

2 • Monday, July 21, 1997 • South Bend Tribune • HOMETOWN MIDWAY

Belles reviving baseball tradition

By DAN DONALDSON

Laura Patterson was in line with two of her teammates and several average boys at the Grand Slam USA batting cages near downtown.

When it was her turn to hit, she stepped into the cage and took her first swing as 20 fans looked on.

She sent the ball down the middle. The boys outside the cage watched in genuine amazement as the 5-foot-3 woman made better contact than most of them had.

"I always kind of laugh at that," she said, referring to the boys' reaction. "I'm from a small town where all the guys are athletes."

"Everyone looks twice when a girl plays a boys sport. But I always think, 'Look at me. I did that. What did you expect?'"

She is one of a handful of Notre Dame and Saint Mary's women who play for the South Bend Belles in the Great Lakes Women's Baseball League.

The first multi-state baseball league for women in 1995.

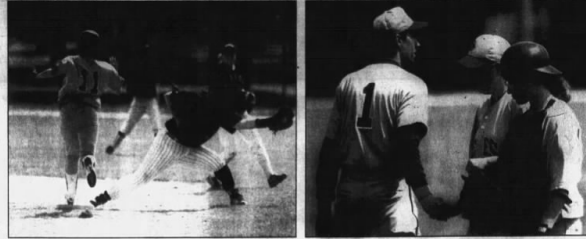
"I played Little League baseball when I was 9 or 10," Laura said. "I never played softball. I was always brought up on baseball. I didn't see softball on television, so there was nothing pushing me to it. Spring and summer were just baseball."

Until 1991, women's baseball was just a distant memory. Then the movie, "A League of Their Own," chronicled one season for two fictional sisters on the Rockford Peaches of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League.

"I saw the movie and loved it," Laura said. "I had never known there was a women's league. I hoped they'd start it again. When this opportunity came up, I couldn't say no."

South Bend had its team in the AAGPBL. In fact, the South Bend Blue Sox put together consecutive championship seasons in 1951 and 1952.

But the league folded after a



dozens years and pretty much was forgotten.

(One night in 1991, John Kovach was wandering around in cyberspace when he found a web page about the league in Lansing on the Internet.)

Kovach has played baseball for years in local amateur leagues, has coached girls softball and is a former minor league player with a keen interest in baseball.

"I had looked around this idea (of a women's baseball league) and wanted to do this," said John, an architect at the Saint Mary's College Library.

Jim Gaudin in Lansing who wanted to develop a league within driving distance, and I e-mailed him.

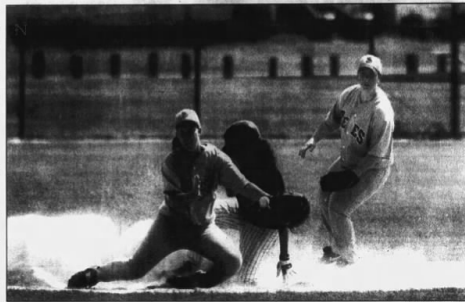
Their eventual meeting led to the development of the Great Lakes League last summer, with teams in South Bend, Lansing, Port Wayne and Battle Creek.

This year the league includes South Bend, Lansing, Port Wayne and two teams from Chicago.

The league has received tremendous support from USA Baseball, a well-established organization that agreed to cover league financing and insurance.

USA Baseball got on the equipment we needed. Uniforms, catching gear, baseballs, bats.

"I started by tracking down Julie Klosser, a junior at Notre Dame. Had heard much from Kovach since he coached her



baseball's same game when women play it. Above, Nicole Paulk stretches for a throw to second base while Shannon Singleton backs up the play. At upper left, Jessica Higgins is a step short of a hit at first base. At upper right, manager John Kovach checks in with his battery, pitcher Ashley Haldeman and catcher Lori Bryant.

team in seventh grade.

"I had to learn how to throw the ball," she said, laughing. "It's a lot harder to hit and the boys are a lot further apart. You think the ball goes farther than it actually does."

This is an amateur league, similar in structure to the Michigan Amateur Baseball League for men.

"We play without contracts for the love of the game," Laura said. "I just love to play."

What's there to like? "Being back in the sport," Julie said. "I had been out of it since high school. Just getting together every week to work out was fun."

"It was more of a recreation thing because nobody had a

reputation of being good."

"I think the women really like it," John said. "We travel all over the area and it takes a commitment on their part. The players are really supportive of each other."

70 years later . .

By LYLE SUMERIK

For 70 years

Edward M. and Estella B. Lawson consider themselves just average folks.

But by today's standards, they are anything but average. "We just have 70 years of togetherness," said Estella, as the Calvin Center couple will mark their 70th wedding anniversary in Yandellia.

"It can be done," she added. "But, you've got to pull together."

Added Forest — with a very sense of humor — "We fight every day but never come to blows."

The occasion was marked quietly, with family. "Nothing special," said Estella. "We celebrated our 50th and 60th with open houses at the church, so we are just observing this one quietly."

Those 70 years started on this date in 1927, shortly before the Great Depression. The Calvin Township native wife is the former Estella Sanders. They were married in Goshen but have remained in Cass County, living in their present home since 1948.

He worked at Indiana Bell Co. until being laid off at the beginning of the Depression. After that, "We got through by doing odd jobs. We made it without welfare," he said proudly.

"Through, it is OK for some people."

The Lawsons are known today largely because of his longtime garage business, Lawson's Garage, located next to their home on Calvin Center Road. He started the business in 1940 and ran it until retiring in 1965.

Estella helped in the business, but mostly was a full-time housewife and mother to their three daughters and one son.

Those children include Ingeborg Brown of Granger, Sandra Rose White of Indianapolis, Audrey Marie Lawson at home and Paul Dean Lawson of Elkhart. The Lawsons also claim seven grandchildren and eight great grandchildren.

Although he has seen 71 years and she 68 years, both are in relatively good health and are still active in the community, although Forest admitted, "This is the last year for a garden."

Both are active in the Calvin Community Chapel, which Forest helped build. Estella is known as "Mother" to the membership, where she is in charge of communion.

Forest is a 70-year member of the Granite Masonic Lodge 11, P. A. M. in Calvin Center. Estella is a 46-year member of St. Mary's Chapter 18, Order of Eastern Star.

The Lawsons offer no special formula for their long lives, except that they both have it in their genes. His father died in a car accident at age 62, but his mother lived 88 years.

Estella's father lived to age 88, while her mother lived to age 95 years.

Brian Hashey starts Blue Angels tour

Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Brian Hashey, whose wife, Margie, is the daughter of Rose Leachman of Midway, has started an eight-day air show season tour with the Navy's Flight Demonstration Squadron, better known as the Blue Angels.

Petty Officer Hashey is one of more than 120 squadron members who will travel to 35 cities throughout the United States during this

From Bremen to Africa and back . .

Del and Ray Haak whirl through tour of 4 game parks

By MICHELLE DONAGHEY

Listening to the lions roar and ultras long late at night outside her tent was an experience Del Haak will never forget.

Del and her husband, Ray, took the trip of a lifetime this spring, making a safari in East Africa.

They traveled through four game parks, including the Gorongosa, Fungurua, Lake Manyara and the Ngorongoro Crater.

It has been a dream of Del for many years.

"I have always wanted to go. I love animals and I love adventure," Del said. "We're not getting any younger either. I gave my husband an ultimatum: Either he was coming with me or I would be going on my own. I wanted the real experience of a safari."

She said a mobile tent safari is not for those who require luxury vacations.

"It was long and it was hard. You have to be the right person to undertake this type of a safari," she said. "The Haaks spent 13 days on their safari. There on the trek spent the nights in tents equipped with sleeping cots, a hot water bottle, bucket shower and a short drop toilet. A hole in the ground."

Not every night was spent in a tent.

As a break, every fourth day was spent at a lodge with running water and a swimming pool.

That allowed the leaders of the safari time to move about in the tent destination and set up camp.

Each day, the Haaks would make up to an English breakfast, sausage, eggs and cereal. Meals were served in a dining tent. Dinner came complete with candles.

While watching wildebeests close up was no problem, Cape Buffalo were another story, she



Del and Ray Haak of Bremen took a 13-day tent safari through East Africa this spring.

other couple, driving in a hatchback Land Rover across the savanna to game parks in search of animals and birds.

Lunch in the field consisted of a picnic. They also purchased 1.5 to 2 liters of bottled water each day.

"We never thought we would pay \$15 for warm water and enjoy it," said Del.

The weather was perfect for a safari.

"We went during the dry season," she said. Their guide was, "one of the best as he had over 20 years of experience and knew where the animals were."

"One of the best experiences," according to Del, was when they saw the migration of wildebeests in the Serengeti.

"We saw literally thousands of them, including newly born babies. It was really something to experience," said Del.

While watching wildebeests close up was no problem, Cape Buffalo were another story, she

said.

"If they were in front of you, you had to make sure you were ready for away as they were vicious."

Her favorite, however, were the lions.

"Lions were not seen in that from us," she said. The guide told them "Their food is on four legs and it runs. Well, if you stand on two legs and stand still, you're OK, we hope."

While it sounds like the lions were mostly domesticated, they were not, in order to keep lions out of the camp area, lions were placed at the front of each tent. Even this sometimes did not stop the beasts.

"One morning we woke up and the guide told us to get back inside the tent," said Del. The lions were right outside.

Del said it is the best memory she has of the trip, as she did not know of any other group who had such a close experience.

Small critters also caused their

share of surprises on the safari.

While there were few bugs and no snakes to cause an annoyance, the tickle flies and birds could drive one crazy at times.

"We used a cow's tail attached to a stick to show the flies away," Del explained.

Once, they had a picnic of fried chicken and out the lions and were told to take the food and hurry back to the Land Rover.

As Del scrambled back with a chicken drumstick in hand, a lion bird swooped down and grabbed it.

The Haaks were also warned baboons would try to steal food from them, just like Vigi Bens in the cartoons.

Despite the intruders, watching animals in their natural habitat was wonderful for the Haaks.

"You have to see it to appreciate it," she said.

"It was so cute to watch the elephants, lions and cheetahs cuddle with their young. They were so human," she said.