

STAN SMITH PASSES AWAY

By GRAHAM LATTA

The peaceful death early this morning of Stan Smith marked the passing of a man widely regarded as the father of Southland softball who had maintained a lifetime interest in the sport.

Widely known throughout New Zealand for the part he played in his continuous promotion of our wonderful sport, Stan became involved at Southland level soon after returning home after first encountering softball while serving in the Pacific Islands with the RNZAF.

Also about that time he began his wonderful partnership with wife Joyce

(Burgess) which ended just four years ago, and which saw both of them, plus all their family members, heavily involved in many aspects of softball, initially in Southland, but later in other parts of the country as well.

Stan never shirked any administrative duties, filling the roles of Southland President and Treasurer, but also recognised and advocated that for the standard of softball to improve at local level, coaching and umpiring was hugely important. He coached at many representative levels, took up umpiring and progressed to the highest NZ level, including international appointments, while at the same time still being involved in all aspects of his Panthers club and Southland administration.

A strong debater as a delegate to NZ Softball AGMs, he served on the NZ Council from 1959-63 (alongside wife Joyce for two of those years) before business commitments forced him to withdraw, and it was the undoubted leadership qualities the pair demonstrated which was instrumental in Southland being awarded many national tournaments and the province being regarded as a reliable tournament host at whatever level required.

Stan was one of the leaders of a multi sports group which firstly established the Surrey Park facility in Invercargill in the late 50s-early 60s and progressed to the establishment of the country's first permanent diamond still in operation which was opened in time for the 1962-63 Beatty Cup tournament and the later addition of the facilities which made it a complete ballpark. We acknowledge of course the earlier laying down of the Quinn family diamond at Benneydale in the 30s.

Stan was a fundraiser supreme as well, in addition to various other roles including publicity, a leading light in the Trojans Softball Club which undertook so many projects which bettered Southland softball, led the way in fundraising drives which ensured teams travelled to all parts of the country to give players exposure, and was always among the first to volunteer whatever task was needed to be undertaken.

A NZSA Distinguished Service Award holder, Stan was elected a Southland Life Member in 1977 and at the time of his death had been the association's Patron for 10 years. He was named as Southland Sports Administrator of the Year in 1964-65.

Stan didn't allow advancing years to limit his softball enjoyment and at the age of 88 he was still a regular on the sideline at Surrey Park last season as he followed the deeds of sons and grandchildren in the Panthers colours.

Earlier this year he absorbed almost every minute of the action as the Black Sox regained their world title at Albany, fittingly at a stadium his son Trevor and wife Janice had done so much to ensure would become a reality in time for such a great occasion.

Stan met old friends and no doubt made new ones during his 10 days in the Albany stands and there is no doubt his experiences there will have given him some wonderful memories to reflect on during the past few months as the life of one of our greatest softball legends wound down.

Southland softball will never be the same.

September 8, 2013