

The Graphic Edge Owner Achieves Fame Through 16-Inch Game

By Marty Maciaszek



The Graphic Edge owner John Reglein

John Reglein has found his share of fame through Chicago's game of 16-inch softball.

Reglein, who founded and owns NSGA member The Graphic Edge in Carroll, Iowa, was inducted into the Chicago 16-inch Softball Hall of Fame on April 26. Reglein won the Frank C. Holan Award given to individuals who demonstrate their love of the game through coaching, managing teams or promoting the game.

"I was very, very honored and very humbled to be included with some of the greats who played the game," said Reglein, who became the first person from Iowa to be honored by the Chicago Hall of Fame.

While 16-inch softball is best known for being played without gloves in Chicago, it also has pockets of serious interest in Iowa. Reglein had never seen the 16-inch game before he moved to Carroll in 1979, but he quickly discovered how much he enjoyed playing it compared to the more offensive-oriented 12-inch slow-pitch game.

"The great thing about it is it puts such a premium on defense and it puts a premium on speed," Reglein said. "Obviously you have to be a great hitter, which I never was, but it's just not home run derby.

"You play a three-man outfield and five-man infield and the ball weighs 10 or 11 ounces. There's a little strategy where you

have to be able to move the runners on offense and play for 1 run a lot of times."

It wasn't long before Reglein was getting high-quality people and players to form The Graphic Edge teams that could compete with 16-inch powerhouses. His teams won nine State Major Open championships in an 11-year stretch, finished in the top five three times in ASA National Tournaments and won more than 1,500 games.

Reglein would frequently bring his teams to the Chicago area to play in the biggest tournaments. The Graphic Edge would enter the no-gloves national tournament even though it was at a disadvantage since it usually played with gloves.

"We were pretty good around here in our area, but when we first started we weren't even competitive state-wide," Reglein said. "I tried to model our teams off some of the better Iowa and Chicago teams.

"We tried to pick up players who were able to compete at that level, players with more speed and more athletes. We weren't a neighborhood team. We were more of a team put together to compete at a higher level."

Reglein said the last five or six years he ran a team, it would travel 85 to 105 miles on Thursday and Friday nights to play in leagues in Iowa, and then travel to weekend tournaments.

"It took a lot of time and effort and sacrifice," said Reglein, who was also inducted into the Iowa 16-inch Hall of Fame in 2002.

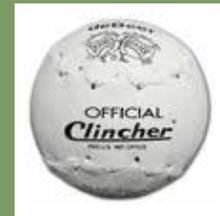
The commitment level to maintain a successful softball team became too much as his screen printing and embroidered apparel business grew from two part-time employees in 1989 to more than 230 employees in a 78,000-square-foot facility today. Reglein got out of the sport about 10 years ago but still attends national tournaments when he has the opportunity.

And Reglein showed he can still mix business with the 16-inch game when he attended the Chicago Hall of Fame Induction ceremony, joining another NSGA

favorite, Anthony Reibel, and then flew out the next morning to attend the NSGA Management Conference and Team Dealer Summit in Palm Springs, California.

"They are tremendous people," Reglein said of the 16-inch softball community. "In my opinion it has always been a blue-collar sport, for the most part, of tough, hard-nosed people who play the game. They played with a lot of passion and a lot of enthusiasm and they get up in the morning and go to work."

DEBEER CLINCHED ITS NAME RECOGNITION IN SPORTING GOODS



The deBeer name is not only synonymous with 16-inch softball but also with its connections to the Sporting Goods Industry.

Frederick deBeer, who is a member of the Chicago 16-inch Softball Hall of Fame, developed a softball in 1934 with a patented covered stitch that was designed to last longer and stand up to the rigors of games on Chicago's gravel playgrounds. The Clincher softball has evolved but it continues to be the ball of choice in the 16-inch game.

And Frederick "Fritz" deBeer Jr., was inducted into NSGA's Sporting Goods Industry Hall of Fame in 1992 as he helped ingrain the Clincher softball in the 16-inch game through his marketing and promotional efforts. He also introduced a "Small Fry" baseball believed to be the first lighter, softer and safer Tee-ball produced and marketed in America and he worked with maverick Oakland Athletics owner Charles O. Finley in the 1960s to develop orange-colored baseballs.