



SENIOR SOFTBALL PLAYER PROFILE: JIM KILMARTIN **-by Larry Wolfe**

James “Jim” Kilmartin holds the distinction of being the oldest current player in the Sun Lakes Senior Softball Association. But when most 79-year-olds are content to sit in a rocking chair or maybe play a less strenuous sport such as golf, Jim is still swinging the bat, rounding the bases and running down fly balls in the outfield. And Jim is not just out there playing; he’s still successfully competing with players 10 to 20 years younger.

Jim hails from the Bronx, so he naturally grew up as a fan of the Bronx Bombers, otherwise known as the New York Yankees. He actually lived within walking distance of old Yankee Stadium and fondly recalls attending 20 to 25 games per year and sitting in the outfield bleachers watching the greatest Yankee of them all, Joltin’ Joe DiMaggio. He also remembers that those bleacher seats cost a grand total of 25 cents! Today, the cheapest bleacher seat in Yankee Stadium is \$12, with good seats fetching from \$60 to as much as \$400 per ticket! Plus, you don’t get to see Joe D. in centerfield anymore. Jim is, of course, still a big Yankees fan (you’ll usually see him wearing an “NY” baseball cap and/or a Yankees T-shirt in the summer). A visit to his home confirms his devotion to the Yankees, as one will see many items of Yankee paraphernalia, including a replica of Yankee Stadium as it was when he sat in those bleachers. His favorite current player is Yankees All-Star shortstop Derek Jeter. Jim’s favorite non-baseball team is, or at least was, the New York Giants NFL team. He liked them better when they actually played in New York instead of New Jersey!

Jim graduated from Haaren Aviation High School in New York City and attended Long Island University. Jim later served in the U. S. Navy in 1946 and 1947, during which time he served aboard the USS Badoing Strait, an escort carrier.

“Jimmer,” as he was called in his earlier playing days, played baseball, basketball and track in high school and also played baseball in an Insurance League, but his “claim to fame” is that he later became a professional roller derby player. He played for the New

York Chiefs, who were the dominant team in the late '40s and early '50s, winning the World Series of Roller Derby in 1951. Jim was a prominent member of that championship team. (See the accompanying photo of Jim in his New York Chiefs uniform.) Roller derby was a very popular sport in that era, as is evidenced by the fact that the playoffs routinely sold out Madison Square Garden. In addition, roller derby was shown on both the CBS and ABC television networks. It was probably as popular as today's NFL in certain east coast cities at the time. Besides the Chiefs, the National Roller Derby League included the Chicago Westerners, Brooklyn Red Devils, Jersey Jolters, Washington Jets and Philadelphia Panthers. When asked how he became involved in roller derby, Jim replied that it evolved from the fact that as a youngster he worked at a skating rink for years and then became interested in dance skating, roller racing and ultimately roller derby. Roller derby is, of course, a rough and tumble sport. Jim's roller derby injuries included multiple concussions, a fractured arm, broken toes and a broken nose. It makes senior softball seem very tame in comparison!

After his professional roller derby career, Jim got his first "real job" as an assistant office manager. He followed that with a long and successful career as a purchasing agent and purchasing director, mostly in the hospital and insurance industries, including a 19-year career with the Hartford Insurance Company.

Jim and his first wife, Julie, were blessed with six children, who ultimately produced 18 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Unfortunately, Julie died of lung cancer in 1981 at the young age of 48. After four lonely years, Jim met his current wife and best friend, Joan, whom he married in 1985.

Joan and Jim built a home in Sun Lakes in 1991. Joan actually came down a few months before Jim retired and signed him up for the softball team. So Jim began playing softball in January 1992 with the Sun Lakes Blues, managed by Jack Lander. After a couple years of getting back into the swing of things, Jim became one of the Blues' best players, leading them in hitting in 1994 with a .596 batting average. He is now in his 15th year of participation. Jim's favorite positions are first base and the outfield. His biggest softball-related thrill came in 2001 when, at the age of 73, he was asked to participate in the Senior Softball World Championships in Las Vegas on the Over 65 team. That team, managed by Bobby Reeves, placed third in that championship series.

Jim's best life memories are those involving his six children and being able to watch them and his many grandchildren grow up.

Jim, like many other senior softball players, enjoys the camaraderie of the game, but it also is a physical activity that keeps him fit and running..... Jim may now be the oldest player in the Sun Lakes league, but he still has that smooth swing that produces line drive base hits into left field...kind of reminiscent of that former Yankee he used to watch from the centerfield bleachers as a youngster.....one Joltin' Joe DiMaggio.