

## 6 QUESTIONS FOR JOE KELL



# Girls softball has grown in Pacifica

By Clay Lambert  
Photos by Adam Pardee

## ADULTS MAKE SURE LEAGUE REMAINS FUN FIRST

Joe Kell is president of the Pacifica Girls Softball League. He presides over a decades-old league that is now as strong as ever. He wants everyone to know that families of girls ages 4 through 14 are invited to register their girls to play in the spring recreation season, which begins in January and runs through May 2022. More information is available at [www.thepgsl.com](http://www.thepgsl.com) or send an email to [president@thepgsl.com](mailto:president@thepgsl.com). To register, visit the [pgsl.com/registration](http://pgsl.com/registration). He took the time to answer a few questions about the league and how it has managed to attract girls for so many years.

**1** Can you tell us a little of the history of the Pacifica Girls Softball League and perhaps how it has evolved through the years? "It all started in 1970 when Shirley Sherwin and her husband, Nick, sought out and secured a Bobby Sox Softball League franchise for Pacifica.

Shirley, a former semi-pro softball player, and Nick, a former Triple-A coach, saw a need for the program given the number of girls just hanging out at the local shopping center with nothing productive to do.

"The Pacifica Recreation Department allowed the new softball league to play at the Cabrillo School fields and approved of parents/volunteers to prepare the playing surfaces and build backstops, fences, etc. The location was quickly transformed from rocks to playable softball fields. Allegedly, girls softball was only supposed to play on Cabrillo for one year, given a housing development plan, but Cabrillo Principal Leslie Linhares strongly advocated keeping the fields, as she had a fondness for recreation and felt that the fields should remain for the girls, especially given all the work performed by the parents. In 1985, the league decided to drop its franchise with Bobby Sox Softball and join the American Softball Association (now USA Softball) as Pacifica Girls Softball League.

"Today, PGSL's mission is to provide an opportunity for girls, ages 4 to 14, to play softball in a positive, fair, instructional and safety-oriented environment with emphasis on the development of qualities such as leadership, teamwork, sportsmanship, citizenship and friendship. The league still operates at the Cabrillo School fields with parents and volunteers spending significant time and effort maintaining them. PGSL is part of the Peninsula league, playing games both in town and against teams from San Bruno to Palo Alto. Current programming includes the main spring

recreation season (with about 100 players) along with the Pacifica Sirens summer tournament and fall ball (about 60 players). We expect significant growth in 2022."

**2** We hear that many young people have turned away from organized sports in recent years, preferring activities like surfing or skateboarding or even video games. How do you convince them to play? "PGSL has seen the opposite trend in the past few years, and, in terms of girls softball, it seems to be an awareness issue. Many parents and families did not know that Pacifica has a softball league or how to join. The Cabrillo School fields are also not visible to passing cars, so there is not a large opportunity for the general public in town to see them play. We have largely focused on awareness and word of mouth in terms of building our league. Also, the spring recreation season is not a busy one for girls sports, so it's a great opportunity for them to play."

**3** There are so many wonderful female role models in sports today. How do you think that pro athletes like Jessica Mendoza or Nneka Ogwumike or Megan Rapinoe influence young athletes in Pacifica? "I am not sure that this matters for most of the girls that play youth softball. They don't seem as interested in following professional sports athletes and are more impressed by their peers. I find that when the girls join a team, they seem to connect with their peers, motivate each other to get over their fears, work a bit harder, and have fun!"

**4** How do the adults involved with the league ensure that practices and games remain fun for kids? "We focus on positive coaching, fun and development. For safety purposes, it is very important that the girls first properly

learn the proper fundamentals of throwing, catching, hitting and base running. We break the girls up into skill-specific, smaller group drill stations and rotate groups. But everyone likes a scrimmage game and we do let the girls be kids and act goofy at times to build team camaraderie."

**5** Are there opportunities for parents to be involved, and do they have to be bona fide softball coaches to participate? "All parents who coach or assistant coach do need to be appropriately trained and insured. We formally set expectations for each coach/assistant, conduct a background check, and require the completion of online training through USA Softball and SafeSport. Also, there are plenty of opportunities for parents to be involved in the league via board positions, fundraising programs, snack shack shifts, team parent and field maintenance."

**6** We've just seen the Major League Baseball playoffs, including a historic season for the San Francisco Giants. Does that have any effect on enthusiasm for softball? "While many PGSL players get excited about MLB and the historic performance of the Giants, it does not seem like the majority of girls have a large enough interest in baseball to where they relate it to softball. Most seem to be most focused on their own team, peer teams/players, and what's going on in their own lives. However, as the girls get older and potentially play in high school, they do pay more attention to women's sports and baseball/softball in particular. I know lots of families whose daughters go with them to college or professional games and have the background and knowledge to really appreciate the game. It builds a lifelong appreciation of teamwork and good sportsmanship." **COASTSIDE**