

These siblings belong in league of their own

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ELMIRA — Female siblings with exceptional baseball talent become teammates for one season. Later they emerge as opponents in the same league. Eventually, one sister remains active in the sport while the older one goes off to pursue other interests. A sibling rivalry occasionally pops up during the years, but a strong bond shines through at the end.

Script sound familiar? Welcome to the real-life version of *A League of their Own*, starring Stacey and Bobbie McMail.

"It's our life. We watch it time and time again, and we cry. It's us; it's unbelievable," Stacey McMail said of the 1992 hit movie.

The sisters are natives of Bently Creek, Pa., the only children of Bruce and Sharon McMail. Stacey and Bobbie have been attracting attention ever since their softball-playing days at Elmira Notre Dame High School.

A 1988 ND graduate, Stacey went on to become a four-year all-star at the collegiate level, batting a cumulative .439 over that period. She pitched at Corning Community College and then earned a partial scholarship to Mansfield University, where she sparked in the outfield for two seasons. Now 23, she is due to graduate from Mansfield later this summer with a degree in social work.

Bobbie, 18, who graduated from Notre Dame in 1992, has enjoyed a quick start on the Bloomsburg University squad. The sophomore-to-be biology major, who is on a three-quarters scholarship at Bloomsburg, posted a 7-0 pitching record this past season. Her team finished 38-5, placing fourth in the NCAA Division II national playoffs.



Stacy (left) and Bobbie McMail pose on the field at Elmira Notre Dame High School, where they both began their softball careers. S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

During their careers, the McMails have appeared on the same roster for just one season. That was in 1988, when Stacey was a senior at Notre Dame and Bobbie made her varsity debut as an eighth-grader.

"It was hard for me. I'm not shy, but I was scared," Bobbie recalled. "It was so new to me."

Five years later, it was Stacey's turn to get nervous. The McMails were reunited — but, for first time in their lives, on opposing fields — when Mansfield met Pennsylvania State Ath-

letic Conference rival Bloomsburg for a doubleheader on April 6.

Stacey faced the possibility of having to bat against her kid sister. "I didn't want to play her," she recalled. "I was worried, just from the emotional point."

Bobbie, on the other hand, took the situation in stride. "To me it was like, 'Who cares, it's just a game?'" she remarked.

As it turned out, the confrontation never took place. Although Stacey played both ends of the doubleheader, Bobbie was only used as a pinch-hitter.

Upon one particularly difficult grab Stacey made that day, Bobbie said "Nice catch." "My teammates all got mad," she noted.

Likewise, when Bobbie was at the plate, Stacey remembered "I'd be cheering for her to get a hit."

Stacey noted that the sisters' attitudes have changed since they were Notre Dame teammates, when, admittedly, neither was very willing to accept the other's advice.

"Now we have such a close relationship," said Stacey. "If I was having a hitting problem I would call her. We realize how much more we depend on each other."

Despite their closeness, Bobbie points out that, as depicted in *A League of their Own*, a common blood line doesn't necessarily result in similar personalities.

"People try to compare us, but in the movie they were two different people — and so are we," she commented.

Stacey and Bobbie also differ on which is the most famous McMail.

"I was never as good a pitcher as she was. I was always known as Bobbie Jo's sister," said Stacey.

"No, no," Bobbie interjected. "I was always known as Stacey's sister."

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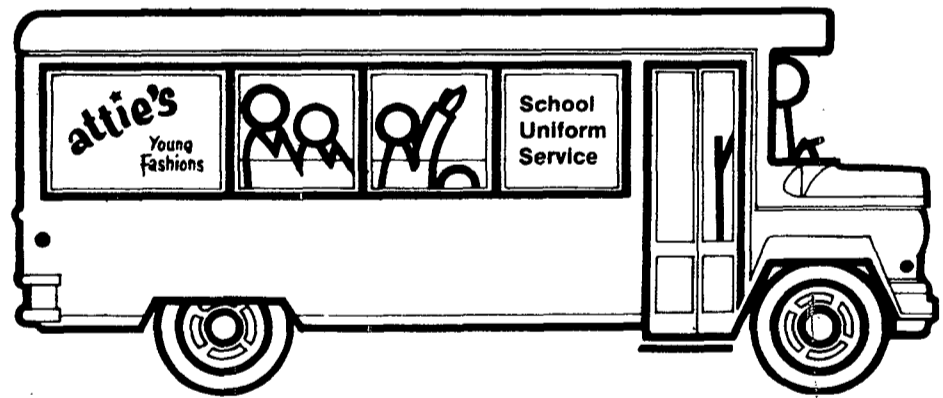
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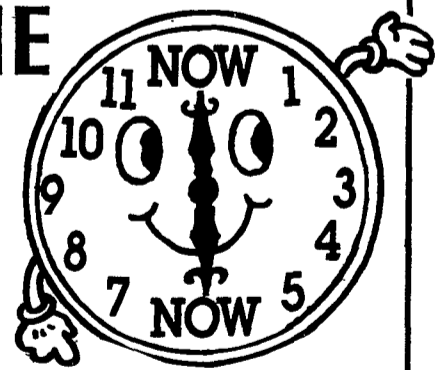
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