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# Vermont Senior Baseball News

The newsletter of the Vermont Senior Baseball League Inc., founded 1984 by Floyd Brown

A hardball league for age 35 and over that plays a safe, fun, and competitive game of baseball in an atmosphere of good sportsmanship  
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edited by Mike Wagner

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### Results of Sunday, May 23, 2004:

Williston 20, Burlington 16  
Killington 4, Chelsea 0  
Barre 7, Mad River Valley 6 (11 innings)  
South Royalton 9, Connecticut Valley 6  
Champlain at Jericho, postponed, rain  
Morrisville at Montpelier, postponed, rain  
Northfield at Danville, postponed, rain  
Newport at Caledonia, postponed, rain  
St. Johnsbury at Lake Region, postponed  
Colchester, bye

### Standings:

Team	W	L	Pct.	GB
Barre	4	0	1.000	-
Colchester	3	0	1.000	0.5
Morrisville	3	0	1.000	0.5
Killington	3	1	.750	1
Mad River Valley	3	1	.750	1
Williston	3	1	.750	1
Jericho	2	1	.667	1.5
Montpelier	2	1	.667	1.5
Burlington	2	2	.500	2
Danville	1	1	.500	2
Lake Region	1	1	.500	2
Chelsea	1	2	.333	2.5
Newport	1	2	.333	2.5
St. Johnsbury	1	2	.333	2.5
South Royalton	1	3	.250	3
Caledonia	0	3	.000	3.5
Champlain	0	3	.000	3.5
Northfield	0	3	.000	3.5
Connecticut Valley	0	4	.000	4

### Schedule for Sunday, May 30, 2004:

Burlington at Killington  
Colchester at Champlain  
Jericho at Williston  
Barre at Chelsea  
Montpelier at Northfield  
Mad River Valley at Morrisville  
Caledonia at South Royalton  
Danville at St. Johnsbury  
Newport at Lake Region  
Connecticut Valley, bye

## 2 Game Experiment With Rule Change Will Be Tried July 11 And July 18

All games played on July 11 and July 18 will include a rule change permitting a runner to advance on a passed ball or wild pitch.

Currently our rules do not recognize a passed ball or wild pitch and no advance by a runner is allowed.

At the league's annual meeting last February the teams voted to experiment for a period of two weeks and permit runners to advance. The league's regular midseason meeting is scheduled for July 18 after that day's games. At the meeting the managers will report on how their games went with the rule change, and whether their players want to make the rule permanent starting in the 2005 season.

The new rule to be used is as follows:

"If a pitch that does not hit the batter's bat gets away from the catcher beyond a 13-foot radius from the tip of home plate, then any runner on first base or second base may attempt to advance to the next base. Any such runner is at risk of being put out by a tag play before they reach the next base or if they go beyond the next base.

This rule does not apply to a runner who is already on third base; they may not attempt to advance and must stay at third base.

The stated radius of 13 feet may be different if a given field has a clearly marked circle or change of surface from dirt to grass that would make it easy to identify the boundary; the boundary line should be agreed upon by both teams in the pre-game meeting with the umpire(s).

If a pitch gets away from the catcher but the ball does not go beyond the boundary line, then if a runner attempts to advance to the next base the runner is at risk of being put out at the base they originally occupied with an ordinary pickoff throw by the catcher, for which no tag is required, per existing rules."

Note that this new rule does not allow a batter who strikes out to try to reach first base safely if the third strike gets away from the catcher.

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## Interview: Rocky Harlow



*Rocky Harlow played on the South Royalton team for several years and now plays for the Williston Armadillos. Earlier this year he was elected to the position of league Secretary.*

**VSBN: What was your baseball or softball experience before playing in our league? Rocky:**

I grew up playing baseball in Woodstock, Vermont. I was raised playing in the farm leagues there, then moved up through the system to the Babe Ruth, high school, and legion teams.

My catching experience began early on. I was playing right field during a "B" team game when our catcher got hurt. The coach ran out and asked if I had ever caught before. Never having worn the "tools of ignorance" before, but being desperate to get in where the action was, I said yes. So I put the gear on and assumed the position behind the plate. Well, the first pitch came in and the hitter swung. I promptly turned my head and got hit behind the ear by the ball! Didn't seem to knock any sense into me though, because I continued to catch on every team I played with. In the early 1980s I caught at Castleton State College, playing on the Mayflower Conference Champion team for two seasons.

After college, baseball left my life for a while as military service, a graduate degree and raising a family became the priorities. I became involved with the co-ed softball league in Burlington in the mid-90s. It helped fill the competitive void, but not as completely as playing in our league has done.

**VSBN: You started with South Royalton in their first year, 2000, and the team won the league championship. How did that feel?**

**Rocky:** Can you believe there were only ten teams in 2000?! Look at where we are now with a very competitive 19 team league. We had a very strong, highly competitive team that year. If I recall correctly, we finished at 12-2. We were fortunate to have a strong, consistent team on every level: offense, defense, and pitching. Winning the league championship was exhilarating. It would have been interesting to see how we might have done against the Green Mountain MSBL championship team, but that was the year before the State Championship series began.

**VSBN: Why were you playing for SR when you live in Hinesburg?**

**Rocky:** John Durkee called me one Saturday night back in '99 asking if I wanted to play ball the next day in the season opener at CVU in Hinesburg. John and I had played ball together at Castleton State and he was the best man at my wedding. I figured it would be a fun, one game deal, so I agreed to walk across the street and have a go at it for the South Royalton team. Little did I know at the time that that one game tryout would turn into a long-term contract.

Thanks for getting me back into baseball John! I wasn't even aware that the league existed before that.

**VSBL: Last year you joined the new Williston team. Why, and how is it going so far?**

**Rocky:** After the 2002 season Dennis Johnson told me he was starting a new team in Williston and he asked if I would play on it. I wrestled with this question for quite some time before finally giving Dennis the nod. I had played at South Royalton from the beginning and felt a very strong allegiance to the team for a multitude of reasons. In the end, however, the fact that I'd be spending significantly less time on the road and would spend much less for gas for the car swayed me.

Our team is coming together very nicely, especially for a new team. We're making fewer errors in the field with each passing game (we won't talk about my dropping the ball at the plate against Caledonia that allowed a run to score) and our hitting has picked up tremendously as we gradually recover the timing we had thought was gone for good from our high school days. We're still searching for a few more pitchers to add to our line-up, but who isn't? All in all I believe we're a team on the move and will be extremely competitive in the next few years. Our goal is to be one of the top eight teams in the league so we can participate in upper division post-season play, and I believe we will accomplish that goal.



**VSBN: Are you going to start pitching in 2006, when you will be 45?**

**Rocky:** I've been thinking about that quite a bit. I know the Williston Armadillos are sorely in need of pitchers, and I have to admit that I'd like to see if I can do it. I pitched a little in a few high school and legion games, but always seemed to return to catching. A lot can happen between now and then, so I'll just have to wait and see.

*continued on next page*

**VSBN: In 2002 you did a lot of work to get wood bat suppliers to submit bids for bulk purchases by our league. What in your work experience enabled you to handle that task so well?**

**Rocky:** I generate bids and quotations every day while at work selling theatrical lighting equipment nation-wide. These range in price from hundreds to hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of equipment. I felt that this background gave me the tools and experience necessary to make sure the league would receive the best pricing possible from the manufacturers I contacted. Those who do price quotes know that if something isn't worded just so or if something is inadvertently left out of the request, you can have some real problems to deal with as a result. This was my opportunity to contribute something to the league and I wanted to make sure it was done to the best of my ability.

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**Above, Rocky at bat in the 2004 season opening game.**

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**VSBN: How do you feel about the way the league works? Are the needs of the teams and players being met? What should be done differently?**

**Rocky:** I think the league is doing quite well as it now stands. I believe its growth with the addition of new teams each year is proof of that. I do think, however, that we need to find other ways to be financially self-sufficient and increase our exposure in the community. I'm not suggesting that we have bake sales and car washes, but perhaps there are other ways of bringing additional funding and recognition to the league.

For instance, I'm trying to follow through with the idea Bill Bauer had at the winter league meeting for hosting a golf tournament. I believe this would serve many purposes: 1) bring additional funds into the league coffers; 2) introduce new players to the league; 3) provide a chance to have fun in a (relatively) non-competitive atmosphere. My intent is to have prizes available for the longest drive in the fairway, closest to the pin, hole-in-one, and top scoring team. I play in a similar tournament that benefits the Castleton State College baseball team each year. It's a very popular project that they use to raise funds for their annual spring trip. With a bit of hard work and support, I believe this could be a very successful endeavor. It's not an exceptionally competitive tournament (and shouldn't be, in my opinion),

but everyone has a good time playing in support of a good cause.

To help with league recognition and cohesion, perhaps someone could design a game announcement device to be placed at the entrance to each teams' field on Sunday to announce the game that day. If this device included a prominently displayed league emblem and the emblems of the teams playing that day (such as the Williston Armadillo, for example?), it might catch the eye of the general public and spark some fan or even new player interest. Ray Obuchowski had a couple sandwich boards that he placed on either end of South Royalton announcing that day's "Old Timers" game. Perhaps the league schedule could be sent to local radio and television stations for announcement prior to games. Most towns have their own local newspapers: game announcements could be listed there. I thought the television spot about the league that was recently shown on WCAX involving the Winooski at Lake Region game was a great way to get the word out. I was thankful they included league contact information at the end. The media is a very powerful tool that I think the league should take advantage of.

If you know your Vermont baseball history, you'll know that there were town teams all over the state at the turn of the century. These games were quite popular, and almost created a carnival-like atmosphere at the time as communities came out to support their team. With the right PR and league support I think this could happen again to a greater or lesser extent.

## There Are Still Some Spaces Open In The Golf Tournament



**What?** 18 hole golf tournament, format: 4 player captain and crew scramble; lots of prizes

**Who can play?** Any player in our league and their guests

**Where?** Basin Harbor Club, Vergennes

**When?** Saturday, September 11, 2004; 8:30 AM start

**Cost?** \$75 includes golf, cart, prizes, lunch

**Why?** A portion of the entry fee will be used to benefit the league's treasury

**Who's in charge?** League Secretary Rocky Harlow of the Williston Armadillos

**What should I do?** Notify Rocky that you want to participate, and he will give you the details: phone 802-482-5220 email: [hrockster@adelphia.net](mailto:hrockster@adelphia.net)

**Volunteers are needed to help run this event and get a free lunch (really!)**

**Sign Up Now for MSBL World Series**

Official signups have begun for the annual post-season MSBL World Series tournament in Phoenix, Arizona, Oct. 30 - Nov. 6, 2004.

If you want to play, send an e-mail message to Mike Wagner at [mike@wagner-usa.net](mailto:mike@wagner-usa.net) or call 802-334-7514. The league does not subsidize the cost, it is up to the players to pay their own way. Be prepared to pay \$275 by July 15. This will cover the tournament entry fee and uniform jerseys and hat (those who played last year pay \$200 if they still have the uniform). Checks should be made out to Mike Wagner and mailed to Mike at PO Box 10, Newport VT 05855.

**What is it?**

An annual end of season tournament played on major league training fields around Phoenix, Arizona. It attracts about 5000 players on 400 teams, in different age and skill divisions. The games are 9 innings with full rules: stealing, etc. Each team plays 6 games in 4 days, then playoff and championship games as needed. The event ends with an awards banquet on Saturday night; usually there is a guest speaker from the major leagues at that event.



**Our teams:**

Our league's two teams are each called the Vermont Catamounts. We will have one team in an age 48+ division and one team in an age 38+ division. Under MSBL tournament rules a player is eligible if their qualifying

birthday occurs any time through December 31. So if you will turn 38 any time this year then you can play in the age 38+ division. Our league's age restrictions for pitching DO NOT APPLY to MSBL tournaments: everyone is eligible to pitch. We will also reserve a practice session the day before the tournament starts.

**Travel - air:**

Last year most players got tickets from Burlington to Phoenix for about \$320 round trip per person. It is highly recommended that players arrive on Saturday, Oct. 30, in order to get used to the climate and to participate in the team practices.

**Travel - rental car:**

Avis and Enterprise offer discounts for MSBL members. Last year we rented a couple of vans and the cost worked out to about \$100 per player for the whole week.

**Travel - hotel:**

The team stays at the Marriott at Phoenix Airport (44th St.), which is conveniently located to the main MSBL field at Tempe Diablo Stadium, and to other fields. It has a dining room, weight room, pool with Jacuzzi and full hotel services (laundry, room service). Basic rate is \$99 per room per night, plus tax. This is a team rate for a minimum of 10 rooms. Each player can take a room or 2 players can share a room, same price.



Above, last year's age 48 and over Catamounts. Back row left to right: John Fitzgerald, Sal Spinosa, Ray Foley, Steve Dollmeyer, Mo Tinker, Neil Stanzione, Mike Wagner. Front Row left to right: Johnny Kalinen, Joe Allard, Mike Rowe, Jim Charkalis, Ken Kenton.

**Application Form For MSBL World Series, Phoenix, Arizona, Oct. 30 – Nov. 6, 2004**

Which division: age 38+ \_\_\_\_\_ age 48+ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of birth (month-day-year): \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City-State-Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Played on the team in 2002 or 2003? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ If no, desired uniform shirt size (M-L-XL-2XL) \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ and desired number \_\_\_\_\_

Regular team name \_\_\_\_\_ Positions played \_\_\_\_\_

Entry fee \$200 due by July 15. Add \$75 for uniform (2 jerseys and hat). Make check payable to Mike Wagner.

Mail this form to:

Mike Wagner  
PO Box 10  
Newport, VT 05855

or copy the above information into an email and send to: [mike@wagner-usa.net](mailto:mike@wagner-usa.net)

## PLAYER SURVEY FOR RULES CHANGES

At the semi-annual league meetings there are increasingly lively discussions about changing our playing rules, as some want to open the game up more; the risk would be possibly eliminating older players from participation. We now have 19 teams, with 280 players ranging in age from 35 to 73. We cover a geographical area roughly 100 miles north to south and 60 miles west to east.

The purpose of this survey is to provide information about the wishes of all players in advance of the next league meeting, which is scheduled for Sunday, July 18, after that day's games.

Please take a few minutes to consider these issues and to respond so that any decisions about changing either the rules or the structure of the league can be made based on feedback from as many players as possible.

Please cut out the form below and mail it to: Mike Wagner, PO Box 10, Newport VT 05855. Or you can copy the information into an email message and send it to [mike@wagner-usa.net](mailto:mike@wagner-usa.net)

Then make sure your team is represented at the next league meeting. As in the past, the meeting is open to all, but each team has only one vote.

As a quick reminder, here are some key points in our existing rules; the complete rules are available on the league web site, starting at [baseball.neknetwork.com](http://baseball.neknetwork.com)

- Minimum age is 35, limit of 4 players on the roster who are age 35-39
- Minimum age for pitchers is 45
- Lineup can have more than 9 batters
- Free substitution in the field at any time as long as the player is in the batting lineup
- No leading off base until the ball leaves the pitcher's hand
- On a pickoff throw the runner must return to their base; therefore it is a force play and no tag is required
- No advance on passed ball or wild pitch

### Vermont Senior Baseball League / Player Survey For Rules Changes / May 2004

Name (optional) \_\_\_\_\_ Team (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

#### I would support these rules being used in our games (check all that apply):

- runner can take a normal lead but not steal bases
- runner can take a normal lead (with a limited distance like 8 feet) and try to steal bases
- runner can take a normal lead (without a limit) and try to steal bases
- on a pickoff attempt by catcher or pitcher, runner can try to advance to next base
- runners on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> can advance on passed ball that goes beyond marked circle (this is the rule which will be tried by all teams on July 11 and July 18; see page 1 for details)
- all runners can advance on any passed ball or wild pitch, including scoring from 3<sup>rd</sup> base
- minimum pitching age should be changed to (enter age) \_\_\_\_\_
- there should be a limit of \_\_\_\_\_ innings pitched per game by pitchers in age range \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_
- I don't want to change any of the rules
- in the schedule we should try to play as many teams as possible during the season instead of playing 2 games against some teams and no games against other teams.

Should the league split into 2 parts, one with the existing rules and one with rules that open up the game more, with a lower pitching age and closer to full rules baseball? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ or No \_\_\_\_\_

If there was such a split, in which one would you play? Existing rules \_\_\_\_\_ or Changed rules \_\_\_\_\_

Other changes desired, or comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this form to: Vermont Senior Baseball League, c/o Mike Wagner, PO Box 10, Newport VT 05855  
or copy the above information into an email and send to: [mike@wagner-usa.net](mailto:mike@wagner-usa.net)

## Bottom of the Lineup

By Mike Wagner, Editor

*Recently someone asked me what I get out of helping the baseball league. I said I already got what I wanted, just by being able to play baseball. Now I was giving something back by trying to get information out to people who might want to play but didn't know that the opportunity existed. Here is a longer explanation of the first part of that answer.*

I was born in Washington DC in 1943 and I got tired of the Senators losing to the Yankees all the time so I became a Yankees fan.



Above, the author at age 10  
Photo by Scully Wagner.

When I was 9 years old my family moved to Brooklyn, NY. Since the rest of the family were now all Dodgers fans, to avoid arguments I spent a lot of time outside and I started playing baseball with my friends in the public park. It was sandlot ball, we just made up a field with a tree as first base and somebody's little sister as third base.

There weren't any organized leagues for kids where we lived, so I didn't play in Little League or Babe Ruth League, and I was too skinny to make the team in High School or College. I loved the game as a fan, but I always daydreamed about being a baseball player on a real team.

I had moved to California and was no longer a Yankees fan by the time my son was old enough for Little League. I enjoyed watching him develop his baseball skills, although he lost interest when he decided that he wanted to become a rock and roll guitarist. Luckily he also got a day job.

I first heard about the Mens Senior Baseball League soon after I moved to Vermont in 1996. One time my wife was taking the bus home from Boston, and she got to talking with the bus driver, who mentioned that he played on a baseball team in an organized league for people age 35 and older. She said, "I think my husband would be interested in playing baseball" and that started a whole chain of events. The 1996 season had just ended but the next spring I tried out for my local team and on May 4, 1997 I went to my first game as a member of Floyd Brown's team from Newport, Vermont.



Above, at my first game on May 4, 1997. Photo by Cheryl Singleton.

It was a cold, dreary day with scattered showers, and only 8 other Newport players made the trip to Milton, Vermont for our game. Among them was the famous bus driver, who was our shortstop and leadoff hitter. They put me up last, and I didn't bat in the top of

the first inning. Then I went out in the field to my position (catcher) and the pitcher started to warm up. I kept looking over at the parking lot, half expecting a car to drive up and someone to run over to the field, saying "Okay, Mike, thanks for warming up the pitcher, I'm the real catcher and you can just take a seat on the bench". But it didn't happen.

I threw the ball down to second base, a batter stepped in, the umpire said "Play", and the pitcher threw a pitch, which the batter took and I caught. I still remember the feeling and the sound as the ball hit my mitt. At that moment my lifelong dream came true. I was 54 years old, and I was finally a baseball player.

In my first at bat I walked, and then I went 4-for-4. We lost that game, 8-7, but went on to win the league championship that year.

I've had many great baseball experiences in the last 7 years, including having my son as a teammate and bringing a team from Vermont to the MSBL World Series, but none can top the feeling I had that day when my dream came true. If I ever have any more children or pets I'm going to name them after that bus driver. ♦

*(Note: the bus driver was Johnny Kalinen, who has played since 1999 for the Lake Region Rangers. I still have his chili recipe, written on the back of a bus ticket envelope. Vermont Transit's bus route from White River Junction to Newport was shut down after the final run on April 2, 2004.)*



Above, the author at bat in a 2002 game at Gardner Park in Newport. My son John Wagner is the runner on first base, the first base coach is Ray Benson and the catcher for the Chelsea team is Gordon Barnaby. Photo by Gary Stevens.

## Vermont Senior Baseball News

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Visit our website at: [baseball.neknetwork.com](http://baseball.neknetwork.com)  
 Send letters and articles c/o Mike Wagner, PO Box 10,  
 Newport VT 05855, or by email to [baseball@neknetwork.com](mailto:baseball@neknetwork.com)

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