



**Veterans' Association  
of the  
Chicago & North Western  
Railway**



*Organized December 9, 1924*

**The C&NW 16-Inch Softball Team - 1984**



The 1984 Chicago & North Western Softball Team. Back row, from left: Tim O'Brien (rf), Cliff Edington (c), Bud Allen (sc), Roy Kramer (rf), Paul Blazek (3b), Ed Lydiksen (2b), Wally Friese (1b), Jim Hallgren (ss). Front row, from left: Lee Bellman (3b), Bob Madsen (cf), Gary Kolbe (sc), Joe Umana (mgr), Bob Franzen (c), Rich Ginger (lf). Missing from photo are team members Joe Collins (p), Rich Gonzalez (3b), Sylvester Bobo (cf), and David Knight (rf)

**SPORTS - The Chicago Game**

*Chicago is probably the only city in the U.S. that plays its own separate and independent brand of ball - a civic pastime alongside the national pastime. It is 16-inch softball. It's played in park leagues and industrial leagues, on lakefront grass, in vacant lots, and in the few open prairies that are left. Sixteen-inch is a lot like Chicago. Newcomers find the ball almost too big to handle. But the game is a great leveler. Almost anybody can play and get on base. You just have to keep your eye on the ball. Like the city, it's bare-handed, it's a hitter's game, and it's often played well by men in their forties, with thick forearms and large belt sizes. And it punishes hot dogs unmercifully. Swing for the fences and you're likely to fix out or miss the ball completely. Strong men have wrenched their backs on empty air trying to hit that giant orb as it comes*

*floating down over the plate like the moon when it sets. Without further apology or introduction, here is an article on Chicago Softball as performed by the Chicago and North Western team. The team's origins are lost in corporate antiquity. It has for years been sponsored by R.D. Leach, senior vice president - Systems & Materials, and managed by tab machine operator Joe Umana. In 1983, the team won the Welles Park Industrial championship. This year they've done it again. -Ed.*

by Joe Umana

The Chicago & North Western Softball Team went undefeated this season with 10 wins and no losses, setting the Welles Park record for 19 years with 13 first place and six second place finishes. During that time, the North Western team has accumulated 25 team trophies and won the Citywide Industrial League championship two years in a row - 1969 and 1970. The North Western team made the final four in the city six times in those 19 years - the years that I've been coaching. Here's a rundown of some of the C&NW players and some of the games I think are most memorable.

The greatest all-around player I've ever coached was Sy Berman, director SD&I. Sy always gave the team more confidence just by being in the lineup.

Jerry Steigerwald, senior systems analyst, won the Golden Glove award almost every year, along with Bud Allen and Ted Lambrakis. Jerry was a great defensive infielder.

Traveling auditor Bud Allen won the batting title this year. He is a master on defense. In one game this year he drove in the winning run against Appleton Electric to keep the C&NW team undefeated. Walter Friese, supervisor interline received divisions, is one of the three players with the most seniority on the team, along with Bud Allen and me. Wally has played first base for at least 20 years and has made some great defensive plays. This year in a game with Commonwealth Edison he hit a tremendous home run over the leftfielder's head to put the game out of reach and clinch a tie for the second round of the Welles Park Industrial League.

Jim Hallgren, another C&NW traveling auditor, is the team's lead-off hitter and one of the best shortstops in the Industrial Leagues. He led the team in hitting at least three times. He is a great athlete and always gives a hundred percent.

Paul Blazek, miscellaneous collections, is one of the C&NW's great clutch hitters. In a game with senior vice president R.W. Russell's team, it looked as if the original C&NW softball team would lose to the new C&NW team. The score was 2 to 1 in the last of the seventh inning, when Paul Blazek hit a line single to left field, giving life to the team. The next batter was Sy Berman, who hit a grounder, forcing Paul out at second base. With two outs, I came up to bat and managed to hit a drive over third base. Berman scored, sliding under the tag at home plate while I went to third. The score was tied. The next batter was Gary Ogurek, who lined a shot to left center, scoring me with what turned out to be the winning run from third - one of the most exciting games I can remember.

The name of Cliff Edington, computer operator, brings to mind another game in which he almost single handedly beat Mars Candy Company by hitting two home runs and a single and driving in six runs.

Rich Ginger, head clerk advance & prepaid, is one of the best base runners on the team and one of the finest outfielders in the Industrial Leagues. He has won many games with his enthusiasm, his speed, and his great catches.

Supervisory accountant Ed Lydiksen broke into the lineup when the C&NW team was playing in the first round of the Chase Park Industrial League in 1973. The score was tied - C&NW 4, Peerless 4. Lydiksen came up with two men on and belted a homer over the right fielder's head to put C&NW ahead by three runs, and that's how it ended. Eddie has power and can hit to all fields.

Gary Kolbe, general manager - grain marketing, started at shortstop and was moved to short center. He has the quickest hands in the infield and is the classiest fielder. In one season, he managed to catch or assist in the last out in six of our 16 games.

Tim O'Brien, assistant manager credit & collections, is a team player and plays as hard as anyone. It is very difficult to leave him out of the lineup. He is a great defensive catcher and also has great speed in the outfield.

Bob Franzen, rate clerk, is a left fielder with a strong and accurate arm. Because of his small frame, the other teams usually play him shallow. That's where he has the edge; he can hit a ball with power and has the swing of a Henry Aaron. Bob has always led the team in home runs. In the second round of the Welles Park playoffs, Bob hit a three-run homer against Commonwealth Edison that went to right-center like a shot out of a cannon. Bob is also the team's top relief pitcher.

Bob Madsen, director labor relations administration, is one of the top hitters on the team with good power to all fields. He is great under pressure. When C&NW was playing Martin Auto in the Hamlin Park playoff. Bob hit two home runs and drove in five runs to win that playoff game for C&NW.

Roy Kramer, cashier supervisor, was our rookie of the year in 1983. Playing center field and right field, he has made some diving catches to save games. He hit a three-run homer over the right center-field fence at Thillens Stadium to spark the C&NW to a 12 to 1 victory in the City-wide Industrial Tournament.

Sylvester Bobo, RTA construction auditor, has great speed, comparable with Sy Berman, Rich Ginger, Roy Kramer, and Tim O'Brien. He also has a strong arm and can hit to all fields. He was one of the reasons why the C&NW went to the final four in the city in 1973.

Lee Bellman, head clerk, Chicago Zone office, has played at least five different positions on the C&NW team and is one of its most valuable players. During the 1974 season, I recall, he almost single-handedly put the C&NW in the final four in the Grant Park City Industrial Tournament. He played third base and was spectacular on defense and hit very well.

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*When this article was submitted for publication, it lacked an appraisal of one current member of the C&NW softball team - player-manager Joe Umana. Sy Berman filled the gap for us: "Without Joe's continued dedication and enthusiasm, the team would not have existed or been as successful for as long it has. Besides his managerial duties, Joe was a terrific left fielder for many years and is now an excellent pitcher. And he has always been and continues to be one of the best hitters on the team." -Ed. (From the November/December 1984 issue of the Chicago & North Western News.)*

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