponsors, who give \$300 each. Last year's league sponsors were *Just Out* and Friends of Our House, through an individual donor. Sponsors to date for the 1996

division, played softball while in the Marine Corps. His RCSA team went undefeated in the regular division and placed second in the league tournament. These wins brought JOQ's to the Gay World Series. The team, which tied for 13th place, was RCSA's first representative in the series, held last August in Seattle.

Conner and Kinniburgh have both competed in city leagues. The governing structure of RCSA



Fans watch a 1995 season game

season are *Just Out*, Hollywood Health Foods and Portland Leathermen. RCSA has team sponsors, too. Community organizations and businesses give \$300 to sponsor a team.

Players pay a \$40 fee to become league members and have a voice in how the league is run. Players must provide their own glove and bat, but Franklin says equipment is sometimes shared.

When Conner was 8 years old she played in Bobbysocks, which is much like boys' Little League. She has been playing softball for the past 25 years, playing in college ball, and has played slow-pitch for the past seven years.

James Kinniburgh, of JOQ's team in the open

is different, the two players explain. The organization is in the process of becoming a nonprofit organization, or a "C league."

"A membership with a nonprofit is different from city leagues, because we all have a say in how we want the organization to be run," says Conner.

At the end of July, RCSA will hold elections for the first time to elect decision makers for the organization.

Playing on the city league teams felt restricting to both players, although Kinniburgh's team was predominately gay men, with three or four straight men.

"When playing straight teams, you couldn't relax and be yourself...and you couldn't camp it up," he explains. "We were in the closet for the most part.... We never knew how the other team would react."

Making sure "incidents" don't happen while playing softball is a concern for the players of RCSA.

"We are working to be inclusive...of all skill levels...[and] as far as communities of color and affordability," says Conner. "We are taking necessary steps to let everyone enjoy it. Respecting everyone's outness around it is important to us, too."

She adds, "We are working hard on creating teams that are equal in ability as much as possible.... We don't want leagues getting bent out of shape and not coming back."

League rules through NAGAAA allow each team no more than two heterosexuals.

"[With] some teams, you just never know for sure," says Kinniburgh.

Bisexuals are included as far as RCSA is concerned.

Age in the league is also decided by NAGAAA; players must be 18 or older. Some teams are mixed, with ages ranging from early 20s to mid-50s.

As for gender, in the open division there are three teams that are all male and three others that are mixed.

For the women's division this year the teams and their sponsors so far are Scarlet Letter, formerly known as the Purple Hearts (Nancy Barron, Ph.D.); Mad Dogs (Jay Larsen); Crane & Love (attorneys); Fox and Hounds; Egyptian Club; and KAOS, the Salem team. Women's teams will play each other two times.

In the open division so far teams include Slaughters, Dirty Duck, JOQ's, Travel Agents International, and Zig Zag (construction company). Teams will play each other three times.

RCSA league games are played on Sundays, from April 21 through the end of July, at 1 pm on fields 1 and 2 at Alberta Park on Northeast Twenty-second Avenue and Ainsworth Street. No games are played on Memorial Day or Fourth of July weekends. As of this year, RCSA will not play during Lesbian and Gay Pride weekend because of changing dates, but hopes to play in the charity game with the Portland Police Bureau that Sunday, June 23.

Kinniburgh admits there are more spectators for the women's teams than the men's.

"We keep [the games] fun," says Kinniburgh. "We could use more support from fans. Mostly friends and loved ones come out to the games. For instance, my mother never misses a game."

For more information about RCSA's open division, call Scott Franklin at 244-8520; women's division, call Toni Carr at 788-9375.

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