



## **SOFTBALL PLAYER PROFILE: BUTCH PAOLELLA -Larry Wolfe**

**Ralph (everyone calls him “Butch”) Paoella hails from Steger, Illinois, a town 20 miles south of Chicago and once known as the “Piano Capital of the World.” Butch graduated from Bloom Township High School in Chicago Heights along with two classmates that would find fame in the sports world: Jerry Colangelo, sports mogul and former majority owner of the Diamondbacks and Phoenix Suns, and Jim Bouton, former major league pitcher turned author (“Ball Four” and others). Both gentlemen attended a recent 50-year reunion of the Bloom Township Trojans. Butch thoroughly enjoyed listening to them tell baseball stories at that get-together.**

**In high school Butch participated in Bloom’s Diversified Occupations Program, where he learned to be a skilled butcher. After a few years as a butcher, Butch went to Barber School and began cutting hair instead of meat. He and his cousin, John, had a barber shop in Steger for several years before Butch began a 25-year career with the U.S. Postal Service.**

**Butch’s interest in baseball and softball can be traced to his youth, where as a Little Leaguer, he was on an All-Star Team that played catch with Chicago Cubs players at Wrigley Field. Butch’s throwing partner that day was future Hall-of-Fame catcher, Gabby Hartnett. Butch grew up a fan of the Cubs and calls outfielder Hank Sauer, “Old No. 9,” his favorite player. Butch played Pony League baseball, then after time off to raise a family, began playing Chicago-style softball in a 35+ league. (That’s where they use the big 16” Kitten Ball.) Butch transitioned to regular softball in his early 50’s and has been playing ever since. Although Butch was usually a catcher in his youth baseball leagues, he became a pitcher after he started playing softball. He joined the Sun Lakes league in 1996 and continues to be a top pitcher, as well as a slick infielder when he’s not on the mound.**

**When asked to name a softball- or baseball-related highlight, Butch remembered playing a team that included former major leaguers, Bert “Campy” Campaneris and Ken Rudolph. It was quite a thrill watching former Major League All-Star Campy playing shortstop and robbing his team of many potential hits. He also once sat next to Joe Garagiola during a D-backs game and enjoyed hearing Joe’s many baseball stories first hand.**

**In addition to his skills on the softball field, Butch plays golf and is an accomplished bowler. He bowls in two leagues, one a mixed league with his lovely wife, Nancy. Butch can boast of bowling a 299 game....just one pin short of perfection! In the past, he averaged 190 per game and hopes to get back to that level this year.**

**Butch has experienced a lot of sports-related thrills, but he says his biggest thrills come when he’s watching his two grandsons, Jason and Zach, play baseball back in the suburban Chicago area. He also brags about watching Jason get a hole-in-one when he was only 13!**