

On Monday, May 20th, the Henderson County Older Sluggers coached by Stan Steinberg and sponsored by **CAROLINA BLINDS** traveled to Tiger, Georgia to face the Rabun County Older Relics in a battle for first place in the 68+ Clayton League. Rabun County entered the games sporting an unblemished 4-0 record while the Older Sluggers record stood at 5-1. Rabun County is new to the 68+ League this year and is without a doubt the youngest team in the league with a core roster of fifteen players comprised of six 68-year-olds, a 69-year-old, two seventy-year-olds, five seventy-one-year-olds, and one true relic at seventy-six years old. The youth and size of Rabun County looked like it might be a problem as they easily scored five runs in the top of the first inning. However, the Older Sluggers responded with their own five-run inning to tie the game. With Don Ward on the mound working his magic, Henderson County managed to keep Rabun below the maximum in both the second and third innings while continuing to put up five runs in each of their at-bats. The Older Relics were able to stay within sight of the Older Sluggers but were never able to take the lead. Henderson County continued to score five runs in each inning until the bottom of the sixth when they were held to four. The Older Sluggers had a 29-22 lead entering the seventh inning and held the Older Relics to one run to take the 29-23 victory and hand Rabun County their first loss of the year. In the second game last week against Franklin, the Older Sluggers hit an impressive 0.897, pounding out 35 hits in 39 at-bats. In the opening game against Rabun County, Henderson County stepped it up even more with 36 hits in 39 at-bats for an amazing team batting average of 0.923.

Furthermore, the Older Sluggers pounded out eleven extra-base hits with two doubles, eight triples, and a home run. Leading the offensive charge with perfect games at the plate were Don Ward (4-4 with a triple), Jerry Austin (4-4 with three triples), Scott Searle (4-4), Tim Epley (4-4 with a triple), Jim Zitney (4-4 with a double), Rick Sweeney (3-3 with a walk), Gene Reiser (3-3 with two triples and a sacrifice fly), and David Keith (1-1 with two walks and a sacrifice fly). Also aiding the cause (but probably feeling bad for making an out) were Bob Drew (3-4 with a triple), Mark Hammer (3-4 with a home run), and Gary Warren (3-4 with a double). In game two, the team batting average for the Older Sluggers dropped all the way down to 0.814 as they rapped out 35 hits in 43 at-bats. There were eleven extra-base hits by Henderson County as they drilled six doubles, two triples, and three home runs in game two. Don Ward was again terrific on the mound as Henderson County rolled to a comfortable 24-8 flip-flop win over the Older Relics. Rabun County did hold a 6-5 lead after two innings of play when the Older Sluggers could not push across a run in the top of the second inning. However, over the next two innings, Rabun County did not score, while Henderson County was putting up five-run innings. Henderson County had six players with perfect offensive outings in the second game led by Bob Drew (4-4 with a double), Don Ward (4-4 with a double), Jim Zitney (4-4 with a double), Gene Reiser (4-4 with a double and a triple), David Keith (3-3 with a walk), and Mark Hammer (4-4 and hitting for the cycle with a single, double, triple, and home run). Four more players were nearly perfect led by Jerry Austin (3-4 with a double and home run), Rick Sweeney (3-4), Scott Searle (3-4), and Tim Epley (3-4 with a home run). With the pair of wins on the day, Henderson County moved to the top of the standings with a 7-1 record while Rabun County fell to second with a 4-2 record.

On Wednesday, May 22nd, the mixed 70+ Sluggers co-managed by Danny Davis and Andy Hinds and sponsored by **WNC FAMILY MEDICAL CENTER** welcomed the Lake Keowee Zenith to Jackson Park to open their season. With most everyone on the team contributing to the offensive output, the Henderson County mixed Sluggers rode the strong right arm of David Keith

to a 26-10 victory. Game two would not turn out to be lopsided at all even though the mixed Sluggers jumped out to a comfortable lead. David Keith went the first four innings on the mound, followed by Danny Davis and Marty Serafin in relief. Lake Keowee battled back from a large deficit to cut the margin to one run. With two runners on base and only one out, David Keith returned to the mound. With the game in the balance, Doug Miller made a great catch by snaring a line drive for the second out, and David retired the next batter on a strike-out to give the Sluggers a hard-earned 20-19 win. David Keith, in a rarity, not only picked up the win as the starting pitcher but also recorded a save by ending the game. Doug Miller not only made a game-saving catch but had a perfect day at the plate going 7-7 in leading a strong offensive effort by the entire team.

Next week the only team scheduled to see action will be the mixed 70+ Sluggers as they travel on Wednesday, May 29th to Sandy Andrews Park in Marion, NC to face the High Country squad from Boone.

The Henderson County Senior Softball League is always looking for new players age 50 and older (35 and older for ladies). Regular league games are normally played on Monday and Friday mornings at 9:30 on fields 8 and 9 at Jackson Park in Hendersonville. For additional information call 828-260-2130 or go to Henderson County Senior Softball at <https://hcssoftball.com>.