

HALL OF FAME TEAM AWARD



Members of the 1982 Cobras team that won the USSA Eastern world championship included, front row, from left — Vernon Neil, Roger Bridenbaugh, Reggie Nevins, Steve Shover, Donnie Stern, Wade Anderson. Back row — Jerry Stern, Al Raymond, Kenny Stern, Conrad Byler, Rod Weyant, Brad Weyant.

The Cobras 'had everything'

Softball national champions first team to be honored

By NEIL RUDEL

As one of the better players in the Altoona Slo-Pitch Softball League in the 1980s, it didn't take long for John Nardoza to describe his memories of the Cobras.

"They were awesome," he said. "They had everything. They dominated every team in Pennsylvania."

And then some.

The Cobras won Amateur Softball Association national championships in 1982, '83 and '88. Their achievements earned them the distinction of being the first team to be inducted into the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame.

Vernon Neil was the team leader and most valuable player of the '88 national tournament.

"To be the first team selected is quite an honor," Neil said. "It's very satisfying and very humbling. The thing I think is most pleasing is we were all best friends, and we

Year-by-year record

1976	.....	70-22
1977	.....	88-17
1978	.....	130-18
1979	.....	106-14
1980	.....	125-27
1981	.....	92-14
1982	.....	110-16
1983	.....	130-13
1984	.....	64-10
1985	.....	68-8
1986	.....	67-8
1987	.....	69-6
*1988	.....	100-18
*1989	.....	68-9
*1990	.....	46-9

15-year record: 1333-212

* Sponsored by Smith Transport

remain best friends."

The Cobras' reign began with domination of the Altoona Softball League and led to an annual pursuit of national prominence.

"I can remember playing third

base in the Altoona League and Vernon Neil hitting a ball so hard it ripped my glove off," Jim Green of Altoona said.

The Cobras' first national title came in '82 when they won the USSA Eastern world championship in Long Island, N.Y., and they added the national Class B championship the next year in Bowie, Md.

Under Smith Transport, the Cobras ascended to the highest level of Class A by 1988 and posted a 7-0 record in Savannah, Ga., besting a 78-team field from more than 40 states.

Team members from the '88 team included Neil, Reggie Nevins, Randy Holsopple, Don Pote, Scott Bortner, Rod Weyant, Bill McNelis, Al Raymond, Donnie Stern, Brad Weyant, Steve Shover and Scott Weyant.

Conrad Byler, Roger Bridenbaugh, Wade Anderson, Jerry Stern, Sam Ebersole and Ken Stern were part of the '82-83 teams.



Members of the Cobras gathered for a recent photo. Those present included, front row, from left: Steve Shover, Donnie Stern, Brad Weyant, Ken Stern, Scott Weyant, Roger Bridenbaugh. Back row: Wade Anderson, Bill McNelis, Conrad Byler, Rodney Weyant, Jerry Stern, Al Raymond, Sam Ebersole, Vernon Neil.

Bob Anderson, a key member of the team when it won its first of three Pennsylvania championships in 1979 and Wade Anderson's brother, was killed in a hunting accident in 1980.

He played first base from 1976-80.

"Andy (Bob Anderson) probably kept us loose more than anybody," Neil said. "He had a great personality and his accidental death actually brought us all closer as friends."

The team prided itself on fundamentals.

"We really weren't known as a big home-run hitting team, but everybody in our lineup could hit," Neil said. "We tried to be solid fundamentally, and we really played good defense."

"Nowadays, you see teams winning games 25-22," Nardozza said. "Back then, it was speed. Conrad Byler just crushed the ball, but they had that team speed. You could be 0-0 with them and then they'd get 15 hits in a row. Even with two outs, they'd score five-six runs."

"They did everything. It was a privilege to play against them. They made softball at that time."

Most of the players grew up

COBRAS' LINEUP

1976-1986

Reggie Nevins	2B
Brad Weyant	OF
Vernon Neil	SS
Al Raymond.....	OF
Conrad Byler	OF
Wade Anderson	C
Jerry Stern	OF
Bob Anderson	1B-OF
Rodney Weyant.....	C-OF
Steve Shover	1B
Donnie Stern	3B
Roger Bridenbaugh	P

1987-1990

Reggie Nevins	2B
Brad Weyant	OF
Vernon Neil	P
Scott Bortner	SS
Randy Holsopple	OF
Al Raymond.....	OF
Bill McNelis	C
Don Pote	OF
Rodney Weyant.....	C-OF
Steve Shover	1B
Donnie Stern	3B

Ken Stern, manager
Sam Ebersole, utility
Scott Weyant, Utility

together, and their camaraderie was evident.

"When we first started, we played because we enjoyed the game and wanted to win," Neil said. "As time went on, and with the death of Andy, we became so much closer. We played for each other and we did everything

together. I think we had the ultimate team perspective."

Roger Bridenbaugh was the Cobras' pitcher most of the time.

Neil and Reggie Nevins were the shortstop-second base combination.

"They were really good up the middle," Nardozza said.

Both Nevins and Neil went on to become basketball coaches at Central High School, where they played high school basketball under Don Appleman.

I think the thing that made those guys so special as a softball team is they were great all-around athletes," Appleman said. "They were good basketball and baseball players and a bunch of real nice guys who got along extremely well. They all were real heady players. They thought the game, too."

The Cobras stayed together from 1976-90 and amassed a 15-year record of 1333-212.

"We had several worthy teams presented to us, both in amateur sports and high school sports," Hall of Fame president David Andrews said. "The selection committee felt the Cobras were the most deserving and an excellent team for us to honor for the first time."