

Week of Monday, June 2, 2025

The Henderson County Senior Softball Association had three teams in action this past week and, for once, the weatherman was cooperative enough to allow all of them to be played. The Henderson County 68+ Sluggers coached by Stan Steinberg and sponsored this week by **Carolina Blinds** opened play on Monday, June 2nd, hosting the Franklin Old Bones in Clayton League play. In game one, the Sluggers had a team batting average of 0.694 and rode the strong right arm of Don Ward to a 22-14 victory over the Old Bones. Four Sluggers led the way offensively with perfect games at the plate: Scott Searle (3-3 with a walk), Jerry Austin (3-3 with a double, home run, and walk), Joe Fishleigh (2-2 with a home run and walk), and Gary Ayers (3-3). Five other Sluggers were near perfect making only one out each: Don Ward (3-4), Jim Zitney (1-2 with two walks), Tim Epley (2-3), Gary Warren (2-3 with two doubles), and David Keith (2-3 with a triple). In game two, the Sluggers had a team batting average of 0.762 as they eased to a 25-8 victory over Franklin. Don Ward started the game on the mound and closed it there with David Keith pitching all the intervening innings. Five Sluggers led the offensive onslaught with perfect outings in game two: Gary Ayers (3-3 making it a perfect day at the plate), Don Ward (4-4 with a double and home run), Stan Steinberg (4-4), Tim Epley (4-4 with a double and home run), and Jerry Austin (4-4 with a double and triple making him perfect for the day). With the pair of wins Henderson County ran their record to 8-0 in the Clayton League, and they maintain their one-game lead over Rabun County at the top of the standings. Through the first eight games, Henderson County has scored 20 or more runs in each game, and they have never batted in the seventh inning, as they have had four flip-flop wins four times and been the home team four times.

On Wednesday, June 4th, the Henderson County mixed 70+ Sluggers, coached by Andy Hinds and sponsored by **Skyland Barber Shop**, traveled to Marion, NC, to face the High Country squad from Boone, NC. Although the mixed 70+ Sluggers have historically done well against High Country, that was not the case on this day.

In game one, High Country picked up the win by 15-9 as the Sluggers had a team batting average of only 0.455. None of the Sluggers achieved perfection, but five players came close: Bud Bonnema (3-4 with a double), Danny Davis (3-4), Michael Elmaleh (2-3), Wayne Hallgren (2-3), and Lewie Bergman (two doubles).

Did not receive any details on who pitched in either game, so there is no report on that. In game two, the mixed 70+ Sluggers upped their team batting average to 0.510, but they still fell to High Country 21-20 in a close game. Three Sluggers were near perfect in the second game: Cliff Coggins (4-5 with a home run), Jim Ready (4-4 with a triple) and Michael

Elmaleh (3-4). In addition, Danny Davis clouted a home run. With the pair of losses, the mixed 70+ Sluggers have a record of 5-3 for the year.

While the mixed 70+ Sluggers were playing in McDowell County, John Musser led the mixed 60+ Sluggers sponsored by **Kiefer Family Chiropractic** to neighboring Burke County to face the bombers from Ashe County. Since John is a poster boy for Senior ball players and budding scribes, I will relate his entertaining description of the contests in his own words as follows. There was much exhilaration in the anticipated match between Ashe County, rumored to be a great competitor, and us Sluggers, who know ourselves to have created a name that is greatly feared and respected. Finally, the question was answered! Having visited a territory unfamiliar to the Sluggers yet known by our opponent seemed to have given them a comfortability and familiarity pseudo-home field advantage. After both coaches went over the rules, it was determined that the Sluggers would be the visitors in the first game and home team in the second match. The first game started trading blow for blow as Henderson County scored four and one run in their respective first two innings while Ashe County took the lead putting up five and two runs in their two at-bats. The next two innings produced similar results with Henderson County scoring three and five runs while Ashe County put up five and two runs again in a tight match, leaving the game 13-12 after four innings in Henderson County's favor. (Editor's Note: My math has the score at this point 14-13 in favor of Ashe County, but we will proceed.) The mixed Sluggers brought out the big guns, putting up four apiece in the next two innings while holding Ashe County to six runs. The difference maker was in the all-you-can-eat (ace) seventh inning as the Sluggers put up six runs. Knowing the daunting task ahead of them, Henderson County made it a point to stand up defensively to secure the victory. They did so quite well, only allowing Ashe County to see five batters step up to the plate while not allowing any of them to cross that same plate, ending with a mixed 60+ Sluggers 27-20 victory. A cute little kudo should go to the mixed Sluggers coach (Editor's Note: Drum roll, please - John Musser). Ashe County had several strong hitters. Three of their batters hit balls over the fence. There came a point where a coach's decision had to be made. One of their power hitters was next up to bat with two runners on base. The Coach (wise beyond his years) gave the order to put the Ashe County bomber on first with an intentional walk. Eyebrows were raised because the next batter was also a power hitter. However, the call proved to be a stroke of genius as the batter lined out to Stan Steinberg to close out the game. Dwight Moore was the winning pitcher. Game one saw a third of the Slugger roster having a perfect game at the plate: John Musser (3-3 with two walks), Kevin Doyle (4-4 with a triple and home run), Steve Strusowski (5-5 with three doubles), and the old savvy veteran Bob Drew (3-3 with a double). Tom Wellbourn also left his mark, going 4-5 with a home run. On to game two, as with a little more calm and a lot more answers, the mixed Sluggers took the field as the temperatures

continued to climb. Maybe it was the escalating heat weighing on the Sluggers, but whatever the reason, Ashe County put up nine runs in their first two innings. Things looked promising as the Sluggers scored four in their first at-bat, but they were shut out in the second inning. Spirits were lifted after Ashe could only score two runs in the third, but alas, they hit the maximum of five in the fourth inning. Henderson County equaled the Ashe output by scoring seven runs in their two at-bats. Down 21-19 entering the seventh inning, Henderson County held their opponent to only two runs in the final inning. Tasked with needing to score five runs in their at bat to pull out the win, the Sluggers had two outs and two on base after plating two runs as the ball was struck high and deep to right field. A concerted sigh was heard from every Slugger as the ball was caught, and the game ended with the mixed 60+ Sluggers taking their first defeat of the season, having lost the game 23-21. Irony is a cruel jester. Apparently Ashe County took notes on how the Sluggers won the first game by intentionally walking any perceived threat. They double-dipped, though, having walked two batters during the last inning. The first intentional walk surrendered two runs (SUCK IT Ashe County). However, the second walk proved to be a game winning call. Dwight Moore suffered the loss on the mound. Though the loss left the mixed 60+ Sluggers grief-stricken, there were many positives to be noted. Perfect plate appearances were achieved by Rob Kennedy (4-4 with two doubles and two triples), John Musser (3-3), Steve Strusowski (4-4 with a double and triple), and the old savvy veteran Bob Drew (3-3 with a double). For those who may have just woken up from reading all this, John Musser and Bob Drew were both 6-6 on the day, while Steve Strusowski was a tantalizing 9-9. Every player contributed in so many ways. Just a couple more shout-outs. Welcome back to Robert Novak, who has been out six weeks with his ankle injury. Also, thanks to Jerry Austin and Bob Drew for making the trek to complete the roster. Lastly, the "Didn't We Almost Have It All" awards for game one go to Tom Wellbourn (4-5), Kirk Hall (4-5), and Robert Novak (3-4). Game two recipients of the same award go to Kevin Doyle (3-4), Stan Steinberg (3-4), and Robert Novak (2-3).

Also, this past week, our league had some players participating in the ISSA Great Smoky Mountains Senior Classic in Knoxville, TN. Sonny Johnston and Mike Warner played for Hollis Appraisal/Ted Todd Insurance, a 70 Major Plus team out of Jacksonville, FL and secured a third-place finish competing against five 65+ Major Gold teams. The Upper East Tennessee 75 AAA team, with Jim Zitney, Gene Reiser, Gary Warren, and Bill Close, captured second place, competing against five other 75 AAA teams.

Next week's schedule has the Henderson County 68+ Sluggers hosting the Upstate SC 68+ team in Clayton League play on Monday, June 9th. Additionally, on Monday, the mixed 60+ Sluggers will participate in the Hickory Games at Stanford Park in Hickory, NC. The mixed 60+ Sluggers will also play on Tuesday, June 10th, as they welcome the Tri-Cities 60+ squad

to Jackson Park. As if they can't get enough playing softball, the mixed 60+ team will hit the road on Wednesday, June 11th, as they travel to Sunset Park in Mauldin, SC, to face the Upstate SC 60+ team. Also, on Wednesday, the mixed 70+ Sluggers will host the Tri-Cities 70+ team at Jackson Park. Meanwhile, I suggest you read "War and Peace," and this report will not seem so long.

The Henderson County Senior Softball Association is always looking for new players age 50 and older (35 and older for ladies). Regular league games are normally played on Monday and Friday mornings at 9:30 on fields 8 and 9 at Jackson Park in Hendersonville. For additional information, call 828-606-8556 or go to Henderson County Senior Softball at <https://hcssoftball.com>.