



SENIOR SOFTBALL PLAYER PROFILE: RON BROWN

By Larry Wolfe

It's amazing how something bad can change one's life for the good. That's what happened to Ron Brown. While serving in the Korean War in the early '50s, Ron, a combat engineer, was assigned to help rebuild a bombed out playground in a small Korean village. While on that assignment he was asked to teach the English language to a class of young Korean girls. At that time Ron had no experience or training as a teacher, but he did have a college degree and knew the English language, so.... Ron became a volunteer English teacher. Ron knew right away that he loved teaching and the satisfaction that comes when one can see that he's making a difference in someone's life. So after returning to the States, Ron decided to get his teaching certificate and the rest, as they say, is history.

Ronald Brown was born in Chicago, but grew up in nearby Des Plaines, Illinois. (Yes, that Des Plaines—home of the very first McDonald's franchised restaurant!) Ron graduated from Maine Township High School where he played baseball and was a diver on the swim team. He then went to Cornell College, a Methodist liberal arts school located in Mount Vernon, Iowa, where he played football and basketball for the Cornell Rams. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree with an emphasis in Economics and Business Administration. He then was in the Army for two years, spending a year and a half in Korea, where his life's game plan changed from the world of economics and business to education.

Ron devoted his entire working life to education, first as a teacher, then later as a principal. He was a long time principal of a junior high school in Naperville, Illinois and completed his career as the principal at Goodman Elementary School in Chandler, Arizona.

Slow pitch softball has been a passion of Ron's for years. In fact, Ron was actually a professional softball player and the manager for the Chicago Storm in the early '70s. The Storm was a member of the first professional slow pitch softball league.

That league didn't make it as a spectator sport, but Ron enjoyed the experience. Later, he also managed and pitched for one of the best amateur teams in the nation, the Lantern Softball Club of Naperville. That team had six players that ultimately were named to the Illinois USSSA Softball Hall of Fame.....including one Ron Brown.

Ron has pitched for ten World Championship teams during his senior softball career, including some of the top "age group" teams in Arizona...the Rattlers, Mustangs and Wranglers. Today Ron plays in the Sun Lakes league and also plays for the Arizona 75's. He says that Sun Lakes is one of the most enjoyable places he has played. He cites both the friendliness of the players and their competitive spirit as being among the best he has played with.

Being from the Chicago area, Ron grew up a fan of the Chicago Cubs. His favorite Cub player was Mr. Cub himself, Ernie Banks. In fact, Ron met Mr. Banks at a promotion for the slow pitch professional team before an exhibition game in Rockford, Illinois. He remembers Ernie as being a very gracious celebrity, even though he was a superstar at the time. Today Ron is a D-Backs fan and calls Luis Gonzalez his favorite current player, even though Gonzo is now an LA Dodger.

Ron and his wife, Gay, have a blended family of five children and fifteen grandchildren, five of whom live in the area and keep "Grandpa Ron" plenty busy when he's not playing softball. Ron considers his election to the Illinois USSSA Softball Hall of Fame his personal "claim to fame;" however, most of his softball colleagues might be surprised to know that Ron is also an accomplished writer. He has written books, sports articles for local newspapers and has even had a couple of plays published. Currently he's working on a novel about a dyslectic young man, who turns to...what else....softball...and becomes a star home run hitter.

What turned out to be a very gratifying life and career all started when that young soldier serving in Korea volunteered to teach English to those young Korean children. Ron says he can still see them in their matching blue and white uniforms, sitting three to a desk and just waiting to absorb what he was going to teach them. War itself may be bad, but in this case, the impact of those circumstances on both Ron and those children, as well as thousands of others in his future, was definitely good.....very good.