



Join the Spirit of Competition: The Σ AE World Series

by Geary Mason, featured writer



WE'VE ALL PLAYED A SOFTBALL GAME HERE OR THERE, whether in a competitive league or in a small pick-up game. For the best of the best when it comes to Sigma Alpha Epsilon members and underhand pitching, though, you need to turn to the Σ AE World Series.

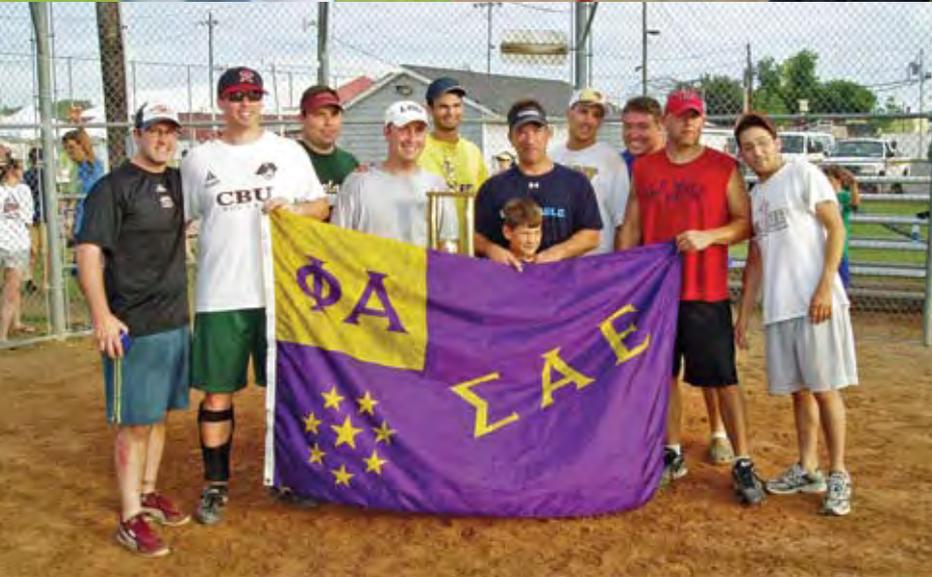
For the 23rd consecutive year, in the heat of June, the best Σ AE active and alumni teams congregated in New Orleans to play a double-elimination softball tournament. Play started the evening of June 13, 2008, with 15 teams all competing to become Eminent Supreme Champions. The defending-champion South Florida Alumni team was so talent-heavy that its managers split the squad into two teams for the 2008 event. Steve Birk (South Florida '92) and his original South Florida team, one that has been playing in the event for nearly 20 years, kept the 35-year-and-older alums, while a new South Florida Young Alums team was built on a core group of twentysomethings. And those young alums made a strong statement as they demolished the Nicholls State B team 33-1 in their opener. They then defeated the hometown Tulane Alumni squad 45-3 in a game that was worse than the score indicated.

South Florida also fielded an active-chapter team and defeated Louisiana Tech 22-4 in its first game. Meanwhile, the old boys on the Christian Brothers Alums team destroyed Louisiana-Lafayette 28-5 and then upset the defending champs from South Florida 9-4 on multiple home runs by outfielder John Shaw (Christian Brothers).

The always strong Southwest Texas Alums team cruised to an easy 15-0 opening-game victory over a weak Nicholls State Alumni team. In the consolation rounds, LSU stayed alive by beating the New Orleans alumni team called the Legion of Doom 7-5 in a game that was won by a grand slam in the bottom of the last inning.

On Saturday morning, play resumed in the consolation round. The Nicholls State B team won their first game in three years by edging the Rejects 6-5. Summer showers attacked the tournament, but softball play continued in the rain as the fields got sloppy. In the winner's bracket, the hot South Florida Young Alums team met their match as they fell 11-2 to the Christian Brothers Alums to advance to within a game of the finals. In the other bracket, the Nicholls State A team, which placed second last year, defeated Tulane 6-0 and then beat a strong Southwest Texas Alums team 28-4 on the powerful hitting of Blake Naquin (Nicholls State '08) and current undergrad Jesse Gautreaux (Nicholls State).

After the rain stopped, the tournament's only two undefeated teams, the Christian Brothers Alums and the talent-laden Nicholls State A team, would meet with a finals berth at stake. The young guns from Nicholls hit everything thrown at them, winning 32-7. The Christian Brothers Alums got sent to the consolation round to a rematch against the strong South Florida Young Alums team, and the old boys were able to shake off their ugly



Photos by James Irwin

OPPOSITE PAGE The Nicholls State championship team celebrates. **ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Warmups were an important part of the pre-game ritual. / Good pitching made the difference between wins and losses. / The eventual champions get pumped up. / The World Series pitted brothers of all ages against one another.

loss and take a 13-11 hard-fought victory. With the win, Christian Brothers was back in the finals, but it would now have to defeat Nicholls twice to win the tournament.

In the championship game, the Christian Brothers Alums turned up the heat and jumped out to an 8-3 lead after three innings over the Nicholls State A team. They added four runs in the fifth inning and then added one run in the final inning to win 13-4, forcing another game because of the double-elimination format.

After a 15-minute break, both teams took the field to play the last game for first place. Current undergraduate Ryan Pitre (Nicholls State) hit a three-run homer to put Nicholls State A ahead 3-0 in the first inning. Nicholls added two more runs in the second but broke out in the third inning with home runs by Zack Koster (Nicholls State '08) and Pitre, giving the men a commanding 13-0 lead. The Christian Brothers Alums couldn't find the gaps, and the score ran to 19-0 after five innings. The Christian Brothers Alums managed a solo home run in the bottom of the last inning to avoid a shutout as Nicholls won 19-1.

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It was quite the year for Nicholls State, as its teams managed to capture the championship, the event's ΣΑΕ Spirit Award, the Best Dressed Award and the Most Improved Award as its B team won two games. Their "just for fun" team, the Nicholls State Alums, took home the ΣΑΕ World Series Last Place Award for losing both games by the widest margin. Gautreaux won the MVP award for his strong play throughout the tournament. In fact, the only tournament award not won by Nicholls was the Farthest Distance Traveled Award, which went to South Florida.

It was an impressive performance from a chapter that, just a few short years ago, didn't exist. The men will have to keep up their training in the off-season, though, if they want to continue their dominance. The South Florida Alums will be itching for a rematch and, with the Sigma Alpha Epsilon's 153rd Anniversary Convention due to be held in New Orleans next summer, there will certainly be a host of new challengers. For more information about the tournament or to get your team prepped, visit www.saeworldseries.com. May the best team win.