ASA/USA SOFTBALL ANNOUNCES ORGANIZATION RENAME AND REBRAND TO USA SOFTBALL

The Amateur Softball Association (ASA) of America/USA Softball announced their organizational rename and rebrand to USA Softball and new logo, which will be effective January 1, 2017. As the sport of softball continually evolves, focusing on the USA Softball brand better reflects the legacy that ASA/USA Softball has established over its 80 years as the leader in the sport of softball.

“This is an exciting time for ASA/USA Softball as the rebrand to USA Softball reflects our vision for the growth of the sport,” said ASA/USA Softball President Warren Jones. “For over 80 years, ASA/USA Softball has been the driving force behind the sport of softball, and this new logo truly embodies that character and legacy. I encourage all of our members to embrace the change of rebranding our organization to USA Softball that the ASA/USA Softball Board of Directors approved during its September, 2015 Board Meeting. As the National Governing Body of Softball, USA Softball will continue to serve as the leader in the sport of softball while helping foster the passion and love for the game to all.”

When ASA/USA Softball entered the softball picture in 1933, the sport was in a state of confusion with no unified set of playing rules and no NGB to provide guidance and stability. ASA/USA Softball changed all that by adopting softball’s first universally accepted rules of play and by organizing consistent and fair competition across the nation. Since its founding, ASA/USA Softball serves the softball community as the leader in certified equipment standards, coaching education and umpiring while providing the best-of-the-best in softball at all levels. Whether as a coach, athlete, umpire, administrator or fan, ASA/USA Softball provides the most exciting, level and competitive fields of play.

ASA/USA Softball has left an everlasting imprint on the sport, athletes and officials, creating many historic “firsts” for the game, including the first set of unified rules, the first standardized uniforms for officials, a Hall of Fame to honor those individuals who have left an impact upon our sport and fielding the first U.S. Olympic Softball team in 1996. From this beginning, ASA/USA Softball has become one of the nation’s largest and fastest growing sports organizations and now sanctions competition in every state through a network of 70 local associations.

continued on page 4
Hello and welcome to the June 2016 edition of The Inside Pitch, the official newsletter of ASA/USA Softball. The month of June has been an exciting one for the game of softball. To name a few, ASA/USA Softball hosted the first of its kind Men’s Fast Pitch Invitational tournament where athletes were evaluated by members from the USA Softball Men’s National Team Selection Committee, the USA Softball Women’s National Team traveled to Japan for the All-Star Series and played in front of 30K+ fans at the Tokyo Dome, and the Junior Men’s National Team completed their training camp in Normal, Ill. walking away with several exhibition games in preparation for the World Championship this July. In addition, many teams have competed hard and fought for their chance to qualify for the 16-Under and 18-Under GOLD tournaments. We have truly seen some great softball played at all levels across the board. A special thank you to all of the players who continue to represent USA Softball by continuing to play their heart out, and to the coaches, umpires and administrators who work diligently to make sure these athletes have a quality experience.

In addition, we as an organization officially announced our rebrand and rename to USA Softball. As we take steps to grow the game and look towards softball’s reinstatement into the Olympics, we can only hope that come Tokyo 2020, fans across the world will have the opportunity to watch softball on national television. Starting September 1 of this year, our organization will take on the name USA Softball while continuing to foster the passion and love for the game as the National Governing Body of Softball.

Looking ahead toward this next month, Border Battle VIII and the World Cup of Softball XI return to Oklahoma City. Highlighting Border Battle VIII is the July 5 battle featuring Team USA vs. Team Canada, while the World Cup of Softball XI welcomes a record-12 countries to ASA Hall of Fame Stadium. Following their stop in Oklahoma City, the Women’s National Team will travel to Surrey, B.C. for the World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC) Women’s World Championship, while fans can watch the Junior Men’s National Team when they head to Midland, Mich. for the WBSC Junior Men’s World Championship. If you’re not able to make it to one of these great events, I encourage you to watch the live stream on ASAUSASoftball.com, which is always available for free.

Have a question for President Jones? Send it to president@softball.org.
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In its long history, ASA/USA Softball has grown from a few hundred teams in the early days to over 160,000 teams today, representing a membership of more than 2.2 million. That legacy will continue to live on through the USA Softball brand, providing a clearer identity of what USA Softball stands for, represents and embodies.

“The evolution of our brand to USA Softball showcases our organization to its fullest potential,” said ASA/USA Softball Executive Director Craig Cress. “Rebranding shows our members, teams, umpires, players and fans that we are continually evolving and furthering the softball community while connecting and unifying them under the USA Softball brand. I’m excited for our fans, members and administrators to connect and identify with our new look and the USA Softball brand.”

In addition to rebranding, ASA/USA Softball has also unveiled a new redesigned logo, approved by the ASA/USA Softball Board of Directors at its April 2016 board meeting, which will replace the ASA/USA Softball split logo throughout the transition to USA Softball. The redesign contains several key elements of previous ASA/USA Softball logos, while clearly identifying the USA Softball brand as the organization evolves towards the future. The home plate shape embodies the sport, while bold, block USA Softball lettering symbolizes USA Softball’s authority as the NGB. Along with the redesigned prominent features of the logo, the stars and stripes pay homage to the U.S. flag and classic American iconography, connecting fans and members with the USA Softball brand. Several subtleties also lie within the new logo, as the three red stripes reference 1933, the year ASA/USA Softball was founded, and the stars represent the four territories of ASA/USA Softball.

Stay up-to-date by reading this month’s Plays and Clarifications >>

Enjoy this month’s INSIDE PITCH?

If your local association has news to share and would like to be featured in next month’s newsletter, email me at kwillis@softball.org by the 15th of the month.

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CHECK IN WITH
JUNIOR MEN’S NATIONAL TEAM TRAINING!

Athletes from across the country participated in the Junior Men’s National Team training camp in Normal, Ill. from June 23-30. The training camp, which included a number of practice drills and a series of exhibition games, was held in preparation for the World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC) Junior Men’s World Championship (JMWC). Held at historic Emerson Park and Currie Stadium, the JMWC will welcome 13 nations from all five regions who will compete for the highest prize in Junior Men’s international softball.
Athletes who participated in the week-long camp included:

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<td>Logan Amend</td>
<td>Vasser, Mich.</td>
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<td>Sergio Balderrama</td>
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ASA/USA Softball announced their partnership with Major League Baseball (MLB) in joining USA Baseball by supporting the “PLAY BALL” initiative (PlayBall.org). The initiative, which was launched in June 2015, encourages widespread participation in all forms of softball and baseball activities among all age groups, especially youth.

“We are thrilled to partner with MLB and USA Baseball for the Play Ball initiative,” said ASA/USA Softball Executive Director Craig Cress. “This partnership allows us to continue in our mission to grow the game and provide opportunities for youth to get involved in our great sport at any level. We’ve had the opportunity to participate in Play Ball events throughout the year, and to see the excitement and joy that picking up a bat and ball brings to the kids that attend speaks volumes about our game. We’re excited to spread that excitement, and grow the game all the way to the grassroots level.”

PLAY BALL highlights the many ways baseball and softball can be played, whether at Championship or recreational play or something as simple as playing catch or a game of wiffle ball. The initiative also provides players, parents and coaches with the information and resources to help with proper play and instruction. Through a partnership with ASA/USA Softball and USA Baseball, PLAY BALL brings awareness and accessibility to the program’s initiatives through special events and promotional opportunities. ASA/USA Softball will also help promote PLAY BALL throughout the 70 local associations across the U.S. as well as assist MLB and its baseball clubs in conducting Softball Series events through various local associations.

PlayBall.org is the PLAY BALL initiative’s online home and is accessible via MLB.com, USABaseball.com, USASoftball.com and other partner websites. PlayBall.org features youth-oriented content, including baseball trivia and quizzes, and video highlights from MLB games, social media content, photos and a “PlayBall Near You” interactive map that locates local community leagues. The site also features access to video podcasts and highlights from MLB Network’s new youth-focused show “Play Ball,” which features interviews and on-field demonstrations with top players throughout the League, including Nolan Arenado, Curtis Granderson, Matt Kemp, Francisco Lindor and Evan Longoria. “Play Ball” airs on Saturdays at 10:00 a.m. ET. PlayBall.org also links to USABaseball.com, which provides players, parents and coaches with the information and resources to help with proper play and instruction, including education videos featuring Hall of Famer and MLB Network analyst John Smoltz, Chicago Cubs Manager Joe Maddon, and Kansas City Royals Senior Vice President of Baseball Operations and General Manager Dayton Moore, among others. Health and safety information, including through the Pitch Smart and Play Sun Smart programs, also is available.

“Major League Baseball is pleased to continue strengthening our ties with the governing bodies of our sport with this partnership with USA Softball,” said Tony Reagins, Senior Vice President, Major League Baseball.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12
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The growth of softball is important to the future prosperity of our sport, and their support of PLAY BALL is a welcome and natural collaboration of this relationship.

One of the nation’s largest sports organizations, ASA/USA Softball serves as the NGB for softball to the United States Olympic Committee and the World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC). ASA/USA Softball also conducts over 100 National Championships each year and registers over 165,000 teams annually. On an annual basis, ASA/USA Softball also conducts over 80,000 background checks on coaches and personnel who surround the game while certifying over 25,000 ACE (Achieve, Certify, Educate) coaches.

To find out more about Play Ball, visit PlayBall.org.
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The USA Softball Men’s Fast Pitch Invitational Tournament was held June 11-12 in Ashland, Ohio. For the first time in its history, ASA/USA Softball introduced this opportunity for Men’s Fast Pitch players to participate in this inaugural tournament, where athletes were evaluated by the USA Softball Men’s National Team Selection Committee (MNTSC) and USA Softball Men’s National Team coaching staff in hopes of making it into an elite identified athlete pool.

“This tournament is important for a player to be seen and evaluated so they have a chance of making the identified athlete pool,” Tournament Director and Men’s National Team Head Coach Denny Bruckert said. “If a player is selected to be part of the pool, that player has the chance to be invited to January’s Men’s National Team Selection Camp, where the roster for the USA Softball Men’s National Team will be chosen.”

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There was plenty of chaos and down-to-the-wire thrillers at the 2016 Women’s College World Series. Oklahoma sophomore left-hander Paige Parker, however, stayed just a little bit above the fray. The Independence, Mo., product watched from the dugout as Auburn rallied from a 7-0 deficit on Tuesday night to set up Wednesday night’s deciding third game of the best-of-three championship series. Parker was far from perfect on the final night of the 2016 collegiate campaign, but she battled a pesky Auburn offense all night and led the Sooners to a second national championship in four years.

Auburn’s Jade Rhodes hit a solo home run in the fourth inning, but that was as Oklahoma won 2-1 in front of a record crowd of 8,367 for Session 10 at Hall of Fame Stadium.

Parker (38-3) tossed her fifth complete game of the week, allowing five hits and striking out five. Her fourth complete game came two nights ago in a 3-2 win that saw Auburn manage four hits and two runs, both coming in a spine-tingling seventh inning that ended when first baseman Shay Knighten threw out the tying run at home plate to end the game.

“It was one of the most fantastic feelings that I’ve ever had in my whole life,” said Parker, who was named the 2016 WCWS Most Outstanding Player after throwing 36 innings over the last seven days. “Our fans this year have been so vital to all of the things that we’ve done. They’ve supported us so much, and to have all of them here and to have all of our families here, as well, just meant so much to us, and it was just incredible to get to share this feeling with them, as well.”

Despite a Game 2 loss, Parker got that extra day of rest as Kelsey Stevens and Jayden Chestnut handled the pitching duties. “Kelsey (Stevens) and Jayden (Chestnut) did a fantastic job yesterday, and I couldn’t be more proud of them,” Parker said. “They’ve worked so hard this whole year, and I’m just so proud of the heart and the fight that they showed. You know, after the game they both talked to me, and they were like, go out and do it for the pitching staff. That meant so much to me.”

In Game 3, OU took a 2-0 lead in a bizarre bottom of the first where the ball barely left the infield.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18
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...Following an infield single by Caleigh Clifton, an Emily Carosone error on a ball hit by Knighten put runners at first and third, but, before the play was dead, Carosone tried to stop a throw she started to make and simply spiked the ball into the dirt, allowing Clifton to score and move Knighten to third. Fale Aviu then grounded one slowly to Auburn shortstop Whitney Jordan, who took too much time throwing to first, and the Sooners had two gift runs and the early advantage.

It was all the Sooner lefty would need.

“`I can’t say enough about not just Paige Parker but the whole team playing great defense behind her,” Sooners coach Patty Gasso said. “Tonight was a tribute to a great pitching performance who shut down a very potent offense and a defense that made incredible plays behind her. We came out strong early, scored first, and then we got stagnant, and I will give – (Makayla) Martin did a great job of keeping us a little off balance. I could feel like our bodies looked like they were getting tired, and we just couldn’t get our legs into things and get the ball through the infield.”

Parker worked out of a first-and-second, no-out jam in the top of the second, getting a fielder’s choice and a pair of strikeouts. In the third, an error by Parker started a sequence that saw the Tigers load the bases with no outs. But the sophomore hurler got Carosone swinging, then got an inning-ending 6-4-3 double play to keep the Tigers scoreless.

Clint Myers’s Tigers went 1-2-3 in the seventh and end the season 58-12 with a second straight trip to Oklahoma City. AU made it five-straight years and six of the last seven where a Southeastern Conference squad has played in the championship series in Oklahoma City.

“We lost to an outstanding Oklahoma team, well-coached, great athletes,” said Myers, who led Arizona State to WCWS titles in 2008 and 2011. “We talked at the beginning in August about having the opportunity to be here. We were picked, I believe, to finish sixth in the SEC. We lost to Arizona … people said we couldn’t come back. We came back. We lost the first game to Oklahoma, but we came back. We came up one-run short (tonight).”

All week the Tigers battled, including a miraculous final-inning rally late to beat Georgia, 4-3, on Saturday and a wild 8-7 extra-inning victory over a charging Florida State team on Sunday night. Freshman Makayla Martin (15-4) was the hard-luck loser on Wednesday; the right-hander worked 12.1 innings during the WCWS and allowed just one earned run. The Sooners had five hits off Martin in the finale.

Gasso wasn’t sure what her 22nd squad in Norman was about early this season after dropping its first two games.

“It was almost panic from the first weekend. All of us were like, wow, wait, what happened? They were scared, very tight, and I think we just started to understand – and they’re going to laugh when I say this word because every time I say it they laugh, but the word freedom is about what this group is about,” Gasso said. “The freedom to make mistakes. They can be good mistakes because you can learn from them, and that is why this group can be so loose because they just can play the way they need to play without me pointing my finger in their face or anybody.”

Oklahoma won 31 of its last 32 games and finish an incredible 57-8 with a lineup that included four freshmen and three sophomores.
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

...OU shut-out Alabama to open the week, held off a late rally by Michigan to win 7-5, and advanced to the championship series with a 7-3 win over LSU on Sunday night.

“I felt our team definitely took the hard road through this,” Gasso said. “We had to open up with Alabama, and that was a very tough game, and then on to -- who did we play next? Michigan, LSU. We played some of the best in the country, so I definitely feel like this team earned every second of our success because they played from the first pitch to the last.”

It’s obvious from a 57-win season and the performance this week that Knighten and fellow freshman third baseman Sydney Romero will give opposing pitching staff fits for the next three years. The infield of Romero, quick-handed sophomore shortstop Kelsey Arnold, Clifton at second, and Knighten at first with Parker in the circle give Gasso a formidable squad.

Florida won back-to-back WCWS titles in 2014 and 2015; the Sooners will be the early favorite for 2017 without question.

“For me, it was more of Coach (Patty Gasso) just not letting me think I was a freshman, and that goes for the whole team,” Knighten said. “They said, well, even though you’re a freshman, you’re going to have to step up one way or another, and so I kind of took that to heart and was like, okay, I’ve got you guys. I’m going to figure this out. Even though I’m a freshman I’m not going to be too big, do anything out of what I’ve already done, and just help you guys to the best of my ability, and I couldn’t thank Coach or the seniors or anybody else on my team enough for it.”
The Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team hosted their annual Kids Camp on the campus of George Mason University in Fairfax, VA from June 13-18. The Kids Camp provided the opportunity to inspire and educate the kids who attended the camp. This year’s Kids Camp brought together 24 children with an amputation or those who are missing a limb with an all-expenses paid trip for the child and an adult including travel, meals and lodging. The kids not only honed their softball skills all week being mentored by the players of the WWAST, but they also got the chance to do some fun things in the Washington D.C. area including a tour of the United States Capitol Building and a visit to the National Air and Space Museum Udvar-Hazy Center. The week culminated on Friday evening with the “big game” where the 12 kids from the “Red Rangers” played against 12 kids from the “Blue Dynamite”. Afterwards, the WWAST showed their skills against a local celebrity team. In the end there were only winners where everyone came out of this game a better player and a true Warrior.
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