



The Silver Streaks follow a blast: "If the right-fielder is feeling a little dizzy, you can take him out and put him back in later."

It ain't over til it's over

Go ahead: You try and keep up with the senior softballers by Bill Jensen

Pulling into the lot at Farmingdale's Allen Park, Tobay Lions manager Steve Andreski gets out of his van and hands rookie Tony Mancino a team cap.

"Look at that, kid. You made the team," jokes a Lion player pulling his own glove and bat out of his car. Another veteran chides, "You get a hat you can only run. You get a shirt you can go out in the field. You get pants and we'll let you hit."

Mancino was discovered one Sunday morning when Lion third-baseman Tony Giardina spotted him sprinting across Wantagh Avenue to attend Mass. Since the Lions are constantly searching for fresh talent, especially fast base-runners, the nimble Mancino would be a perfect addition. The 61-year-old retired art director looked like he would fit right in, if he could make the cut.

After losing the first game of a doubleheader to the Brookhaven Silver Streaks, the defending league champion Lions are rallying in the second game.

"They're complaining already. Let's beat their ass," Lion Harry Settino, 63, yells from the on-deck circle.

Senior softball is a serious matter on Long Island. This is no company picnic—these guys play for real. The old-timers play a 64-game season of up of two doubleheaders a week, Tuesdays and

Thursdays. There are more than 450 players in the Long Island Senior Softball Association, whose players are 60 and older. The Lions and Silver Streaks are in the six-team top division, and Mancino still has to prove he can play with the big boys before he can get the rest of the uniform.

The old guys make some accommodations for age. The seniors don't take to bang-bang plays at the plate. To avoid repeating a Pete Rose-meets-Ray Fosse collision at home, players cross a line parallel to home plate. If you touch the plate, you're out. There is no sliding; the strike zone is a rubber pad placed behind the plate. If the pitch hits the plate or the pad, it's a strike.

Pitchers are limited to a 12-foot arc, which many of the hurlers try to stretch. Doc Marasco, 62, a practicing dentist who is the Streaks' best pitcher, tests the umpire in the first inning of each game to see how high he can spin his pitches and still get strike calls. Illegal pitches are automatically balls. Marasco also utilizes a pitch with very little arc, called a "flat pitch," which when thrown correctly makes the batter lunge awkwardly.

Jake Considine, 70, of the Lions also tries to pitch as high as he can get away with.

Batters can get a pinch runner if they reach base but not be taken completely out of the game. This is where speedsters like Mancino come in. As the dust kicked up around third base, the Streaks' George Martin, 64, a retired high-school teacher from East Moriches, scored from second on a tag-up fly ball to left. The fastest man in the league, Martin plays four days a week and umpires the other three. Unlike most of the other guys, who got back into softball after retirement, Martin has been playing every year since high school. "I've never missed

a year of playing, and I'm not ready to miss one yet," he said.

Free substitutions are allowed.

"If the right-fielder is feeling a little dizzy, you can take him out and put him back in later," says Andreski, 68, of Seaford, a retired landscaper whose four-year minor-league career in the Boston system was cut short by an ankle injury.

By 11 a.m., the Boys of Endless Summers were doing their best to keep cool under a relentless sun. Playing from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in summer, it always gets hot. Dick Mauer, 71, of Patchogue, a former phys-ed teacher and Long Island Softball Hall of Famer who was a Philadelphia Phillie prospect, said he and his mates don't care. "Last year, it was 97 degrees. We were playing doubleheaders and the high-school kids couldn't go out on the field because it was too hot."

"When you're older, you know how to pace yourself," Andreski adds.

"You mellow," says Mauer. "When you were young, you were a nasty bastard."

For instance: Former tough guys find they can be civilized at the senior league's spring and fall dances and at the luncheons.

The Lions came roaring back with a big third inning to earn the split. After the doubleheader, the best players on each team were off to Trenton to play in a regional tournament as one squad. Long Island fields teams in the 60-and-over, 65-and-over and 70-and-over categories. All three have qualified for the Senior League World Series in Houston.

These tough guys aren't going gently. They're going to go out swinging. Or, as Settino proclaimed: "The old-timers, we never let up. This is some fuckin' game." **V**