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Senior Softball USA and Visit Central Florida Sports celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Original Tournament of Champions, hosted in Polk County, Florida since 2006.

Updated Requirements for New SSUSA Teams

Softball News Report

Beginning this season, there is a new requirement for new teams wishing to compete in Senior Softball USA major championships (Westerns, Easterns, and Worlds):

Number of Qualifiers Required for New Teams:

The National Rules Committee in December passed a new rule that requires new teams to play in two qualifiers to be eligible to compete in the Eastern and Western Nationals and the World Championships.

A new team consists of fewer than 6 previously registered SSUSA players.

To view other rule changes for the upcoming season, please view the updated 2026-2027 rulebook here: <https://seniorsoftball.com/?page=7>; or call 916-326-5303 to purchase a physical rulebook.

SSUSA 2026 Original Tournament of Champions Celebrates 20 Years

**By Donna McGuire
Softball News Report**

Senior Softball-USA's crown jewel, the Tournament of Champions, celebrated its 20th year in late January with a hitting clinic, all-star game, skills competitions and nearly 300 games played across four central Florida ball parks.

Seven teams emerged as unbeaten champions following three days of play under pleasant conditions, with crisp mornings giving way to beautiful 80-degree afternoons at Polk County complexes. Twenty-two additional teams also claimed first-place prizes, which included free quality Jostens rings.

Overall, 91 teams from 27 states and Canada competed. Since only winners of TOC qualifiers across the country get invited, the competition featured some of best teams and senior athletes in North America. Their fans cheered spectacular defensive plays, spirited offensive rallies, and endless friendly post-game interactions between opponents. Sportsmanship abounded.

"A former director used to say that you know you've run a good tournament when a team that just went '0 for the weekend' stops to ask when the next tournament is," Tournament Director Tim McElroy said. "That was the case in Florida. Regardless of their finish, many players thanked us for the special events, for the awards, for the top notch officiating, and communication via the new Who I Follow online scoring system."

Events launched Jan. 21 with a hitting clinic and an all-Star game won 24-22 by the National team. The following day, players competed in hitting, running and pitching competitions. That evening, hundreds attended a reception at Nora May Hall in Winter Haven that honored the all-star players, the skills contest winners and the 91 teams in attendance.



Both the 2026 TOC National Team (red caps) and American Team (blue caps).

Players From Each 2026 TOC Team Competed in Tight All-Star Game

By Donna McGuire
Softball News Report

As Dominic Martinez' high fly ball sailed into deep right-centerfield late on a January evening, participants in the SSUSA Original Tournament of Champions' All-Star game watched anxiously to see where it would land.

The game's outcome hung in the balance.

The National All-Stars (photo below), led by co-managers Irene Fry of Mood Swings 40s and Terry Hennessy of SSUSA, were protecting a two-run lead with two outs and a runner at third base in the bottom of the ninth inning at the Auburndale Softball Complex.



The American All-Stars (photo below), led by co-managers John Karagiannes of Alliance/Scrap Iron 60s and Joel Reich of the Long Island Jaguars 80s, had a five-run rally going – and already had plated two runs after two outs.



Unable to get a good read under the lights, right-centerfielder Keri Sulonen initially broke in on the ball. Then she heard a teammate yell, "Back! Back! Back!"

Sulonen reversed direction and sprinted toward the outfield fence.

When bracket play ended Jan. 25, teams from as far away as Arizona, Nevada and Canada had captured crowns. More than 50 of the games, including six title tilts, were decided by one run. More than a few games needed extra innings to determine a victor.

"SSUSA's Original Tournament of Champions is a unique event, celebrating the best of the best on and off the field," McElroy said. "It's been that way for 20 years, and I am already looking forward to popping the cork on the 21st edition."

Results:

Women's 40+ Gold: Top-seeded Redz/Prime Time/Ikonic/CA Sports Co. of North Carolina (photo lower left) nabbed the Major championship and overall bracket title by defeating third-seeded AAA champion Mood Swings of California (photo lower right) 19-12 in the finale. The unbeaten Redz averaged nine-run victories in its five games. The second-seeded Lady Bandits/Standard Plumbing team from Arizona finished third in the three-team division.



Women's 50/60+ Gold: The top-seeded Lady Scorpions 60s of Arizona (photo lower left) capped a 4-1 tournament by defeating Shots Fired of Rhode Island (photo lower right) 27-14 in the title game of this three-team, mixed-age-group division. The Lady Scorpions earned the 60+ Major title while Shots Fired claimed the 50+ AAA crown. Get Dirty of New Mexico finished third.



Men's 40+ Major: Playing a best-of-three format, Motion/Edge 40s Softball of Virginia (photo below) finished 5-0 by sweeping TSC/Anarchy of New York 21-17 and 24-14 in bracket play.

As the ball sailed over her head, she stretched out her arm, glove open to the sky.

Plop.

An over-the-shoulder, running catch to end the game!

National players cheered. They had won 24-22.

“That was fun,” Sulonen said afterward. “It was really cool to play with these great guys.”



Keri Sulonen, the National All-Star Team's MVP after the game winning catch, up to bat earlier in the game.

Teammate John Tinkler of Wongs 60s congratulated her on a great game. Sulonen, who plays for Mood Swings, also had singled, doubled, walked and driven in a run.

“You can come play with Wongs any time you want,” Tinkler told her.

Another player walking past added: “She’s the MVP.”

Every team that plays in the Tournament of Champions gets to enter a player on the All-Star rosters.

The oldest players competed for the first three innings. The next younger group plays the middle three innings. The youngest players draw the final three innings.

The game featured five lead changes, with neither team able to pull more than five runs ahead at a given time. Batters bashed 58 hits, including six home runs.

“It was an exciting game right to the end,” Karagiannes said. “I am not happy we lost, but everyone left healthy.”



Men's 40+ AAA: The second-seeded Lead Foot Grays of Maryland (photo below) won a high-scoring championship game 31-29 over top-seeded Torgi Trucking/U.P. Electric of Washington. Third-seeded Smokin Aces/American Legion Post #327 of Virginia finished third.



Men's 50+ Major Plus: Playing a best-of-three format, Suncoast 50s of Florida (photo below) needed all three games to dispatch Baugh Ford/Barrow Power/Short Porch of Florida 19-12, 25-32 and 30-12.



Men's 50+ AAA: One run decided one-fourth of this division's games, including the 21-20 title game won by third-seeded Old Skool/Racehorse Tavern/Girard Club of Pennsylvania (photo below), which finished 5-1 overall. Fifth-seeded EIS of New Jersey captured second place. The top-seeded Viejos So Cal team finished third in the seven-team division.



48 players from 48 different teams and 4 managers took part in the 2026 All-Star Game.

Skill Contest Winners Celebrated at 2026 TOC

Softball News Report

POLK COUNTY, FL. – Skill Contests were conducted at the 2026 original Tournament of Champions on January 21 at Auburndale Sports Complex in Winter Haven. Hosted each year, the event consists of four contests across five different gender and age groups: Precision Hitting, Power Hitting, Speed and Pitching.



The Pitching Contest measured how many strikes a player was able to throw hitting the mat, out of 10 tosses.

All contests except for the Speed contest had ties that led to run-offs as competition was tight. Highlights include Bruce Fairchild's (Venom 75s – FL) 6 out of 10 homeruns in the Men's 75+ category of the Power Hitting contest and Jonathon Robertson's (Warpath 50s – MD) 11.9 second run to win the Men's 40-54 category. The Men's 55-64 category of the Pitching contest saw a tie with 8 out of 10 strikes; Brian Lohman of Road Warriors 60 (AZ) won the pitch-off with another 6 out of 10 strikes hitting the mat.



Men's 50+ AA: Nearly a third of this division's games were decided by one run, including the 20-19 title game won by the second-seeded Markham Canadians of Ontario (photo below). The Canadians finished 4-2 overall. Second place went to the top-seeded Heroes NE 50s of Nebraska. The Nor-Cal Hitmen of California placed third in the three-team division.



Men's 50/55+ Platinum: After Yeager's/Max Batz of Florida (photo lower left) defeated Suncoast 55s of Florida (photo lower right) 31-27 in the first championship game, the teams agreed not to play the if-needed game because both had earned titles. Yeager's/Max Batz nabbed the 50+ Major crown while Suncoast captured the 55+ Major Plus title. Magic Softball of Massachusetts took third in the three-team division.



Men's 55+ AAA: Second-seeded Paly of Texas nipped a stubborn Heroes 55 team of Nebraska (both teams photographed together below) 20-19 to claim the title with an overall 4-1 record. The fifth-seeded Heroes won four elimination games to reach the championship bout. Fourth-seeded Pro Vision 55 of Washington placed third in the six-team bracket.

Winners of the Precision and Power Hitting contests won new bats, provided by Short Porch Baseball Company; while the Speed contest winners won new shoes, provided by Beebe Sports and Pitching winners won new gloves from SSUSA.



Skill contest winners were invited up on stage to receive their awards during the TOC Reception.

Skill Contest Winners:

Precision Hitting

Women: Jessica Flores, Lady Bandits (5)

Men's 75+: Michael Breitenstein, Center for Sight 85 (6)

Men's 65-74: Joe Kaso, Long Island Jags (6)

Men's 55-64: Garrick Yokoe, NV Drifters 60s (5/ 5)

Men's 40-54: Jeremy Baker, Markham Canadians (6)

Power Hitting

Women: Jessica Flores, Lady Bandits (3)

Men's 75+: Bruce Fairchild, Venom 75s (6)

Men's 65-74: Mike Dozier, Smash 60s (1)

Men's 55-64: Bob Greene, Hard Hat/Latella's/ Caterbone Realty (2/3)

Men's 40-54: Jeremy Baker, Markham Canadians (3)

Speed

Women: Keri Sulonen, Mood Swings (12.78)

Men's 75+: Ron Christian, Long Island Jaguars (16.47)

Men's 65-74: Jim Crowl, Venom 75s (13.82)

Men's 55-64: Jeff Smith, Nevada Drifters (13.5)

Men's 40-54: Jonathon Robertson, Warpath 50s (11.9)

Pitching

Women: Julia Thrash, Lady Bandits (7)

Men's 75+: Eric Hoff, Sacramento

Men's 55+ AA: Playing a best-of-three format, the Longshoremen 55 of Virginia swept Detroit Pride of Michigan 15-14 and 23-12.

Men's 55/60+ Platinum: Undeclared in five games, 60+ Major Plus champion Suncoast/Squared Away Sports/M&M Glove Repair of Florida (photo lower left) won each of its bracket games by one run, including the 32-31 finale over 55+ Major champion C3 Skids of Florida (photo lower right). The third-seeded NW Jokkers of Washington finished third in the three-team division.



Men's 60+ AAA: The third-seeded Road Warriors 60 of Arizona (photo below) lost the first championship game 20-15 but rebounded to win the if-needed game 20-17 over top-seeded Wicked Slice Pizza of Connecticut, which lost its first bracket game before winning six elimination games. Fourth-seeded Team Illinois captured third in the 11-team division, the tournament's largest.



Men's 60+ AA: The top-seeded Nevada Drifters (photo below) had been on a roll before the second-seeded Colorado Renegades won the first title game 22-15. The Drifters responded with a 32-15 win in the if-needed game to capture the three-team division. Wongs 60 of California placed third.

Islanders (7)
 Men's 65-74: Charles Pickett,
 Wongs 60s (6)
 Men's 55-64: Brian Lohman, Road
 Warriors (8/6) pitch-off
 Men's 40-54: Dominic Martinez,
 Viejos SoCal (6)

**Linda Weber, SSUSA
 Director, Honored by
 National Officials
 Association**



SSUSA National Director, Linda Weber, at the Inaugural 2024 Land of Enchantment Championships in Albuquerque.

**By Nic Francois
 Softball News Report**

Linda Weber, a Senior Softball USA national director and umpire, will be named the Kansas Official of the Year in Softball by the Kansas High School Activities Association (KSHSAA).

This honor "recognizes one official per sport in each state for the great work they do for young people in our country," according to the award letter sent by the National Federation of High School Officials Association.

Linda has umpired and officiated for KSHSAA for more than 25 years, in softball, basketball and volleyball in schools across the Kansas City metro area.

"Never forget where you came from or when you started - give back and help others," said Linda, speaking of her work and humbled by this honor. "Don't be afraid to learn something new every day, she added."

"This is such a well-deserved award," said Terry Hennessy, chief executive officer of SSUSA. "Linda



Men's 60/65+ Platinum: Third-seeded Hard Hat Cafe/Latella's/Caterbone Realty of Connecticut upended the top-seeded Minnesota Merchants (photo below) 28-19 in the first title game. The teams were in the third inning of the if-needed game when a player's serious medical emergency halted play. The teams agreed to cancel the rest of the game. Hard Hat received the 60+ Major title while the Merchants, which went 4-1 overall, nabbed the 65+ Major Plus title. TRT of Florida finished third in the three-team division.



Men's 65+ Major: Top-seeded Dudley Lightning 65s of Missouri (photo below) capped a 5-0 tournament with a 16-9 championships victory over second-seeded Levin Ameriprise II of Florida. The third-seeded Hudson Valley Cyclones of New York finished third in the three-team division.



Men's 65+ Silver: Unbeaten in six games, the top-seeded 65+ AAA Texas Legends (photo below) edged sixth-seeded Scrap Iron Heavy Metal of Colorado 11-10 in the championship game. Fourth-seeded Steve Levin Ameriprise 65 of Florida placed third in the nine-team division.

Weber has umpired for us in many states and several other countries and represented the sport exceptionally well," he added.

For SSUSA, in 2024 alone, she worked at the Aloha Bowl in Hawaii, Spring Nationals in Florida, Midwest Championships in Kansas, Land of Enchantment Championships in New Mexico, Eastern Nationals in Virginia, Rocky Mountain Championships in Colorado, Worlds in Vegas, and the Winter Worlds in Arizona. She's also umpired on SSUSA International Trips in New Zealand, Switzerland and Germany.



Linda Weber with her husband, Roland, on the 2024 Medieval Rhineland Tour of Switzerland, France and Germany.

"Linda is an exceptional umpire and director," said Fran Dowell, executive director of SSUSA. "She has compassion and great knowledge of the sport. We are very lucky she represents us. Congratulations to you, Linda, for an award well deserved," Fran continued.

Linda was SSUSA's Umpire of the Year in 2019 and named Tournament Director of the Year in 2024.



Linda Weber directing at the 2026 SSUSA Original Tournament of Championship in Polk County, Florida, with other SSUSA directors and umpires.



Men's 70+ AAA: In the only division without a one-run game, top-seeded Slug-A-Bug of Florida (photo below) capped a 6-0 tournament with a 11-8 title-game victory over the second-seeded Long Island Jaguars 70 White of New York. Fourth-seeded Spring Ford 70+ of Pennsylvania took third in the four-team division.



Men's 70/75+ Platinum: After going 0-3 in seeding games, third-seeded Promotion/Phoenix Tube 70 of New Jersey (photo lower left) went 3-0 in bracket play, including a 21-11 championship victory over top-seeded REI Nation 70s of North Carolina. That gave Promotion the 70+ Major title. Top-seeded RPR Softball of Tennessee took third. Venom 75s of Florida (photo lower right), which played as an exhibition team, received the 75+ Major Plus title.



Men's 75+ AAA: The second-seeded Jersey Masters 75s capped a 4-1 tournament by squeaking out a 7-6 championship victory over the top-seeded Sacramento Islanders 75 team from California. Fourth-seeded MidState Seniors 75s of Illinois captured third in the five-team division.

Men's 75+ AA: Top-seeded Doc Martens/Ropes Courses of Michigan went 4-1 overall, including a 25-10 championship victory over the Minnesota Lumberjacks 75s. Northwest Sage of Washington finished third in the three-team division.

Men's 80+ AAA: Top-seeded and unbeaten Midwest Express of Nebraska knocked off Cozy Grill 80s of Rhode Island 21-17 in the title game. The Syracuse Cyclones 80 of New York took third in the four-team division.

Men's 85+ Gold: Top-seeded 85+ Major champion Center For Sight of Florida went 5-1 overall, including a 16-10 title-game victory over Team Rehab 85 of Minnesota. Main

Street Pub of Michigan (photo below) received the 85+ AAA title while placing third in the bracket.



Charity abounds in 6th Annual Caribbean Classic

Softball News Report

Bats, equipment and \$3,250 in uniforms were donated to impoverished kids in the Dominican Republic during the 6th annual Caribbean Classic in Punta Cana in January.

The family of late Connecticut player Jim Caterbone asked his friends and family to send cash donations to Senior Softball USA, in lieu of flowers, to purchase softball/baseball equipment children in the Dominican.

In addition, USA team player Conway Waddy coordinated the donation of 12 youth bats from Smash It Sports – and is setting up even more bat donations for the kids.

Other players and guests brought new and slightly used softball equipment to be donated, as well.

Look for a detailed report on the 6th Annual Caribbean Classic in the upcoming Spring Edition of Senior Softball News in March.



Team USA players and guests visiting a Dominican Youth Softball organization to deliver donations.

Stay At SSUSAs Official Hawaiian Resort Hotel



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