SPORTS

Fun comes first in parish co-ed softball league

By Mike Latona Staff writer

This is a fun league. The emphasis is not on competition.

CATHOLIC COURIER DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, N.Y.

These words appear first in a listing of more than 30 league rules.

And their placement on top of page one is no coincidence.

Apparently, the stipulation has not hampered the number of co-ed teams wishing to play in the Monroe County parish softball league. If anything, a relaxed attitude is a nice break from the rigors of more intensified summer athletic programs.

This year's league participation is at an all-time high, with 28 churches and two teams from Hillside Children's Center involved. The high school program, which runs Tuesdays and Wednesdays, features 28 teams; while the Thursday-night junior high league includes 12 squads.

Webster resident Johanna O'Connell, 15, plays for both Holy Trinity Church and the

Webster Athletic Association (WAA). She said the parish team offers her opportunities not always available with WAA, even though she has earned allstar status in her town league.

"(Parish softball is) not so tense. If somebody wants to try a new position you can play it, whereas in WAA you have one position and that's it," Johanna said. Her father, Tom, coaches her on both teams.

In addition, Johanna pointed out, there is no fee or pre-registration required for the parish league. Her father added that friends of Holy Trinity players both Catholic and non-Catholic - are free to participate, regardless of their athletic ability or weekly time commitment.

"We leave the roster open," said Tom O'Connell, whose 13year-old daughter, Stephanie, also plays for Holy Trinity.

Alisha Bryant, 17, describes a similar experience playing for her Sacred Heart Cathedral team. A senior-to-be at Bishop



Alisha Bryant enjoys the `no strings attached' attitude on her Sacred Heart Cathedral co-ed softball team.

Kearney High School, she competed for the BK junior varsity in her freshman and sophomore years.

"Playing here is less pressure," she said_of the Sacred Heart program. "If you don't make a play it makes a difference, but it's not as big a loss. Here you play and have fun. There are no strings attached."

The league's emphasis on enjoyment has been greatly appreciated by a first-year team at Henrietta's Church of the Good Shepherd. Coach Debbie Potter only has six youths on her junior high squad, yet they've been able to play each week because opposing clubs have lent Good Shepherd enough people to field a full unit.

Potter also recalls a game against Greece's St. Charles Borromeo Church when that parish's coach, Mike Vail, encouraged his group to cheer for the Good Shepherd athletes. She said this attitude is a drastic departure from some turbulent

scenes she's witnessed at Little League games in past years.

"(Adults) scream at kids who aren't even their own, and they scream at their own kids, too,' remarked Potter, who also serves as youth minister at Good Shepherd.

On the other hand, Terry Lee, league commissioner, has observed a nice balance in the parish program.

"Everybody I see wants to win, but there's so much camaraderie," said Lee, who also coaches the junior high team at Greece's Holy Name of Jesus Church. His son Tim, 13, plays on that squad and his daughter Jennifer, 16, is a member of the Holy Name high school team.

Lee noted that summer softball is a good way to guide youths toward year-round involvement in parish activities.

"A lot of times the youth ministers draw the kids in that they may not have drawn normally. It may be the start of something,' Lee said.

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