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 Elvis Mitchell, **THE NEW YORK TIMES**
 Mike Clark, **USA TODAY**

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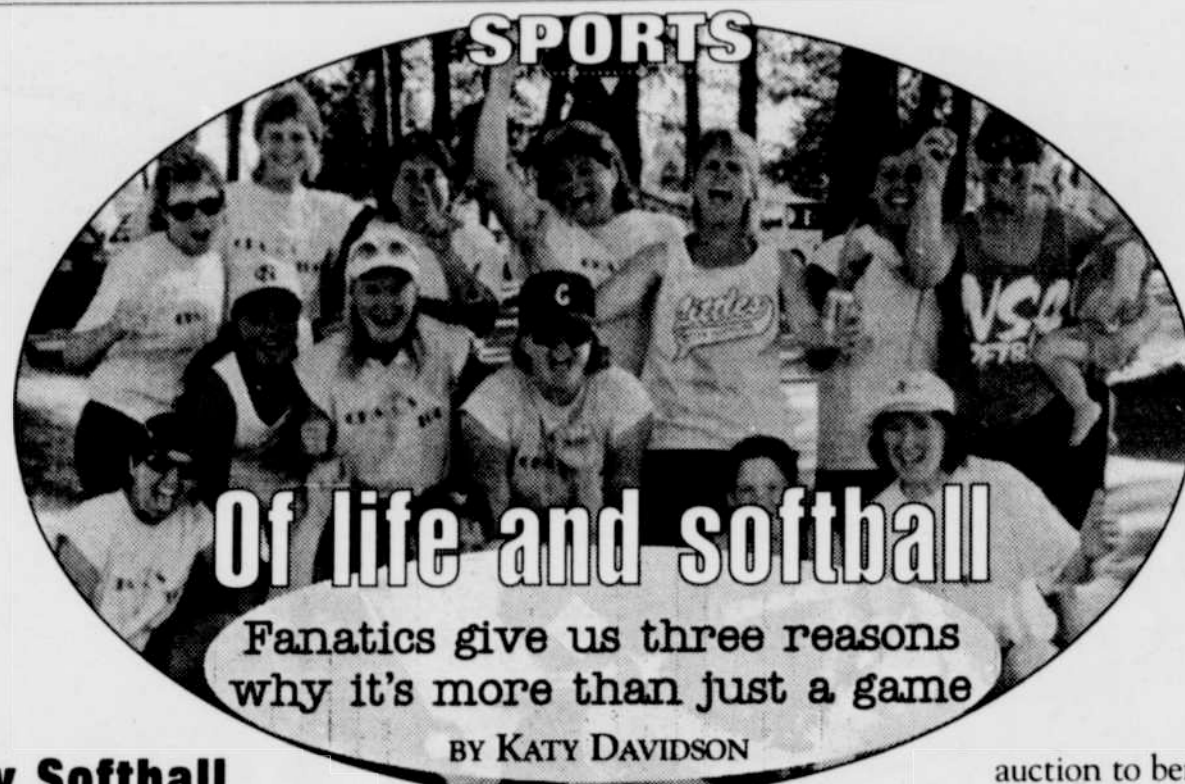


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Of life and softball

Fanatics give us three reasons why it's more than just a game

BY KATY DAVIDSON

Gay Softball World Series

From an economical standpoint, it could be huge. Very huge.

When the Gay Softball World Series swept through Atlanta in 1998, attendees pumped \$10 million into the local economy. Most of the money went to queer-affiliated businesses.

Now, a special committee of the Rose City Softball Association is preparing a proposal to bring the event to Portland in 2002.

"We're talking about thousands of people," said Jae Larsen, head coach of Team Mad Dog and assistant commissioner of the Rose City Softball Association women's division. "It's an incredible week. For an amateur athlete, it's the best thing you can be in."

Both Team Mad Dog and the Portland Storm, the respective women's and men's league champions, will travel to Toronto later this month to participate in this year's world series. Alongside the teams, the Rose City committee will give an hourlong presentation to the North American Gay Amateur Athletic Alliance, the organization in charge of awarding the annual series.

With help from representatives of the Portland Oregon Visitors Association and the Portland Hilton, the committee recently held its first practice presentation—complete with an inspirational, come-to-Portland-for-culture video (set to a smooth-jazz soundtrack). The presentation also includes a list of Portland factoids, weather charts, venue profiles, a run-down of activities, a softball highlight video with a cameo from the West Hollywood Cheerleaders and messages from a few local nonprofit organizations and Mayor Vera Katz.

At press time, Portland's only competition for the event was Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Several committee members said Fort Lauderdale's weak point will be its high temperatures and humidity levels in August, while Portland's late summer weather is generally pleasant. The committee will make its presentation Aug. 13 and hear the results the next day.

Tournament of Choice

Softball and naked slip-and-slide: a match made in lesbian heaven?

Later this month, upwards of 800 people will storm the softball diamonds and camping sites of Prairie Fields, Wash., as the Lesbian Community Project celebrates the 15th anniversary of its Tournament of Choice. The event was originally a one-day softball tournament organized to raise awareness of LCP's programs.

These days, the event runs the course of a long weekend. Tournament organizer Karen Hefner says it now is held in Prairie Fields, which is a 30-minute drive from downtown Portland, because "it's the only place we could find that had six fields and camping facilities all together."

The weekend includes two days of softball games between 8 a.m. and dusk, a silent

auction to benefit LCP, live music, a barbe-

cue plus vendors with queer-related merchandise. Even hairdressers show up, Hefner says: "They come out and give butch haircuts and things like that." And yes, there really is a celebratory naked slip-and-slide event!

The tournament is not a function of the Rose City Softball Association, although several of the association's teams will compete, including the Just Out Mud Skippers. Hefner says any women's team may enter the tournament—in fact, some teams exist only for this event. Because of the vast range of experience among the teams, the organizers divide the tournament into four divisions.

Hefner, who now has helped organize this extravaganza for eight years, says watching the event evolve has been interesting. The age range is now quite remarkable, she says, and more players show up with children. The organizers have acknowledged these changes by creating a quiet section of the camping area for families "away from the party girls," Hefner says.

Despite the evolution, the tournament's original purpose still rings true. "It's to build community," she says. "It's become a tradition—people come from all over Washington and Oregon."

■ The 15th annual TOURNAMENT OF CHOICE will take place Aug. 11-13 in Prairie Fields, Wash. For more information, call the Lesbian Community Project at (503) 233-3913.

Project Good Dog

To Jae Larsen, veteran coach of Team Mad Dog, softball is more than just playing a game. It's about bringing together community.

Earlier this year, the team started Project Good Dog, a plan in which the whole team does an hour of community service for every \$25 in sponsorship money it receives. The Mad Dogs are trying to raise \$10,000 to get to the world series in Toronto later this month.

Though the team is still a few thousand dollars short of its goal, Larsen says, "No player will be left behind because of lack of funds." In addition to the project, the Mad Dogs are planning a karaoke party and their own version of *The Dating Game* to raise more money for the trip.

■ To make a donation or for more information about PROJECT GOOD DOG, call (503) 287-1413. Team Mad Dog will hold a karaoke party/fund-raiser 7 p.m. Aug. 6 at Chez What in Portland, 2203 N.E. Alberta St. The cost is \$5. The team also will play *The Dating Game* and hold a date auction 8 p.m. Aug. 10 at the Egyptian Club, 3701 S.E. Division St. Both events will help the team cover transportation costs to this summer's Gay Softball World Series in Toronto.

KATY DAVIDSON is a Just Out staff writer who can be reached at katy@justout.com.