

Surge in slo-pitch interest means more quality play

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
Special to *The Champion*

The 1996 Nassagaweya Men's Masters Slo-Pitch season has been in the history books for some time now, and so have the efforts of three of its top competitors.

Despite the feelings of accomplishment the trio must enjoy following a solid year amid high-level national competition, they may well draw even more satisfaction from the burgeoning popularity of their sport.

"Slo-Pitch has gained considerable popularity over the past 20 or 30 years," noted Gerry Brooks, whose Brookville Rideout Auto Parts crew won the Nassagaweya title. "It used to be guys played fastball or softball until they were around 30 and then quit, but now they keep playing and eventually switch over to slo-pitch. This has caused a huge influx of players over the past few years." That has made for much stronger competition, both at the local and national level.

Brooks, Mike Fascinato of Milton and Lowville's Gary Hoard ventured outside the realm of their rural league this past summer and showcased their talents at the national level.

The trio were selected to play in the Men's Senior Canadian Slo-Pitch Championships in Peterborough. They competed on a team sponsored by Milton's Harrop Restaurant and Gallery, comprising players from across the GTA. The local players helped bring home silver-medal honors

from their first national tournament.

"I couldn't believe how good some of the teams were at the nationals," said Brooks. "One player from the Brantford squad, who also won the title in 1992, said if they had sent the same team this year they would have never gone beyond the preliminary round."

With both an increase in players and better conditioning every year, Brooks said slo-pitch is quickly becoming as great a challenge as softball or even fastball. "There are better pitchers these days and the defense is getting stronger all the time," he explained.

This may be due in part to year-round competition in many centres throughout Metro. Brooks himself has been invited to join a Markham team during a winter league played at the Dixie Road indoor diamond.

"That's really an indication of how popular the sport is getting, when you can find enough players to form a league in the winter," Brooks said.

With regard to the national showcase, "We had actually qualified the year before, but didn't go because we felt our team wasn't strong enough," said Fascinato, who pitched every game in the team's 5-1 showing.

His mound performance anchored the Metro squad to wins over St. John's, Victoria, Calgary, Peterborough and Dresden before losing to Brantford Nissan in the gold medal round. "It (the national tournament) was exciting as hell. We all

had a tremendous time," Fascinato added.

Patrolling the outfield was Brooks, who like Fascinato played many years of fastball before switching over to slo-pitch. The move, he said, meant absolutely no decrease in quality or intensity of competition. Hoard was a steady contributor at the plate and next to Brooks in the outfield.

Fascinato is already thinking about another big performance at next year's nationals. He's hoping to be part of the team that goes for another medal in Vancouver. "I like to play squash in the winter, but I'm hoping to make a return trip to the nationals in 1997. What can I say, it's the largest participant sport in North America and for good reason. It's really fun," Fascinato said.

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GERRY BROOKS



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THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF HALTON

PUBLIC INFORMATION CENTRE RECONSTRUCTION OF GUELPH LINE FROM BRITANNIA ROAD TO DERRY ROAD CITY OF BURLINGTON PR-1538

The Regional Municipality of Halton has recently completed the preliminary design phase and is now proceeding with the detailed design of approximately 3.4 km of Guelph Line from 200 m south of Britannia Road to 250 m south of Derry Road in the City of Burlington. The reconstruction is required in order to improve the horizontal and vertical alignment, road drainage, roadway safety, the structural condition of the pavement, and to address slope stabilization concerns.

A Public Information Centre will be held to update any interested parties on design refinements to the approved plan. Members of the public are invited to drop in at their convenience and discuss the study with representatives of the Region and their consultants.

The Public Information Centre will be held:

DATE: Tuesday, December 3, 1996

TIME: 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

PLACE: St. George's Anglican Church
Guelph Line north of Derry Road
Milton, Ontario

Subject to the comments received as a result of this notice, final design drawings and contract documents will be prepared for construction activities tentatively scheduled for 1997.

If you require any additional information regarding this project, please contact:

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