

by Geary Mason, featured writer

BENEATH THE LOUISIANA SUNSHINE, ON THE FIRST

weekend of June, 13 of the best all-ΣAE softball teams in the nation convened in New Orleans for the 22nd annual ΣAE World Series softball tournament. The New Orleans Alumni Association has hosted this fun event since 1986, bringing together chapters from all over the country. The tournament uses a double-elimination format and began on Friday night under the stars. In the event's first games, the New Orleans Alumni Association sponsored two teams that won their first games and surprised the fans. The Rejects, recipients of the 2006 event's "Last Place Award," edged the LSU chapter 2-1 in a defensive struggle. Across the softball complex, the Legion of Doom, which boasts an overall record of 1-40 over the past 20 years, defeated the Tulane Alums 6-2 to claim its second overall victory. Later that night, age caught up with them as both local teams of 40-something-year-olds would lose their games in an ugly fashion. The Rejects would lose to eventual champion South Florida Alums 28-1, and the Legion of Doom was doomed from the start in a 22-1 loss to the Troy University Alums.

In other action, a spirited active chapter of Cajuns from Nicholls State in Thibodaux, Louisiana, upset tournament powerhouse Southwest Texas Alums 5-4. But the B team from Nicholls State could not keep up with their first string team, as it would lose their opener 22-1 to the Christian Brothers Alums. It was hard not to notice the Nicholls State chapter as it brought nearly 100 fans to cheer on both teams. This unbridled enthusiasm would earn players the event's Spirit Award for the third consecutive year.

Later in the evening, the Rejects would stay alive with a 12-10 victory over the Tulane Alums in a game full of solid hitting. The Southwest Texas Alums took out their frustrations from their opening-game defeat on the Nicholls State B team running up the score in a 20-1 victory in an elimination game. This Nicholls State B team's second loss would earn them the tournament's "Last Place Award" for losing by a combined score of 42-2 in two games.

Saturday-morning play resumed as the South Florida Alums defeated the Christian Brothers Alums 14-9. The South Florida Alums have been competing in the World Series since they were actives and have come for 16 years in a row led by captain Steve Birk, who always sees his team to contend for the title. The Nicholls State A team arrived an hour and a half before the 10 a.m. game to warm up and then proceeded to upset the second-seeded team from Troy University 10-3 to advance again. In the consolation bracket, the Southwest Texas Alums kept their title hopes alive with three consecutive strong victories

over LSU, 8-1; the Christian Brothers Alums, 14-2; and the Troy University Alums, 12-2. With the bleachers overflowing with Nicholls State fans, the Nicholls State actives squared off against the defending champion South Florida Alums for a berth in the championship game. Birk's South Florida Alums could not take the hostile crowd as the Nicholls State A team cruised to a 12-4 victory to keep its Cinderella story alive. Birk's team has experienced the consolation bracket before and bounced back by beating the Southwest Texas Alums 13-10 in a game full of home runs.

The tournament's double-elimination format would require Birk's team of 30- to 40-year-olds to beat Nicholls State A twice to retain the title, and the players' ages were catching up to them. In the championship game, the South Florida Alums jumped to a 15-6 lead after three innings on big hits and home runs by Terry Lopez and Niri Tijerino. The youngsters from Nicholls State then sparked a four-run rally by Blake Knocken and closed the score to 16-10. Both teams then played solid defense, and the South Florida Alums held on to win 16-11 and force another game for the title.

After a 15-minute rest, both weary teams squared off again as the strong Nicholls State crowd encouraged their boys to win their first potential World Series title. Nicholls State A jumped out to an early 4-0 lead on Zack Koster's RBI, which ignited the team. Both teams played solid defense as the Nicholls State A team held the 4-0 lead into the fourth inning. In the top of the fourth inning with the bases loaded, Niri Tijerino hit a line drive that brought in three runs for the South Florida Alums. The spark ignited as Ed Baker, Tim Valdez and Birk all had crucial hits that piled up 11 runs and silenced the Nicholls State crowd. Two innings later, the South Florida Alums held all the momentum as well as a commanding 16-4 lead. The Nicholls State A team had its backs against the wall in the seventh and final inning and would add six runs while South Florida Alums replaced two pitchers. The heroic comeback would fall short as the South Florida Alums held on to win 16-10 and win their eighth ΣAE World Series tournament.

Later that evening, all teams and spectators ventured to the historic New Orleans French Quarter to a post-tournament celebration on a Bourbon Street balcony to distribute trophies, eat Cajun food and celebrate brotherhood. Tijerino's heroics earned him the MVP award, and Birk accepted his eighth first-place trophy. For more information or to participate next year, visit www.saeworldseries.com. The ΣAE World Series is open to any collegiate or alumni group.