Softball

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the field to pull them apart."

Also a vivid memory was the 1962 final, when Silver was pitching for Rose Trucking, which was losing 4-2 in the seventh inning.

"Elton Cotton, who played basketball for the University of Houston, came up to bat and hit a three-run homer and we won the game," said Silver.

But perhaps the biggest game in most memories was the 1952 championship game.

It was a Thursday evening and Silver was on the mound for Hudson Engineering, while All-American pitcher Julie Kujawa was heading up Grand Prize Brewers. The result was the longest game in tournament history, with the two teams battling for 23 innings before Silver took a 1-0 victory.

In the process, Kujawa struck out 41 batters while Silver fanned 18. The game lasted until 12:45 a.m. Friday.

"We had over 6,000 fans crammed into the stands at Memorial Park," said Silver, 59, and a former football star at Rice. "When it ended, we still had about 3,000 there. It was a great game against one of the greatest pitchers in Texas."

Things have changed since the days when more than 800 teams would battle it out in the Chronicle tournament. Approximately 350 are expected to compete this year.

"Back in the '50s and even later, a lot of ballplayers looked forward to the Chronicle tournament as the big prestige tournament of the year," said Wolff. "It was something you talked about all during the next season."

Added Silver: "Now there's just too many different things going on and the event has faded a little as people's interests change. But you still want to win. That's why you play."

Wolff and Silver scoff at the men's teams playing slow-pitch.

"I don't like slow-pitch," said Silver. "You might as well put the ball on a T. For competitive athletes, it's not a very good game. I don't know why men don't want the challenge of fast-pitch."

The group also is not concerned that it probably will be one of the oldest teams in the tournament. It's just an added incentive.

"I'll be 60 in August and I can probably outrun guys 35 with beer guts," said Silver. "We try to win as many games as we can. We get a lot of fun out of beating those young guys. They walk off the field and say, 'Boy, those old guys can play.' We're just extremely competitive."

And even if they lose, it's still not so bad.

"At our age, if we get beat 5-0 it's not embarrassing," said Wolff.

Chronicle tournament rules

Here are the rules for the Chronicle's 1988 softball tournament:

1. Slow-pitch balls — Only A.S.A. approved balls, MSP 47 for the men and mixed, will be allowed. That includes such brands as Spalding Tournament Plus, Worth Blue Dot, Dudley, MacGregor and Steeles.

2. Time limit — There is a 55-minute time limit in all slow pitch games. In fast pitch there will be an 80-minute time limit. Finish the inning in both cases. In case of rainouts or light failure, 30 minutes constitutes a slow pitch game. A.S.A. rules will be observed in all games.

3. Run rule — In slow pitch, 15 runs after three innings and 10 runs after five innings. In fast pitch, 7 runs after four innings.

4. Number of players — Ten players are allowed in men's, women's and coed but teams will be allowed to start or finish the game with nine players. However, there must be five women on field in coed at all times. Nine players are used in men's fast pitch.

5. Equipment — Players must furnish their own equipment, including bats, gloves, balls.

6. Forfeit time — Players are responsible to find the field they have been assigned. Game time will be forfeit time.

7. Umpires — Umpires are in charge of all games.

8. Protests — In case of protest, it must be made to the umpire during the game and also in person at the City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department, 2999 S. Wayside, before 9 a.m. the following working day. No protest will be allowed on umpires' judgment.

9. Injuries — The Chronicle and the City of Houston are not responsible for any injuries, on the field or in the stands.

10. Rainouts — In case of rainouts, the revised schedule will be printed in the next day's Chronicle sports section. However, rainouts are determined by umpires at the field locations and teams must report to avoid possible forfeits.

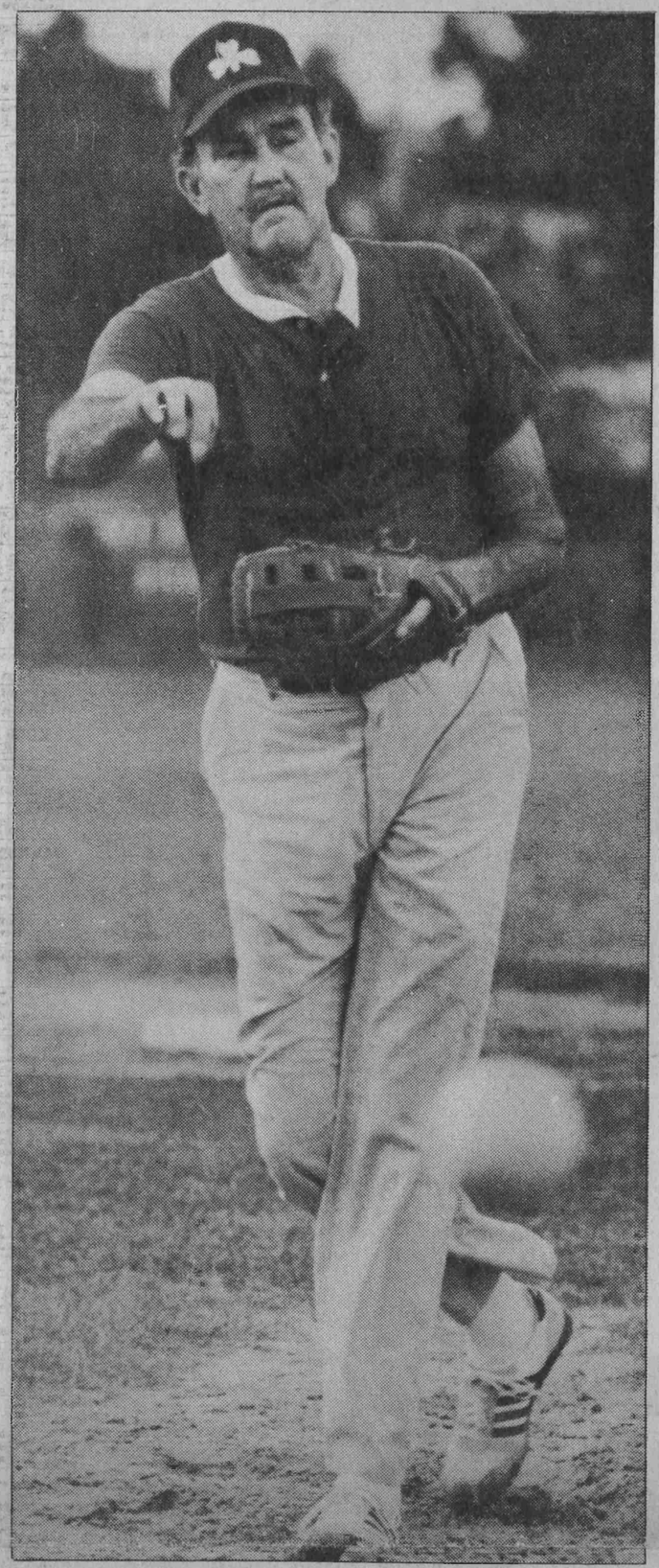
11. Softball Hotline — The Chronicle will provide a Softball Hotline (220-7898) from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. during the tourney that players may call to obtain field locations, pairings and other information dealing with the event.

12. Shoes — No steel cleats will be allowed in slow pitch games. This rule is used as a safety precaution and violation of rule will result in removal of player from game.

13. Mixed Division — Will be played under A.S.A. rules and sliding will be allowed.

14. Weekends — No tournament games on Friday, Saturday or Sunday.

15. Opening night — The tournament starts Aug. 8.



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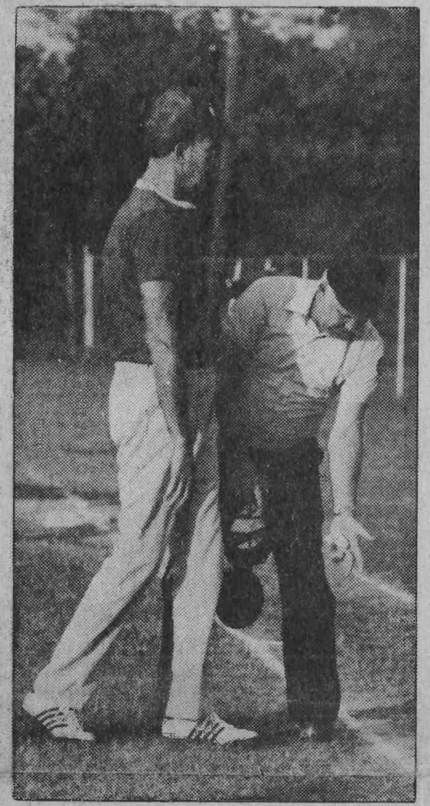
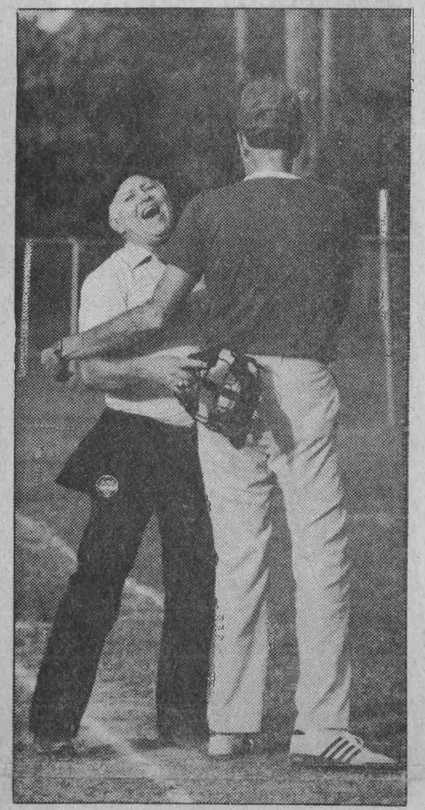
For Walter Wolff, fast-pitch softball is still as much fun as it was 40 years ago.





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Walter Wolff argues with umpire Jim Crain over whether or not a ball was foul, then both laugh off the argument.