



★ A Ballplayer Is Missing ★

By DOYLE MAY

The life of one of Southern Oklahoma's most widely-known sports personalities — Vernon Straughn—was snuffed out last fall in an automobile wreck.

The tremendous impression the big guy from Wilson made on teammates, opponents and fans during his career is reflected in the following article submitted by Don Loftis, heir apparent to Straughn's title as the state's No. 1 softball pitcher.

Loftis, who is associated with an oil equipment firm near Countyline, competed against Straughn many times. We humbly turn this space over to him today for his fitting tribute to the late Wilson athlete:

There is someone missing on the softball scene this summer. His name is synonymous with the game of softball in Southern Oklahoma. That would be Vernon Straughn. For over 20 years, the big amiable guy dealt the opposing batsmen misery with his blazing pitches. Vernon was killed in a tragic automom-

bile accident near his home in Wilson.

Never one to complain, Vernon outpitched his opponent on the mound in countless games only to lose because of faulty fielding or poor play behind him. His would be only a chuckle or a good natured grin that hid the disappointment inside. But the other teams have always known his ability and shuddered to think of him playing on a great team. Of course, he played on some of the best.

Veteran softball observers will recall his sterling feats on the mound in the years gone by, especially during the 1946 and 1947 seasons with Chickasaw Lumber and Ardmore 7-Up. He and the great Tommy Reynolds teamed up to rip through the ASA State championship in Oklahoma City. The same two pitchers had opposed each other during the season and one of their games was a 19 inning duel that ended in a 0-0 tie allowing a girls' game to be played.

STRUCK OUT 47 MEN IN ONE GAME

Some think that Vernon mellowed with age, because in 1953, while pitching for Samedan Oil Co. in the Ardmore City League, he won a 19 inning, 1-0 game that saw 47 batters whiff at his "figure eight" style slants. Two nights later, he pitched for Thorn Chevrolet of Duncan in a Petrolia, Tex., Invitational against the top team in Wichita Falls and sent 19 more batters spinning at his pitches.

The story behind Vernon Straughn's fabulous pitching was a superb physique and everyday clean habits of living. At the age of 43, he pitched Bell Oil Co. of Ardmore, to the finals of the state tourney at Okmulgee. No, softball won't be the same without Vernon Straughn in Ardmore. His has been a glowing list of exploits in top softball.

A fair estimate would place his winnings in the neighborhood of 400 games during a 22 year span. In his prime, it was not uncommon to see Vernon work doubleheaders and as many as 5 games in as many days.

But the true greatness in the life of Vernon Straughn was not the great total of winnings, but more prevalent was the wonderful way in which he took defeat. He was always the first to console his own team mates. He never cast disparaging remarks about the play of team mates. He always was eager to help a young player start out pitching or batting. And there have been many who imitated his style.

A lot of the old playing mates of Vernon's will probably just throw their spikes away this year, because it just won't be the same without the big bronze skinned figure wheeling his familiar underhand slants through the strike zone.

For his was the day when softball was played at the peak of pitching perfection and only his strong right arm was the difference in the game. There will be a lot of balls thrown and bats swung before another player and gentleman the likes of Vernon Straughn's calibre comes along.