

2001 SAE World Series

South Florida Alums win Tournament Championship

By Dennis Kitchens (FLEP '81)

As the highly successful 145th Anniversary of the SAE National Convention was nearing its conclusion, the 16th annual SAE World Series Softball Tournament was about to begin. On Friday, June 22nd and Saturday, June 23rd, teams of SAE's from all over this great nation made the trek to beautiful Orlando, Florida to compete in this year's tournament. Before I go on, I would like to extend a special word of thanks to Geary Mason (LAEP '84) for graciously allowing us to host this year's tournament. Geary has done an outstanding job in heading up this tournament for the first 15 years of its existence and we are truly grateful to him for this privilege. I would also like to thank the members of our own committee, without whose tireless efforts I would never have been able to see this undertaking to fruition. The committee members to be recognized are: Virgil Rook (FLBE '93), Brian Teagle (FLBE '92), Jamie Cable (FLBE '92), Pat Morris (FLBE '94), John Kelley (FLEP '77), and Mark Peters (FLEP '89). Mark Peters also assisted me with my on-field duties. Special thanks go out to all of you for making this truly a team effort. By the way, Mark was also instrumental in helping the beer vendor run out of beer!

The tournament was held at the Osceola County Softball Complex in Kissimmee, Florida, just minutes from Walt Disney World, Universal Studios, and the rest of the attractions. I've been playing ASA softball in the Orlando area for the last 25 years and I have never before seen fields in such top-notch condition. This facility had everything the participants could possibly want: 5 fields (300 foot fences to all fields) in a cloverleaf design surrounding a 3 story state-of-the-art clubhouse featuring a 360 degree view from the scorer's loft, professional umpires, electronic scoreboards, public address systems, phones from each field to scorer's loft, covered dugouts with water fountains, and, which proved to be the most important feature of all, the best drainage system of any fields in the Central Florida area. This feature was really put to the test on Saturday. As the first round of games were being played, the sunny skies of Orlando opened up, dropping such an enormous amount of precipitation on the fields that play had to be halted. Such is the danger of playing softball in Orlando during the month of June! Had it not been for the drainage abilities of these fields, we would not have been able to complete this tournament on time. Kudos to the Osceola County Softball Complex and their fine staff of groundskeepers!

Due to some last minute cancellations, we ended up with ten teams in the tournament, so we were forced to change the format a bit. It was still double elimination but each team, regardless of won-loss record, would be guaranteed of playing at least 3 games. There was a high level of competition and quite a lot of talent on many of the teams participating. Although there were a few blow-outs, there were also some very close, hard fought games such as Province Omega's (Michigan) back to back 1 run victories, 16-15 over hard hitting S.W. Texas State and 17-16 over the University of South Florida actives. The USF Alums took on the Florida State Alums in a battle which saw the USF Alums emerge victorious, 12-10.

In the final round of games, Province Omega took on the USF Alums in a game that saw the teams combine for 39 runs in 4 innings (there were so many runs scored, the game was ended by the time limit rule). The USF Alums won it by the score of 23-16 to remain undefeated and clinch a spot in the title game. The FSU Alums, already 2-1, were set to take on the USF actives and keep alive their hopes for a shot at the title. As I watched this game, it seemed to me as though the FSU Alums were completely out of gas. They were down 4-0 going to the bottom half of the sixth inning, leaving them 6 outs from elimination, when John Crist, the eventual Tournament MVP, blasted a three run home run over the left center field fence and suddenly the FSU Alum bench came to life. This proved to be the turning point for this team. Seemingly inspired by his teammate's heroics, left-handed batting Brian Teagle followed with a blast of his own over the right field fence to knot the score at 4. Momentum had switched dugouts! The USF actives went three up, three down in their half of the 7th, setting up what could be the best comeback victory of the tourney. Rick Johnston doubled leading off the bottom of the 7th and it appeared the FSU Alums were on their way. After an intentional walk to Pat Morris to set up the double play, Rick Golden lined out hard to short. With one out, Ron Draa lined a base hit scoring Rick Johnston with the winning run, eliminating the USF actives and keeping the FSU Alums hopes for a championship still alive!

As the USF Alums waited to see whom their opponent in the championship game would be, the FSU Alums faced yet another tough challenge in the Province Omega. Seeing these two teams compete, I had a feeling that this game would go right down to the wire. I couldn't have been more wrong. In the top of the fourth, the newly energized FSU Alums, already up 4-0, sent 18 batters to the plate. First baseman Brian Teagle had 2 singles in the inning and for the second straight game, shortstop John Crist belted yet another 3 run home run. The FSU Alums scored 13 times and never looked back, winning the game 17-2.

The FSU Alums would bat first in the championship game and quickly proceeded to put the pressure on the USF Alums by scoring 5 times in their half of the first. The USF Alums, having scored 52 runs in their previous 3 games, had 15 of their first 16 batters reach base safely in the bottom of the first and scored 13 runs to take a 13-5 lead after only one inning! The FSU Alums, refusing to quit, scored 4 times in the top of the second to trim the lead to 13-9, but when the USF Alums hung 5 more runs on them in the bottom of the second to take an 18-9 lead, it seemed to extract some of the energy and momentum that had gotten them to where they were. The USF Alums then went on to post a 20-10 victory, a perfect 4-0 record, and the championship of the 2001 World Series Softball Tournament.

Congratulations not only to our champions, but also to the rest of our award winners: 2nd Place (FSU Alums). 3rd Place, "Best Dressed", and "Farthest Distance Traveled" (Province Omega). The Home Run Derby Champion was Adrian Castelleja of S.W. Texas State, who took home a new Worth bat for his efforts. The tournament MVP was John Crist of the FSU Alums, whose heroics sparked his team to their eventual second place finish. Last, definitely not least, and the one I'm most proud to announce, the Most Improved Team award goes to my brothers at the University of Central Florida. The UCF team, tying the FSU Alums for most games played in the tournament with 6, finished with a 4-2 record, scoring 53 runs in their 4 victories and losing only to the eventual champions and 2nd place team along the way. I may sound a little biased but that's only because I am! Phi Alpha brothers!

In closing, I'd like to say that it was an honor to have been associated with this tournament and my distinct pleasure to have met all the SAE's that made the journey to play in this tournament. I would also like to personally thank each and every one of you for helping us make this year's tournament a complete success. The friendship, togetherness, and brotherhood that were displayed throughout the week truly symbolize what our great fraternity stands for and I'm very proud to be a part of it.

Footnote: *The 2002 World Series will be back in New Orleans. Any team that was unable to attend this year owes it to themselves to be a part of next year's tournament. If interested, please contact Geary Mason at (504) 282-8757, (800) 937-0266, or P.O. Box 2683, New Orleans, LA 70176 to be put on the mailing list.*

Photo: *Insert the UCF Team photo with the following caption: Most Improved Team, the University of Central Florida.*

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1st—University of South Florida Alums

2nd—Florida State Alums

3rd—Province Omega

Special Awards:

Best Dressed—Province Omega

Most Improved—UCF University of Central Florida

Farthest Distance Traveled—Province Omega

Last Place—Troy State

HR Derby—Adrian Castalleja—SW Texas State

Journey MVP: John Crist, Florida State Alums