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Newsletter of the BEANTOWN SOFTBALL LEAGUE

## A Look Back

The opening of the season always brings with it a sense of renewal, sometimes accompanied by a yearning for perspective: To know how far we've come from our pristine beginnings in order of gauge how far we may have yet to go.

With this in mind, ON DECK assigned its aggressive cub reporter, Slide Tornpants, to track down John Hartley, an original member of the League, to help illuminate our ever-darkening past.

Tornpants found John H. at MediaCentral, where he is still trying to find coherence and meaning in the endless hours of video and audio tapes made during the sputtering final season of his first and only team, Chaps, now only a memory -- except for the tapes.

After negotiating all foreign and ancillary rights to this interview, as well as a hefty percentage of any future revenue derived from domestic cable television and franchise operations (including the Christmas doll), John H. agreed to talk to Tornpants, under several additional conditions they both found hard to swallow.

"History, you know," said John H., "is how we remember it, and not necessarily the way it really was." With that caveat in mind, the interview commenced.

**TORNPAANTS:** Many people find it hard to believe there was actually a time before the Beantown Softball League existed...

**JOHN H.:** Yes, it is hard to believe, but it was an awful long time ago, you know. In fact, I believe it was even before Jeff and Terry, now of the new Flairies, had met.

**TORNPAANTS:** That long ago, huh?

**JOHN H.:** You could look it up. Anyway, it was back in the '70s and I was playing ball with a semi-organized group of professional heterosexuals out behind Harvard Stadium, when I realized there was something not quite right about them. Funny thing, though, I didn't sense this until after I came

noticed a memo taped upside down in Chaps, a local gay oasis, a quaint, yet clannish beer and wine bar, with peanuts in a big barrel by the pool table and their shells all over the floor. The note said that anyone interested in a little ball playing should go over to this field behind the Fenway. Needless to say, my interest was piqued. It was cold and drizzling that day in May, but I thought to myself, what the hell, what harm can it do?

**TORNPAANTS:** What harm did it do?

**JOHN H.:** Well, that's the funny part. I got over to the field and saw five to ten others all eager to play, some of whom would never go near a softball field today, and I know at that very moment that I was no longer alone. It was like one of the great lessons of coming out all over again: Where there's one, there's more.

So I rushed onto the field with my glove, hoping to claim first base, my Little League position, and in the process of going after a foul ball, I ran into a little trouble. His name was Seth, a lanky but big boy, and he was going after the same ball, and the result was my finger got broken in about eight places.

**TORNPAANTS:** Gentle Seth?

**JOHN H.:** He denies responsibility to this day. Me? I was out for six weeks and never played first base again.

Looking back on it, I suppose it was that broken finger that got me started on those stipulations in my contracts - No throwing the ball in April; no fielding in rain or drizzle; no batting if the wind/chill factor is below 50 F. - all those stipulations that eventually led to my retirement.

But, look. I had to protect myself. It's a jungle out there. Have you ever had Joe "Tiny" Leo sit on you while sliding into second base?

**TORNPAANTS:** Never. But speaking of retirement, do you like it?

**JOHN H.:** Blissfully so. Of course, I miss the guys. I miss my boys. But I don't see them during the wintertime, anyway.

**TORNPAANTS:** You mentioned Joe Leo. He's often referred to as the father of the league. Steve Sprague's name also comes up, among others. Do you see yourself in this light?

**JOHN H.:** No. I think of myself more as the mother. Although, I'm sure there's competition for that position, too.

**TORNPAANTS:** I see...One final question, John. Undoubtedly there are new players this year, and it's just possible they might be interested in the guiding principles that enabled you to have such a long career. What can you tell them?

**JOHN H.:** Oh. That's simple. Stay in shape and don't do drugs. And most of all be loyal...and be proud.

**TORNPAANTS:** Thank you, John H..

**JOHN H.:** Thank you, Slide. By the way, how did you ever tear those pants that way?

**Next issue:** John H. recalls the night of the Herbie's Ramrod massacre AND speaks out on initials: Are they enough?