

## Week of Monday, June 23, 2025

The Henderson County Senior Softball Association had three teams scheduled to play the week of 6/23/25. Unfortunately, the games between the Henderson County mixed 70+ Sluggers and High Country scheduled for Wednesday, June 25th, were cancelled. However, the elements of heat and rain could not stop the show from going on in the other contests. On Monday, June 23rd, the Henderson County 68+ Sluggers coached by Stan Steinberg and sponsored by **Carolina Blinds** made the trek to the Parker Meadows Complex in Franklin, NC to face the Rabun County Relics in a battle for first place in the Clayton League. The bad news for the Sluggers is that they lost their first game of the year. The good news is they won the other two games to hold onto first place and extend their lead over the Relics to two games. Game one started out just like you might expect, as the Relics scored five runs in the first inning without making an out. As you can probably guess, the Sluggers responded with five runs of their own, although they did make an out. Over the next three innings Henderson County began to separate themselves and entered the final inning with a 17-8 lead. Game over, one would think, but as Lee Corso says on College Football Game Day, not so fast, my friend. Rabun County pounded out multiple hits sandwiched around a couple of misplays by the Sluggers to score ten runs and capture the lead 18-17. But the Sluggers roared back in the bottom of the inning with two runs to capture an exciting 19-18 victory. Don Ward took the win on the mound. The Sluggers had a team batting average of 0.765 with five players achieving perfection: Scott Searle (3-3 with two doubles), Sonny Johnston (3-3 with two doubles), Jim Zitney (3-3 with a double and triple), Roger Helm (2-2 with a walk), and Jim Ready (3-3). In addition six Sluggers were one out away from making the perfection list: Bob Drew (2-3), Tim Epley (2-3), Jerry Austin (2-3), Mark Hammer (2-3 with a double), Don Ward (2-3 with a double), and Gene Reiser (1-2 with a double and sacrifice fly).

After taking the first game with the comeback win, the Sluggers led 2-0 after one inning of play in game two, and all seemed right in the world. Then the wheels started to come off as Henderson County did not score in the second or third innings while Rebus was putting up three runs in each inning. The Sluggers did manage to pick up two runs in the fourth but it was too little and too late as the Relics held on for the 7-4 win giving Henderson County their first loss of the year. Don Ward pitched well but suffered his first loss of the season on the mound. As one could surmise from the paltry four run output, the Sluggers posted a season low with a team batting average of 0.440. Sonny Johnston was the only Slugger to achieve perfection in the second game going 2-2 with a pair of doubles. Eight Sluggers were close to perfection but couldn't seem to string a lot of their hits together: Bob Drew (1-2),

Don Ward (1-2), Jerry Austin (1-2), Roger Helm (1-2), Tim Epley (1-2), Jim Zitney (1-2 with a triple), Mark Hammer (1-2 with a double), and Stan Steinberg (1-2 with a double).

The all-important third game would determine whether the teams would be tied for the top spot in the league or whether the Sluggers could add to their lead. The Sluggers scored five runs in the top of the first inning to exceed their output from the entire second game which was a good omen. The Relics could only score three runs in the first two innings. The Sluggers continued to pad their lead, and after Rabun County failed to score in the next two innings, the teams flip-flopped in the final inning. Henderson County again held the Relics scoreless to take an 11-3 win and capture victories in two of the three games. Don Ward got the victory on the mound. Henderson County got back to a more normal team batting average of 0.625 in the final game with four players having perfect plate appearances: Don Ward (2-2), Jim Zitney (2-2), Tim Epley (2-2), and Sonny Johnston (2-2 completing a perfect day at the plate). Seven Slugger batters came close to perfection: Bob Drew (1-2 with a triple), Jerry Austin (1-2 with a double), Mark Hammer (1-2), Roger Helm (1-2), Scott Searle (1-2), Jim Ready (1-2), and Stan Steinberg (1-2 with a double).

And now for the moment you have all been waiting for (drum roll please), John Musser's report on the battle between the Henderson County mixed 60+ Sluggers and Upstate South Carolina that took place on Thursday, June 26th. Buckle up!!

Let's start with a couple of notes prior to the game. Firstly, it's becoming bluish the way Mother Nature lavishes its favor upon the Mixed 60s Sluggers. Prior to our game Wednesday, Tuesday night was assaulted with a deluge. Yet, Mother Nature Made sure it didn't overburden the fields so much we couldn't play. Not only that, but rain/thunderstorms was in the forecast and did not present itself until the game was concluded. Shortly thereafter, Mother Nature unextended her wand and it began to rain thus, proving her favoritism towards the Mixed 60s Sluggers!

Secondly, numerous fans came out to watch what proved to be an early 4th of July firework display! So much so was the crowd that every seat the fans brought was filled!

Enough of the prelude! On to the game. Hendersonville's Mixed 60s Sluggers, coached by John Musser (and sponsored by whoever Gary tells you), accepted the visitation of the Upstate Mojos, who made the trek from across the southern border to play here in the mountains at Jackson Park. As you can imagine, with this game being described as a 4th of July firework display, there were many many outstanding performances backed by slugging power demonstrations throughout the match. Before we get into the stats, let it be said that this game started off incredibly tight for the first three innings. The Sluggers were shut out in the first inning while their opponents, the Mojo's, put up four runs.

This did not come as a surprise to the coach since it had already been leaked that the Upstate Mojos were going to bring a much-improved and heavily stacked squad. And, the score would validate such an attempt on behalf of the Mojos. After three innings, the mixed '60s found themselves in unintimated waters, having fallen behind for the first time in any of their previous matchups. Down by two runs after 3 innings, the Sluggers regained composure and lived up to their moniker.

Spoiler alert! What followed hereafter in the remaining innings of this doubleheader was downright ridiculing. The Sluggers lit the fuse to their packaged fireworks while the Mojo's must have dropped their heavily engineered package of sky illuminaries in their water cooler.

In game 1, the Sluggers were the visitors thusly, only needed three of the remaining four innings forcing one flip short of a flip-flop. Hendersonville wrapped up the remaining three and a half innings putting up 12 runs to the Mojos 1. For those are who are keeping tallys, the final score was a 20 to 11 rout.

It wouldn't have been that close had there not been an unforced error in the outfield. While most of the team was licking their chops to dash any hopes their opponents may have been scheming to regain a competitive statement, John Mix and Steve Strusowski decided to measure testosterone levels ending in a collision with both men on the ground and the ball bouncing off Steve's glove. While the two were comparing test levels on the ground to see who bore most of the aforementioned coveted hormone three Spartanburg runners mercilessly strolled across the plate. As true Sluggers the two were able to get up, brushed the grass off and continue the battle.

A few Sluggers reached perfection at the plate in game 1. Kevin going four for four with two doubles and a home run. Rob Kennedy (dbl, 2 trp), John Mix (3 sgl) and Chris Culberson (2 dbl) all went three for three at the plate. Four others went Maxwell Smart missing it by that much. Shout out to Steve Strusowski, Scott Webster, John Musser and Norm Royo all going two for three. Missing their staple pitcher Dwight Moore, the starting pitcher on the mound was John Musser who got the win.

Having announced a "spoiler alert!" alert you can presume that the second game was also a victory for the Hendersonville Mixed '60s Sluggers. While the heat was hot, it didn't seem to sap the energy from the Sluggers. With John Musser again taking the mound, the Sluggers put up 21 runs in only five innings having decimated the Upstate Mojos, who, in there seven innings, managed to only put up two runs! (Insert SMH here).

It has been rumored that the defensive stand that was displayed was due to the coach's intuition. In that second game there was player personnel movement. The strong and

imposing figure of Mike Elmaleh in right field was so intimidating that the Upstate Mojo's dared not hit a shot in his direction. Likewise, the second game movement placed Peter Fama playing middle infield. It was his attempt to finish a double play throwing to first base that demonstrated his rifle of an arm. Though the attempt of finishing the double play failed with his ball coming up just short and hopping to the first baseman it was enough to send a warning to the Mojo's not to try his area of field again.

While only three Sluggers were perfect at the plate in Game 2 (Steve Strusowski 3/3, 1 HR; John Musser 3/3 1 HR, 1 walk; Scott Webster 2/2, 1 walk) nearly everyone else got the Maxwell Smart award. Bud Bonnema, Kirk Hall, Pete Fama, Rob Kennedy, John Mix, Chris Culberson and Norm Royo all went two for three at the plate with Mike Elmaleh going one for two at the plate and a walk!

Final score in this thrashing was 21 to 2 with Hendersonville only batting five innings while Upstate batted 7 and again John Musser got a W from the mound. Game 1, Hendersonville had a team batting average of .718. In Game 2. their batting average dropped slightly to .714. Thank you everyone who showed up not being intimidated by the Heat! And if you are still reading this, the mixed 60+ Sluggers were sponsored by **WNC Family Medical Center**.