BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL COMBINE TO BECOME MOST PARTICIPATED TEAM SPORTS IN UNITED STATES, ACCORDING TO SFIA REPORT

With nearly 25 million participants, baseball and softball combined to rank as the most participated team sports in the United States in 2016 according to the annual report produced by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), Major League Baseball announced. Findings in this year’s Topline Participation Report were presented during the quarterly MLB owners meetings, which concluded, and included the following data.

Overall baseball participation increased by 7.7% and slow-pitch softball participation increased by 8.1% in 2016, with casual participation in both baseball and slow-pitch softball showing the highest growth. In 2016, casual participation in baseball rose by 18.1% and slow-pitch softball increased by 12.4%. Casual participation in baseball and slow-pitch softball is up 34% over the last five years. When combined, baseball and softball (fast-and slow-pitch) have more casual participants than any other sport (10.25 million total casual participants).

Tom Cove, SFIA President and CEO said: “The growth in Baseball and Softball participation is significant as traditional team sports do not usually see these kind of double digit increases. These numbers suggest something special is happening with baseball and softball. We believe basic efforts to put a ball, bat and glove in more young people’s hands really connect with the joy of the game. The biggest increases are in casual participation, and this uptick represents a huge opportunity for the baseball and softball community to build ongoing and deeper player engagement with the game in the future.”

Baseball Commissioner Robert D. Manfred, Jr. said: “No goal is more important to Major League Baseball than making baseball and softball accessible and to engage with children in all communities.

...CONTINUED ON PAGE 5
Hello and welcome to the May 2017 issue of The Inside Pitch, the official newsletter of USA Softball. I hope you enjoy the news and find the information inside the newsletter helpful and inspiring as you continue to plan and organize tournaments and events in your state or local area.

On Memorial Day, we had the opportunity to remember and honor the men and women who have given their lives while serving in the United States Armed Forces. We thank them for their service and dedication to our great country.

The end of May typically marks the start of summer and with that – USA Softball Championship season! The best-of-the-best play USA Softball, and I look forward to watching and/or hearing about the great Championship Play happening around the country. Keep inspiring those in your community to get out and get active on the diamond – softball is the sport for everyone, from competitive to recreational. Along with Championship season, the National Teams will also start their international schedule, including both the Men’s and Junior Women’s World Championships, held in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada, and Clearwater, Fla., respectively.

I also wanted to highlight the work USA Softball has done and the additional opportunities we’re providing for men to play – both fast pitch and slow pitch. The second annual USA Softball Men’s Fast Pitch Invitational Tournament returns to Ashland, Ohio June 9-11. With an opportunity to be evaluated by our Men’s National Team (MNT) Selection Committee and MNT coaching staff, teams from around the country will be traveling to compete once again, and we are excited to welcome them. Like I mentioned above, players representing the U.S. on this year’s Men’s National Team will look to earn a Gold Medal at the WBSC Men’s World Championship, and we want to continue growing the program and developing our players through tournaments like this NIT. Men who are interested in playing slow pitch also have the ability to play in this year’s Slow Pitch NIT which is set to take place in Virginia. If you would like more information on either of the events, feel free to reach out to me or visit USASoftball.com.

It’s a great time to be a part of USA Softball. We’ve got an exciting lineup this summer, and offer several opportunities for athletes, umpires, coaches, and fans to be involved in our great game! Wherever you are – travel safe, play hard and most of all, have fun.

USA Softball President
Tracy began his umpire career in 1990 prior to his freshman year in high school in Hebron, Neb., umpiring baseball and USA softball. He worked in Nebraska for 12 years prior to moving to Kansas. Since arriving in Kansas he has attended a regular National Umpire School, and the advanced umpire fast pitch National Umpire School in Oklahoma City. In addition to umpiring USA Softball, Tracy has umpired NCAA Division I and Division II softball for seven years.

Tracy was named to the USA Softball of Kansas umpire staff as a District Umpire-in-Chief (UIC) in August of 2006. In May of 2015, he was named the Northeast District Commissioner. He has instructed at the USA Softball of Kansas Umpire Clinic for the past two years and volunteered to assist at the 2016 NUS in Ralston, NE.

CLICK HERE TO READ THE FULL STORY >>

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 Katie at kwillis@usasoftball.com by the 15th of the month.
USA SOFTBALL MOBILE APP

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BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL COMBINE TO BECOME MOST PARTICIPATED TEAM SPORTS IN UNITED STATES, ACCORDING TO SFIA REPORT

...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The results of the SFIA Report demonstrate that participation in baseball and softball is growing. We are encouraged by the success of the PLAY BALL initiative toward our objectives and grateful for partnerships with USA Baseball, USA Softball and the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Together, we will continue to work to provide memorable experiences for young people, especially those from underserved areas.”

In 2015, Major League Baseball launched the “PLAY BALL” initiative as the sport’s largest collective effort to encourage young people to participate in baseball- or softball-related activities, including formal leagues, special events and casual forms of play. PLAY BALL events have become MLB’s signature youth engagement activity during the professional and amateur baseball and softball calendar, particularly in connection with key dates from Spring Training, through the MLB Championship Season and into the Postseason and World Series. PLAY BALL aims to highlight the fun and community-focused natures of the game at the Major League, professional, amateur and youth levels. In addition to flagship partnerships with USA Baseball and USA Softball, PLAY BALL is also supported by all 30 MLB Clubs, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and MLB Corporate Partners Chevrolet, Scotts and Nathan’s Famous. In 2016, MLB Network launched Play Ball, a weekly player interview and demonstration show geared toward kids. In the program, MLB stars, including Bryce Harper, Dexter Fowler, Francisco Lindor and Anthony Rizzo, have discussed their experiences reaching the Major Leagues and shared tips in one-on-one demonstrations and conversations with MLB Network analysts. Currently in its second season, Play Ball is available on multiple platforms, including MLB Network, MLB At Bat, MLB.com and Facebook.

“We are pleased to see that this latest round of SFIA data showcases baseball and softball as healthy and flourishing sports,” said Paul Seiler, Executive Director/CEO of USA Baseball. “While this progress is encouraging, we remain steadfast in furthering the many sport development initiatives that have helped to make this growth possible. The collective effort being led by MLB, its 30 Clubs, USA Baseball and USA Softball, as well as the support of the many national amateur organizations around the country, is having a discernible impact on families and communities in the United States.”

“Seeing the growth of both baseball and softball means that opportunities continue to expand for people to get involved in bat and ball sports,” said USA Softball Executive Director Craig Cress. “We are honored to be partnered with MLB and USA Baseball for the PLAY BALL initiative and believe that the efforts of all three organizations has greatly contributed to the growth in participation in both sports. By putting a bat and ball in kids’ hands and growing the game at the grassroots level, it fosters a passion and love for the game, which is the reason why so many get involved in our great sports. We look forward to continuing to work with MLB and USA Baseball in providing more opportunities for young people across the country to get involved in baseball and softball.”
The 2017 USA Softball Men’s National Team (MNT) took home the 2017 Rodney Fox Memorial Tournament hardware after shutting out Globe 8-0 (six inning) in the Championship Game. Earning a spot in the finale after posting a 13-3 (five inning) win earlier in the day, the U.S. had timely hitting at the plate and a strong outing in the circle from Tony Mancha (Las Cruces, N.M.), who allowed just two hits.

**Championship Game: USA 8, Globe 0 (six inning)**

Facing one of the best pitchers in the international game, Team USA proved they are a force to be reckoned with as the team slugged their way to an 8-0 (six inning) win over Globe. After taking the lead in the bottom of the second inning after Bryce Kay (Jefferson, Mo.) sent out a two-run shot, the U.S. never looked back as Mancha kept all but three Globe hitters off the bases.

It was a pitcher’s duel before Kevin Castillo (Long Beach, Calif.) picked up the first U.S. hit of the game with a double to lead off the bottom of the second inning. Back-to-back strikeouts kept Castillo at second before Kay sent the ball deep over the left field fence to make it a 2-0, U.S. ballgame.

It would stay a two-run lead for the Red, White and Blue until the bottom of the fifth inning when Chris Heinlein (Columbia, Mo.) was issued a leadoff walk. Nick Mullins (Toms River, N.J.) brought him home with an RBI double to left field before a single from Matt Ratliff (American Fork, Utah) put runners on the corners. This prompted a pitching change for Globe, as starter Sean Cleary was replaced by Jon Gwizdala. An error would allow Mullins to cross the plate, a sac fly from Erick Ochoa (Imperial, Calif.) brought home Ratliff and a sac fly from Tyler Dudley (Battle Creek, Mich.) extended the U.S. lead to 6-0. One inning later, a two-run home run from Pat Sagdal (Richland, Wash.) earned the walk-off win for the United States.

Mancha got the win in the circle, his second of the Rodney Fox Memorial Tournament. Limiting Globe to just two hits and one walk, Mancha picked up nine strikeouts through six complete innings of work.

“These guys played as a team,” said Head Coach Denny Bruckert (Gillespie, Ill.). “We swung the bats against some good pitching and our defense played really good all weekend. All in all, we did a really good job all weekend and I’m excited to see how this team develops.”

...CONTINUED ON PAGE 7
Semifinal: USA 13, Elanco 3 (five inning)

Jeff Nowaczyk (Midland, Mich.) had a day at the plate to help land the U.S. in the Championship Game. With a perfect 3-for-3 performance in the batter’s box, Nowaczyk sent two balls out of the park to pick up four RBI while Heinlein, Dudley, Kay and Ochoa each picked up a home run in the run-rule contest.

BJ Hunhoff (Harrisburg, S.D.) earned the win in the circle, pitching the first four innings with two strikeouts, three hits and three runs. Duane Weiler (Bedford, Pa.) entered in relief in the final frame, retiring each batter faced while picking up one strikeout.

The USA Softball MNT will meet up again at the Father’s Day Memorial Tournament in Houston, Texas from June 16-18 and the Vancouver Challenge July 1-3 in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. The final 17-player roster for the 2017 USA Softball MNT will be determined prior to the WBSC Men’s World Championship, which will be held July 7-16 in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada. Fans at home can follow along all summer long at USASoftball.com.

CLICK HERE TO VIEW THE 2017 MEN’S NATIONAL TEAM ROSTER >>
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Eleven finalists were selected for the 2017 Schutt Sports/NFCA Division I National Freshman of the Year award, as announced by NFCA. The award was presented to the winner prior to the start of the 2017 NCAA Women’s College World Series in Oklahoma City, Okla.

Out of the eleven finalists, two are members of the 2017 USA Softball Junior Women’s National Team: Nicole Bates (Washington) and Jessica Harper (Arizona). The nine additional finalists include Caylan Arnold (Tennessee), Maggie Balint (Oregon), Alyssa Barrera (Utah), Jenna Cone (George Washington), Rachel Garcia (UCLA), Ryan Jackson (Bethune-Cookman), Kendyl Lindaman (Minnesota), Brittany Pickett (North Carolina), and Takesha Saltern (Weber State).

The finalists hailed from 11 different universities and seven conferences. The Pac-12 conference led the way with five selections. The Atlantic-10, Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten, Big Sky, Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) and Southeastern Conference (SEC) make up the rest of the field.

The top three finalists were voted and released on Wed., May 24: Oregon’s Maggie Balint, UCLA’s Rachel Garcia, and Minnesota’s Kendyl Lindaman. On May 30, Rachel Garcia (UCLA) was announced as the winner of the award.

Created in 2014, the award honors outstanding athletic achievement among Division I freshmen softball student-athletes. In the inaugural year, Auburn’s Kasey Cooper and Tennessee’s Annie Aldrete, were co-winners. Oklahoma’s Paige Parker took home the honor in 2015 and Florida’s Amanda Lorenz captured the award in 2016.
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USA Softball announced the complete coaching staff for the USA Softball Junior Men’s National Team (JMNT), who will spearhead five select exposure camp opportunities for athletes who wish to be a member of the 2018 USA Softball JMNT. Selected from the USA Softball Men’s National Team (MNT) Coaching Pool, the coaches selected will join Head Coach Tyron McKinney (Ashland, Ohio) as the team builds towards to the 2018 World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC) Junior Men’s World Championship.

On the coaching staff are Tony Aresco (Stoneham, Mass.), Mike Armitage (Normal, Ill.) and Bob Piddock (Castro Valley, Calif.). Aresco, who was a member of the 1998 USA Softball MNT athlete pool, has over 30 years of experience coaching men’s fast pitch and has led his teams to four USA Softball National Championship titles. Armitage played for over 18 years at the highest level of men’s fast pitch, earning First Team All-American honors as a player in USA Softball National Championship play before transitioning into a coaching role at the conclusion of his playing career. Piddock has coached fast pitch softball in a variety of capacities for the last 25 years, where he has led teams to eight USA Softball National Championships.

In addition to the complete coaching staff, USA Softball also announced five exposure events for the 2018 JMNT that will provide athletes the opportunity to showcase their skills in front of members of the JMNT coaching staff. The five exposure events are open to any male U.S. citizen born in 1999, 2000, 2001 or 2002 who can commit to future team events. There is a $15, non-refundable registration fee for athletes who are not registered through their respective USA Softball association. Participants are responsible for their own equipment and expenses to the tryouts, and applications must be submitted one week prior to the start date of each event. With events spread throughout the United States, athletes will participate in a series of softball-related skills for each position, hitting and bunting.

“I would like to congratulate Mike, Bob and Tony on being named to the coaching staff for the Junior Men’s National Team Program,” said McKinney. “They are a valuable key to the program’s success. I am looking forward to getting the ball rolling with these exposure camps and preparing our 2018 athletes for the Gold!”

**Click here to register!**

- **June 3-4 | Stevens, PA | Click here to register**
- **July 1-2 | Pekin, Ill. | Click here to register**
- **July 10-12 | Midland, Texas | Click here to register**
- **August 25-27 | Ashland, OH | Click here to register**
After traveling to San Diego, Calif. to kick off the 2017 USA Softball Stadium Power Tour at Petco Park, home of the San Diego Padres, first-time Power Tour slugger, Jerred Messersmith (Monsta) came out swinging and made a statement with his 10-point performance. Launching most of his hits well over 400 feet into left-center, Messersmith surprised the crowd after rising atop the list and surpassing four-time champion, Denny Crine (Miken), by one point.

“I have been watching the Long Haul Bombers for years on TV, so to be on the same field with them and then to win the derby makes me humble and grateful,” Messersmith said, before he was greeted by family and friends who joined in on the celebration.

Fellow slugger, Ryan Dacko, said, “We just might be looking at the new face of softball.”

Crine, who returned from an injury last season, capped off his at-bat by sending the money ball deep onto the third level of the Western Metal Supply Building. Crine finished the night with nine points total. Additional sluggers present at the Petco Park tour stop included Mike Brambilla (Miken) who finished with six points and Chris Grienert (Monsta) who earned three.

Up next, sluggers on the USA Softball Stadium Power Tour travel to Target Field, home of the Minnesota Twins on Wednesday, June 14. For more information, please visit USASoftball.com.
2017 College Corner Rankings

Week 12
With 2017 Record

1. Florida (46-4)
2. Florida State (47-3-1)
3. Arizona (47-5)
4. Minnesota (48-3)
5. Oregon (41-6)
6. Texas A&M (41-7)
7. Oklahoma (44-8)
8. Washington (37-10)
9. Tennessee (42-8)
10. Auburn (43-8)
11. Utah (30-9)
12. UCLA (37-12)
13. Baylor (39-10)
14. James Madison (44-6)
15. Alabama (39-12)
16. Louisiana (39-6)
17. Michigan (37-10-1)
18. Kentucky (34-14)
19. LSU (37-15)
20. BYU (36-10)
21. Ole Miss (33-17)
22. Illinois (35-12)
23. Arizona State (28-16)
24. Tulsa (36-13)
25. Marshall (38-7)

RV: South Carolina, California, Arkansas, Ohio State, Texas State, USC Upstate, Georgia, Missouri, Mississippi State, Oklahoma State, and Wisconsin.

Week 13
With 2017 Record

1. Florida (50-5)
2. Oregon (44-6)
3. Minnesota (51-3)
4. Florida State (48-6-1)
5. Arizona (48-7)
6. Oklahoma (47-8)
7. Tennessee (44-9)
8. Auburn (45-9)
9. Washington (40-11)
10. UCLA (39-13)
11. Texas A&M (42-9)
12. Baylor (41-11)
13. James Madison (47-6)
14. Utah (33-11)
15. Louisiana (42-6)
16. Alabama (40-15)
17. Michigan (41-10-1)
18. Ole Miss (36-18)
19. Kentucky (35-6)
20. BYU (40-10)
21. LSU (38-17)
22. Arizona State (30-17)
23. South Carolina (32-22)
T24. Marshall (40-8)
T24. Ohio State (33-15)
T24. Tulsa (37-15)

RV: Mississippi State, Illinois, USC Upstate, FIU, Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Cal State Fullerton, Oklahoma State, California, Jacksonville State, and Texas State.

Week 14
With 2017 Record

1. Oregon (47-6)
2. Florida (50-6)
3. Minnesota (54-3)
4. Florida State (51-6-1)
5. Arizona (48-7)
6. Oklahoma (50-8)
7. Tennessee (44-10)
T8. Auburn (46-10)
T8. UCLA (42-13)
10. Tennessee (44-10)
11. Texas A&M (42-10)
12. James Madison (50-6)
13. Baylor (43-12)
T14. Alabama (42-16)
T14. Louisiana (45-6)
16. Ole Miss (40-18)
17. Utah (33-14)
18. Michigan (41-11-1)
19. LSU (41-18)
20. Kentucky (36-17)
21. BYU (44-11)
22. Arizona State (30-20)
23. Tulsa (39-15)
24. South Carolina (32-23)
T25. Ohio State (35-16)
T25. USC Upstate (44-11)

USA SOFTBALL COLLEGIATE NATIONAL PLAYER OF THE WEEK HONOREES

Week 13 - Maggie Good  
Week 14 - Ronnie Ladines  
2017 Player of the Year - Kelly Barnhill

Have you purchased your new USA Softball gear?
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FOR INFO ON THE NCAA WOMEN’S COLLEGE WORLD SERIES, CLICK HERE >>
USA Softball announced that Florida’s Kelly Barnhill was named the 2017 USA Softball National Collegiate Player of the Year. The award, which is considered the most prestigious honor in Division I women’s softball, is designed to recognize outstanding athletic achievement by female collegiate softball players across the country. This season, Barnhill helped lead Florida to its eighth NCAA Women’s College World Series (WCWS) appearance, where the Gators will look to take back the NCAA title for the first time since 2015.

“It’s really amazing to be chosen for this award as just a sophomore,” said Barnhill. “There are so many amazing players out there and to be honored at such a young age is a special accomplishment.”

The 2017 Southeastern Conference (SEC) Pitcher of the Year, Kelly Barnhill leads the nation with a 0.36 ERA and ranks in the Top 10 in shutouts and strikeouts. In just her sophomore season at the University of Florida, Barnhill has racked up First-Team All-SEC honors and boasts a 24-3 record with 333 strikeouts and only nine earned runs allowed through Super Regional play. Behind the arm of Barnhill, who was named an NFCA First Team All-Region honoree, Florida earned the No. 1 overall seed in the NCAA Softball Championship.

Notable 2017 performances for Barnhill include 14 wins and nine shutouts over Top 25-ranked opponents this season. Earning SEC Pitcher of the Week five times this season, the first pitcher in Florida history to do so, Barnhill has thrown four no-hitters in her sophomore campaign.

“The first thing that I can say is to attribute a lot of her success to just how much she’s embraced being a competitor and her tremendous work ethic,” said Florida Head Coach Tim Walton. “Not only have her teammates embraced her, but she’s embraced her teammates and is really becoming very comfortable in being a quiet superstar. She’s very humble and very driven.”

The other two finalists for the 2017 award were 2017 Colonial Athletic Association (CAA) Pitcher and Player of the year Megan Good (James Madison) and 2017 SEC Player of the Year Meghan Gregg (Tennessee).

Barnhill now joins the ranks of past winners of the award, which include UCLA’s Stacey Nuveman, Florida State’s Jessica Van der Linden, three-time winner from Texas Cat Osterman, Tennessee’s Monica Abbott, Virginia Tech’s Angela Tincher, two-time winner Washington’s Danielle Lawrie, Stanford’s Ashley Hansen, back-to-back winner Oklahoma’s Keilani Ricketts, Lacey Waldrop from Florida State, Lauren Haeger of Florida and 2016 winner Sierra Romero from Michigan.
USA Softball has proudly unveiled the redesigned USA Softball Collegiate Player of the Year trophy. Created and designed by MTM Recognition out of Oklahoma City, Okla., the redesigned trophy honors one of the most decorated USA Softball athletes, three-time Olympic Gold Medalist Lisa Fernandez, whose athletic achievements embody the essence of the prestigious award.

“What better representation of the top award in NCAA Division I softball than to honor one of the greatest athletes to ever play the game,” said USA Softball Executive Director Craig Cress. “Lisa is without a doubt one of the best to ever wear ‘USA Softball’ across her chest. She has inspired millions of players and fans around the world with her tireless work ethic, her champion mindset and her resounding success. Her relentless attitude both on and off the field perfectly represent what the USA Softball Collegiate Player of the Year award is all about. We are privileged to design the trophy in her honor as we continue the legacy of celebrating college softball’s most outstanding Division I athlete.”

One of the greatest players to ever play the game, three-time Olympic Gold Medalist Lisa Fernandez is the only pitcher to have appeared in three Olympic Game finals. Achieving a 7-2 record throughout her Olympic career, Fernandez has the distinction of holding four individual Olympic records: most strike outs in a game (25 at the 2000 Olympic Games), fewest runs allowed, highest batting average (.545) in Olympic play and most doubles (three). A graduate of UCLA, Fernandez played for the Bruins from 1990-1993, where she was a three-time winner of the sport’s Honda Award, becoming the first softball player to win the prestigious Honda-Broderick Cup in 1993. A four-time, first-team All-American, Fernandez led the Bruins to two National Championships and two runner-up finishes. She was also named All-Region and All-Pac-12 first-team each season and was the Pac-12 Player of the Year her final three years.

“I am so honored and humbled to know that my name/image will forever be associated with greatness in the sport I loved to play,” said Fernandez.

USA Softball commissioned MTM Recognition, the nation’s leader in sports awards and recognition, to create the iconic Player of the Year award. Fernandez and USA Softball staff worked hand-in-hand with MTM’s sculptor, Mario Grijalva, on all the fine details of the piece. Though the sculpture is frozen in time, the fluid motion of the wind up and Fernandez’s determination shine through in this iconic bronze. With the overall vision to create a recognizable symbolic award for softball, the sculpture incorporates the pitching circle at the foot of the bronze statue, which sits atop a black, stained walnut base. Standing at five and a quarter inches tall and 11 1/2 inches wide, the base is cut into the shape of a home plate. The bronze sculpture stands almost a foot tall atop the base to add to the rich texture of the overall look of the trophy.

...CONTINUED ON PAGE 17
USA SOFTBALL UNVEILS NEW COLLEGIATE PLAYER OF THE YEAR TROPHY

...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

“MTM has been the official supplier of ASA, now USA Softball, for over 27 years and we are very proud to create this iconic award for them,” said Charlie Stepp, MTM’s Relationship Manager for USA Softball.

In addition to the redesigned trophy, USA Softball also unveiled new branding for the award, which was designed by Old Hat Creative out of Norman, Okla. Using the redesigned trophy as their inspiration, Old Hat Creative closely observed the intricacies of the sculpture while designing the artwork.

“Old Hat is grateful to USA Softball for the challenge of creating a logo for the prestigious Player of the Year award,” said Robert Smith, Chief Operating Officer and Director of Client Relations for Old Hat Creative. “We realize this is a great honor to those that receive the award, and our goal was to create a timeless logo that was representative of that honor.”

The USA Softball Collegiate Player of the Year award, which is considered the most prestigious honor in Division I women’s collegiate softball, recognizes the outstanding athletic achievement by Division I female players across the country.

Above (right): Lisa Fernandez (middle) with MTM Recognition representative and sculptor
The Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team (WWAST) participated in four events over the past 30 days. On April 28-30, the WWAST headed to Chester, S.C. for a doubleheader hosted by the Progressive Association of Chester County Communities on April 28-30. This was a first-ever event in that community. On Friday night, there was a large banquet to welcome the players to Chester. Several of the WWAST players gave testimonials about their experiences in the military, their injuries, and how the WWAST not only has aided in their recovery, but has helped them to give back in so many ways. The doubleheader on Saturday was well-attended by many fans from the community. The day was capped-off by a dinner that evening. On May 5-7, the WWAST returned to Sacramento, California for a game against Sacramento celebrities at Raley Field, the home of the Sacramento River Cats minor league baseball team. While there, the WWAST conducted a special visit on Saturday to the Shriners Hospitals for Children, Northern CA. After their game on Saturday night, the WWAST got a chance to watch the Sacramento River Cats game against the Reno Aces. The WWAST traveled to Long Island and Queens, New York the weekend of May 19-21. This was the fourth trip back to this community. On Friday, May 19, WWAST players spoke at Sycamore Ave Elementary school on Long Island and inspired the students. That evening, the team had a tailgate BBQ hosted by Winters Brothers where the team got a chance to meet with many of their fans. On Saturday, May 20, the WWAST played a game against the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) in the heart of Queens, New York. On Sunday, May 21, the team was back on Long Island for a game against a Long Island All-Star Team. The final event for May took the WWAST to the communities of Cooperstown and Oneonta, N.Y. May 26-28. On Friday, May 26, the team attended a welcome reception and fish fry at Council Rock Brewery. On Saturday, the team played in Oneonta against their Police and Fire Departments followed by an inspiring evening at the American Legion in Oneonta where the team met with local Veterans and exchanged stories. On Sunday, the team played a doubleheader against the Cooperstown Fire Department in the first game and against the Event Sponsors in the second game at Historic Doubleday Field. Following the game, the team visited the Baseball Hall of Fame. The WWAST would like to thank everyone - the event organizers, sponsors, and fans who made these events such a great success.

...CONTINUED ON PAGE 25
USA Softball recently announced the USA Softball Men’s Fast Pitch Invitational Tournament which will once again be held June 9-11 in Ashland, Ohio. For the second year in a row, USA Softball will be providing an opportunity for Men’s Fast Pitch players to be evaluated by the USA Softball Men’s National Team Selection Committee (MNTSC) and USA Softball Men’s National Team (MNT) coaching staff in hopes of making it into an elite identified athlete pool.

“I would like to personally welcome all players, teams, and sponsors to participate in the second annual USA Softball Men’s Fast Pitch Invitational Tournament,” said MNT Head Coach, Denny Bruckert. “Last year’s tournament was a huge success as several athletes were identified and placed in the player pool to be considered for the final USA Softball Men’s National Team Selection Camp. This camp could be held in late 2018 or early 2019 for the next cycle for the 2019 World Baseball Softball Confederation and 2019 Pan American team. As a Coaching Staff and Selection Committee, we need to develop these players and continue to watch them throughout the 2018 season in the major tournaments and finally in the USA Softball Men’s Major and ISC World. If you feel you have ambition of playing for the USA Men’s National Team, this is your best option to be seen by the committee and the coaching staff.”

The weekend tournament officially starts Friday, June 9 with a technical meeting, where managers and sponsors will meet at the local Elks Club to decide the format of the tournament. Team representatives will be given time to provide their input and preferences for the weekend. However, all teams should prepare and be ready to take the field the morning of June 10 with the expected championship games to start Sunday afternoon. Games will be held at Brookside Park, 123 Parkside Dr. in Ashland, Ohio.

“We want to get back on that medal stand and it’s our job as a coaching staff to develop our players,” Bruckert added. “Nobody wants to see softball in the United States take a backseat to anybody. Currently sitting at No. 6 in the WBSC World Rankings, we hope to improve and move up by the performance we put on this season and in the future.”

“We look forward to hosting the tournament for the second year in row and watching the incredible talent of Men’s Fast Pitch teams from across the country,” said USA Softball President and USA Softball of Ohio Commissioner Warren Jones. “This tournament continues to bring in the best in the country, and will help build the future of USA Softball men’s fast pitch.” If teams or individual players wish to participate, they can visit the tournament website at TournamentUSASoftball.com.
Your team keeps score, we’ll do the math.

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A letter from USA Softball Marketing Coordinator, Nick Dorety:

This month, we would like to spotlight USA Softball of Alabama & their grassroots marketing efforts. Commissioner Natalie Norman called me about a week out from the Auburn at Alabama softball series & mentioned that she had secured a booth space for the Top 15 showdown of the in-state rivals. Natalie and I worked together to figure out what we could do within her space & what we wanted to highlight. This was the perfect opportunity for her to promote the upcoming Team USA tour stop to both campuses, Auburn and Alabama, and USA Softball of Alabama as a whole.

How did this grassroots event come about? Natalie has worked with Alabama's Director of Softball Operations in the past at previous events in Montgomery. After a Team USA tour stop in Alabama was secured, Natalie was at a site visit for the Team USA tour stop and simply asked if she could set up a booth for free during the Auburn at Alabama series. Sometimes just asking is the key to a potentially great grassroots event.

Her setup included several USA Softball feather flags to catch the attention of fans, posters for the upcoming Team USA tour stops & plenty of giveaways. All of those giveaways (sunglasses, koozies and adhesive cell phone wallets) were all branded USA Softball. The consistency of branding across the booth space left no doubt to fans that USA Softball of Alabama was in the house. A great tip to make your booth interactive is to fill a jar with candy and have fans guess how many pieces are inside. Make sure to have a signup sheet with their name, phone number and email. The winner received a Team USA jersey & was announced on the USA Softball of Alabama website. The athletics staff at the University of Alabama also set up a PA announcement about the booth space and the upcoming Team USA tour stops in Alabama. They also put the USA Softball logo on the videoboard.

Great job to Natalie & USA Softball of Alabama on a VERY successful grassroots marketing event! This is a reminder that your association can promote this way as well. Your message and goals may be unique, however grassroots marketing is very important for building and connecting with your audience.
“Our association has the privilege and the unique opportunity to promote the sport of softball, grassroots and large scale. We recently had the chance to set up a promotional area for USA Softball of Alabama at the Auburn-Alabama series in Tuscaloosa. Outside of the total coolness of being there, I must thank the National Office and Nick Dorety in helping us with promotional items. The ordering procedure was super easy, products were cost effective and high quality, delivery was efficient, and having those items helped us tremendously in achieving the goal of high visibility. The event was awe-some! We got to mingle with softball fans all day, and the promotional items and games were a hit! That was not our first time and will not be the last! There were 4,000+ in attendance that Sunday, all softball players and fans, all day, every day…….what a target audience!! We were certainly grateful to the University of Alabama softball for allowing us to be there to promote and represent USA Softball, USA Softball of Alabama, and the coming of TEAM USA! Having a Parks and Recreation philosophy and knowing how people, both youth and adult, choose to spend their valuable leisure time, it’s thrilling when they choose to spend that time involved in the sport of softball. Our association can make an impact on that choice, through grassroots promotion, and that’s where we want to be seen!” - USA Softball of Alabama Commissioner, Natalie Norman
TIPS ON MARKETING YOUR LOCAL ASSOCIATION:

1. Choose your events wisely. Find a family friendly event. Pick something where it won’t overwhelm your booth. Many of these events are free or do not cost a lot. Brainstorm with people of all ages to find out about different festivals, etc...

2. Make it interactive. Fill a jar up with candy and have people guess how many pieces are inside. Have a jar with business cards and the winner gets a prize. If space allows, have an activity for kids. It could be hitting softballs off tees, soft toss for older kids, or even a simple bag toss. This interaction allows for free flowing conversation that doesn’t seemed like a forced sales pitch. It’s as simple as “Wow, your kid was great at pitching! Have you ever thought about joining a USA Softball league?”

3. Be creative in your setup. Purchase several USA Softball feather flags, A-frames and stickers. You can purchase these marketing items from USA Softball by contacting Nick Dorety at ndorety@usasoftball.com. Check out the great marketing items on page 29 of this issue of The Inside Pitch.

4. Be generous with your giveaways. Whether they are koozies, chapsticks or sunglasses, people always love and appreciate those fun and free items! We’ve made it easy for you to be stocked with USA gear at your booth. Contact Nick Dorety at ndorety@usasoftball.com to purchase any giveaway item.

5. Ask your staff, friends and family to come out to help with your booth. The more excitement and help you have at your booth, the more welcoming it will appear.
Let our team help you to insure your teams!

Three easy ways to insure softball:

- Visit USASoftball.com to contact your Commissioner
- Contact RPS Bollinger’s USA Softball Department
- Visit RPSBollinger.com, and select USA Softball, under Specialty Programs

To learn more contact:
RPS Bollinger, USA Softball Department
800.446.5311
ASA@RPSins.com
RPSBollinger.com
The WWAST is excited to be hosting our fifth annual Kids Camp in June. The Kids Camp brings in 20 kids between the ages of 8-12 from all over the country who are missing a limb to be mentored by WWAST players for a week. The WWAST pays all expenses for the child and a parent, including travel, meals and lodging. Our 2017 Kids Camp will take place on the campus of George Mason University from June 12-18 and will take in the sights and attractions of our Nation’s Capital in Washington DC. The week will begin with a Kids Camp fundraiser on June 11 in Fairfax Station, Va. If you are interested in attending this event and donating, please reach out to our Executive Director, Dennis Wince, for details at dennis@thewwast.org. The Kids Camp kicks-off on Monday, June 12 with a welcome dinner hosted by the American Legion Post 177 in Fairfax, Va. The softball camp takes place on Tuesday through Friday in the mornings with fun and exciting activities planned in the afternoons and evenings. The “big games” take place on Saturday starting at 5:00 PM starting with the Kids Game. The second game will feature the WWAST against a team of local celebrities. The event is free and WWAST looks forward to packing the stands!

The WWAST recently opened up the 2018 schedule. If your community is interested in hosting the WWAST for an event in 2018, please contact WWAST Executive Director, Dennis Wince, for details by emailing dennis@thewwast.org.
USA SOFTBALL ALL-AMERICAN GAMES TO BE HELD AUG. 18-20, 2017 AT HOF COMPLEX

Held at the “Softball Capital of the World”® in Oklahoma City, Okla., the USA Softball All-American Games provide national exposure to elite athletes in the 12-under Junior Olympic (JO) fast pitch division and will highlight the top competitors from across the country.

“The USA Softball JO Commissioners are very excited to host an event that showcases 360 of the best 12-under players from around the country,” said USA Softball of Southern California JO Commissioner Kristi Allen. “We are excited to give these athletes the opportunity to play at the USA Softball Hall of Fame Complex representing USA Softball.” With teams selected from the 10 USA Softball Regions, a total of 24 teams from across the U.S. will compete in the USA Softball All-American games. Each region can select up to two teams to represent their region at the USA Softball All-American Games and each team will consist of 15 athletes and two coaches. Athletes must be on a USA Softball registered team for the 2017 season and must be age eligible for the 12-under JO division. Each region is responsible for the selection process for their teams, and players must commit and be registered no later than July 1.

Teams competing in the USA Softball All-American Games will be invited to participate in an exposure camp to highlight their skills. The USA Softball All-American Games will also have an Opening Ceremony, free live streaming and live stats through USASoftball.com and players will be provided with a tournament “swag” bag, which will include their USA Softball All-American jerseys and other official USA Softball and sponsor merchandise. Thanks to sponsors, Beast Mode Apparel, Crown Awards, Evoshield, Oklahoma City CVB, Rawlings, SanMar, Scribbners T’s and Softball Factory.
Take advantage of partner travel discounts.

Fly United

fly the friendly skies™
WATCH AND CONNECT ONLINE!
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WATCH SOFTBALL ALL YEAR LONG!
VISIT THE USA SOFTBALL VIDEO LIBRARY!

FOLLOW ALONG ON SOCIAL TO SEE THE LATEST NEWS AND UPDATES + SHARE PHOTOS AND CONNECT WITH OTHERS AROUND THE COUNTRY!
Vinyl Banners

Item #C1286 - 8’x3’ USA Softball Primary & USA Softball Secondary Stacked, blue background: $65
Item #C1286 - 8’x3’ USA Softball Primary & USA Softball Secondary Stacked, white background: $65
Item #C1288 - 6’x3’ USA Softball Primary & USA Softball Secondary Stacked, white background: $55

Feather Flags

CONTACT NICK DORETY AT ndorety@usasoftball.com >>
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