

Published October 8th, 2014

All About the Game

By A.K. Carroll



Alan Cupples (right) smiles with a fellow team member, Tom Thompson, at the ball field. Photo Stu Selland

For a man in his 70s, Alan Cupples is impressively active. "I get kidded by people who ask me 'What are you doing at your age playing ball?' And I say, 'What do you mean, I'm one of the young ones.'"

For a Missouri-native like Cupples, sports have always been a part of life. From track to football to diving to tennis, there aren't many things the man hasn't tried. "I did everything," Cupples said of his early experience in athletics. "As a kid, especially in the Midwest, that's just what we were a part of."

The man's love for the field of sports came through in his professional career as well. "I had a business that dealt with everyone," explained Cupples, who spent decades working in the tuxedo industry and ran special promotions for major sports teams. "I did it because it was good for business and it was just fun."

A longtime resident of Orinda, Cupples is now retired from the tuxedo industry and living in nearby Pleasant Hill where he has rekindled his love for America's favorite past time. "My background is not dramatically different than a lot of the guys," he said. "The guys that play are probably better than average athletes, but we have some that are not."

The one area where Cupples differs from his teammates is that he's fairly new. "I'm one of the few on the Pleasant Hill team who hasn't been around for 20 years or more," he said. Cupples is

also considered young. "We just had a catcher retire at 89," he stated. "Eight of the players on our team are in their 80s."

This is pretty standard for members of the Tri-Valley League, which currently includes slow pitch teams from Walnut Creek, Pleasant Hill, Concord and most recently Lamorinda. Cupples has been "a guerilla marketer" for the league and after holding an informational meeting on Sept. 16, it looks like the Lamorinda team is ready to play. Twenty-one members have already paid their fees and another six or seven have given verbal commitments.

"It is so gratifying to see and hear their excitement and joy to be out there playing a game they grew up with and never thought they would get the opportunity to play at this age," Cupples remarked.

Both the league and the team are all inclusive and open to anyone who might be interested. "We're hoping for varying degrees of talent," said Cupples. "We don't want superstars or it's not fun." He emphasized that the premise behind the league is camaraderie, not competition. "No one gets taken off the field unless they want to be." And no experience is necessary. "The youngest guy on [the Pleasant Hill] team had never played competitive ball before, but he's improved tremendously," Cupples noted.

This is not to say that the men who play aren't serious about their performance. "We can still hit pretty far," said Cupples, who painstakingly keeps track of his own batting average, even though the league doesn't keep official stats on its players.

But the league is for everyone. "A lot of them have had hip operations and knee replacements," Cupples acknowledged. He himself has recently made it through major foot surgery and a dislocated elbow. "I'm a wrecking ball, but I'm still out there playing ball because I enjoy it," he said with a smile.

Weather permitting there are 43 games each season, starting at 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday mornings. Practices are Mondays from 9 to 10:30 a.m. Teams break over the summer to accommodate for youth practices. There's an expectation members will commit to being an active part of the team and will attend as many games as possible. First-year start-up fees are estimated at \$50-55 per player, with fees in subsequent years being lower. Anyone interested in getting more information should contact Cupples at (925) 876-9974 or alkanije@aol.com (Include "Softball" in the subject line).

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