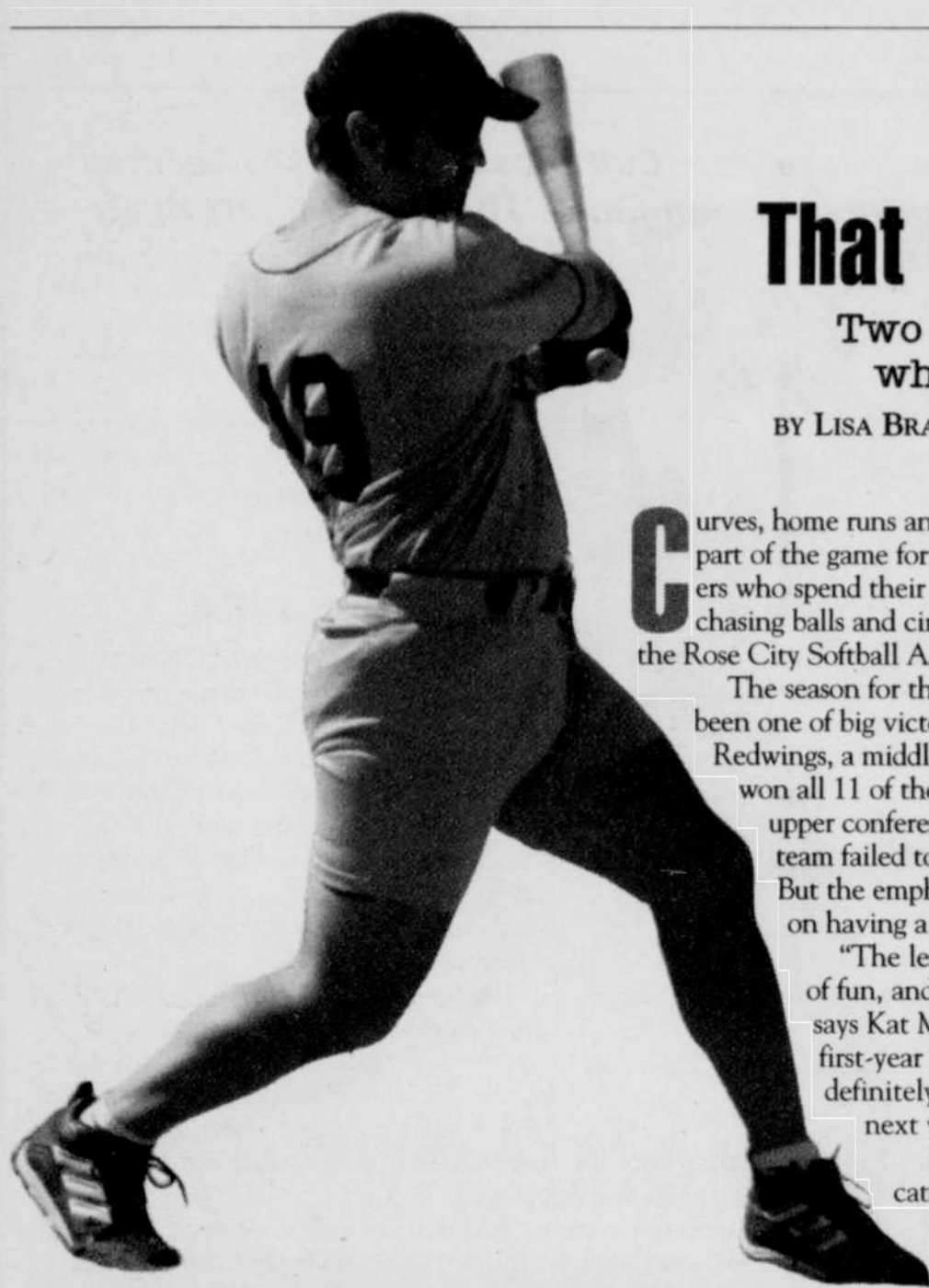


SPORTS

That championship season

Two teams head to the World Series, while Mad Dogs take a final bow

BY LISA BRADSHAW AND JODI HELMER • PHOTOS BY MARTY DAVIS



Curves, home runs and line drives are all part of the game for the 350 softball players who spend their Sunday afternoons chasing balls and circling bases as part of the Rose City Softball Association.

The season for the queer league has been one of big victory and big loss: The Redwings, a middle conference team, won all 11 of their games, while the upper conference Yellow Pages team failed to win a single game. But the emphasis, as always, was on having a good time.

"The league is a heck of a lot of fun, and I love it," says Kat Mitchell, a first-year player. "I will definitely play again next year."

Mitchell, a catcher for the lower conference Bella Boys, says

playing softball has helped her gain confidence. "When I started I really, really sucked," she admits. "I have enjoyed seeing myself get better—seeing our whole team get better."

The league, which includes both women's and open (mixed-gender) divisions, encourages players of all skill levels to join. With the open division split into upper, middle and lower conferences (from higher skill level to less) and the women's division split into alternative (more competitive) and recreational, the association can accommodate everyone from serious players in teams with winning records to players like Mitchell who

just want to participate in a sport and enjoy the camaraderie.

Bella Boys finished the season in third place, but Mitchell says winning the championship was not as important as developing friendships and team spirit. "We are playing and having fun," she says. "We want to win, but it isn't quite as competitive."

Bella Boys shortstop Autumn King pipes in: "It's all about playing well, not about bringing home the trophy.... Everyone is really good-natured and supportive."

Teams cheered each other on during several



"This year we tried to put more emphasis on having fun."

One team fans can always count on for a great game is the Mad Dogs, who won the women's division alternative conference (as they so often do). Mad Dogs have decided to call it quits, so winning this last season was especially meaningful.

"They'll be missed," laments women's division assistant commis-

sioner Noelle Buckley. "Everybody aspires to beat them year after year, so they'll be a big loss. They're a really fun team to play."

As commissioner of the open division, Drew Canulette says this year he has taken a hands-off approach to managing the league. "We are empowering people and placing the impetus on the teams and managers to make

things happen," he explains. "This season, the team managers have made a lot of decisions; the commissioners have just administered those decisions."

One of those decisions was a consensus not to hold a championship series. Instead, placements will be decided based on the standings for the season. First-place winners have already been announced; additional standings will depend on final play July 18.

The league will be represented by two teams—Oregon Haze from the upper conference and Scandals from the middle—at the North American Gay Amateur Athletic Alliance World Series next month in Dallas, Texas. Commissioners are also planning for the upcoming Fall Ball, an extended softball season that runs every Sunday in September.

The 2004 action-packed season has Rose City Softball Association players, board members and commissioners all excited about the future of gay softball in Oregon and in increasing the participation of both players and fans.

"We want to get the league out in front of people," states Dale Clinton, a member at large on the board of directors. "We want to bring people out and get more teams involved with the league," which, he notes, will also create "positive public relations for the gay community." □



The Portland Gay Men's Chorus celebrates its top place in the lower conference



Winner of the Just Out award for Best Team on the Planet

tournaments this season at the Gordon Faber Recreational Complex in Hillsboro, where all regular season games also take place. The Cascade Cup, held during the Fourth of July weekend, found 24 teams from across the country competing for the coveted title. The Redwings won the cup on their home turf, creating one of the most memorable moments of the season.

For Jay Heidenrich—pitcher for the Portland Gay Men's Chorus, which won the lower conference—it was not the team's win-loss

record that made the season memorable. "This year has been fantastic. The weather has been incredible, and nobody has been hurt," says Heidenrich, apparently unaware of the gigantic purple bruise on his left knee and ice pack clinging to his shin—both softball injuries.

There have been other such injuries during the season. In fact, just minutes after Heidenrich's injury-free comments during the league's final games July 11, a teammate was taken to the hospital for stitches after being hit in the head with a softball.

So make no mistake, this is serious softball league play. But Heidenrich notes 2004 was definitely more low-key. "Last year we won the championship. It was a very competitive year. We really wanted to win the games," he says.

Open division

- Upper conference: Bike Gallery
- Middle conference: Redwings
- Lower conference: Portland Gay Men's Chorus

Women's division

- Alternative conference: Mad Dogs
- Recreational conference: Cleats of Fire

First-place winners have already been announced during the season. Final determining placements will be decided July 18 at Hillsboro's Gordon Faber Recreational Complex, 4450 N.W. 229th Ave. Visit www.portlandgaysoftball.com after July 18 for final season standings.

