

**A brief history of the  
San Francisco Architects Engineers and Contractors Softball League  
Compiled by Dave Johnson of the Fearless Flying Anchovies**

**1978** The softball league evolved from an informal co-ed volleyball league, which had been formed by a few architecture / landscape architecture firms, including Anthony Guzzardo & Associates (now TGP), Fisher Friedman Associates (now the Anchovies) and Backen Arrigoni & Ross (now BAR Architects). Those firms decided to play a softball game and soon got the other volleyball league members involved in a weeknight summer softball league. Some of the other original firms included Sandy Babcock (now Brand X), Bull Field Volkman Stockwell, MBT, Marquis & Associates, HOK and SWA Group.

The original goal of the league was just to get some exercise, meet new people and have a good time, so the rules were kept as informal as possible - and basically have remained unchanged: co-ed (minimum of two women in the field), no umpires, no balls / strikes, catcher calls fair or foul balls, base coaches decide plays in the field.

**1980** By 1980 there were 18 teams playing on Thursday nights. Most games were held at the Polo Fields in Golden Gate Park. Many teams ended the evening by going out for pizza and \$2 pitchers of beer at the Front Room on Clement Street, where the occasional food fight was known to break out.

**1981** The league now had a name: “Designer Co-ed Softball Quasi-League” and 30 teams signed up to play, including some engineers and contractors. “North Beach Architects” was formed, later to become the North Beach Rockets.



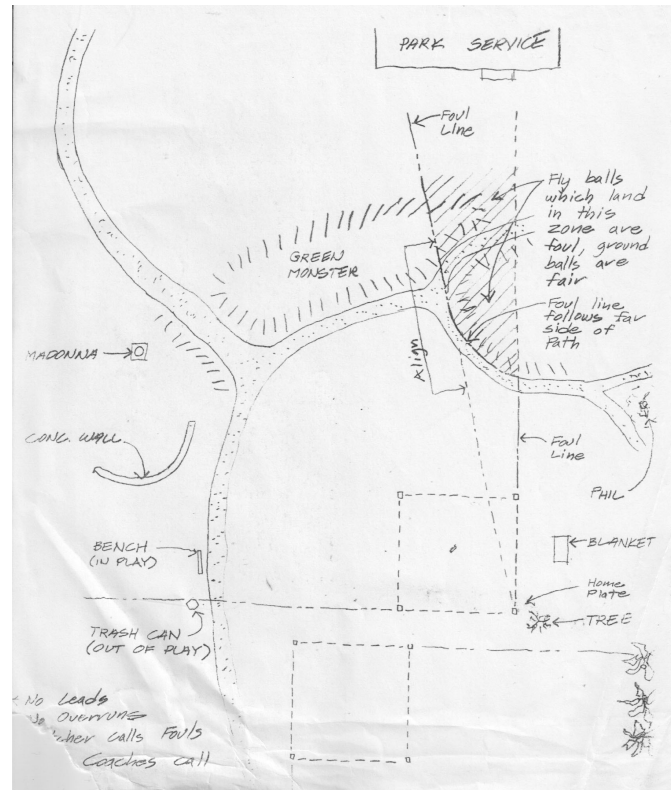
**1985** By this time, the league was going strong but playing fields were hard to come by. The Polo Fields had been declared off-limits for softball. Most games were now held on Wednesday and Thursday nights at the Great Meadow at Fort Mason. The four fields generally sloped up or down hill and had various obstructions, such



as palm trees, benches and players from adjacent games. Since reservations were not possible there, one person from each team had to stake out one of the fields – which meant arriving by 3 pm and hanging out for 3 hours. A fifth field was “created” on

the east side of the Meadow, and when a statue of Phil Burton was erected in right field, the foul line was adjusted to avoid the famous politician. However, the GGNRA was about to start clamping down on softball due to complaints from neighbors across Bay Street.

**1986** A formal letter from Superintendent Brian O'Neill officially closed Fort Mason to use as "playing fields", despite a major letter writing campaign by league members. However, architects are not so easily discouraged. Teams continued to use Fort Mason for ten more years before rangers finally began to actively and regularly enforce the new rules.



*Diagram of Field 5 at Fort Mason – Phil is on the right (drawn by Craig Edwards)*

**1990's** The league continued to prosper but two major problems remained unresolved. The scheduling of games was a total zoo, as team captains would begin calling other captains randomly sometime in March, which usually triggered two or three days of marathon phoning and call-backs, while teams tried to arrange their schedules.



The other problem was the increasing difficulty of finding fields – teams continued to use Fort Mason, but also started to play at Speedway Meadow in Golden Gate Park, as well as independently scheduling reserved fields with SF Park and Rec.

**1997** SF Rec and Park began to require permits at Speedway Meadow in Golden Gate Park, and Park Rangers regularly policed the park and stopped games. In response to these continuing difficulties with scheduling and field reservations, Luke Sheridan of Gensler volunteered to coordinate the field assignments for the league, including securing permits and dealing with SF Park and Rec as a league rather than on an individual team basis. Discussions were still being held with the National Park Service about using Fort Mason for 3 or 4 games a week. At a meeting of team captains after the season, a few rules were sanctioned, mostly to reduce the chance of injury – such as no sliding, permitting overrunning of bases, and the ten run mercy rule. Nancy Murphy of Team ETC agreed to secure permits for Speedway Meadow. Captains also agreed to hold a game-scheduling (and happy hour) session the following March to avoid the annual phone-a-thon. And for the first time, the possibility of post-season play-offs was discussed.

**2000** At a post-season wrap-up meeting held at the local AIA office, a formal league name was adopted: San Francisco Architects / Engineers / Contractors Softball League (SFAECSL). By this time there were 46 teams signed up for the league and it was becoming very difficult to find enough dates and fields for all teams. A resolution was passed to disqualify teams that did not fall under the “A/E/C” category. (The dot com crash soon eliminated this concern.)

This futuristic year also marked the beginning of an on-line schedule on the Sportability website with regular field assignments organized by League Administrator Luke Sheridan (aka “the Commissioner”). The ability to track team standings on Sportability made it possible to hold both “competitive” and – for those who prefer the original who-cares league spirit – “non-competitive” playoffs. SF Rec and Park continued to clamp down on the use of Speedway Meadow for softball, so the League began scheduling most games at regulation Rec and Park softball fields throughout the City, which resulted in the requirement for teams to pay field fees.

**Now** The League ranges between 28 to 36 teams with its own website [www.sfaecsl.com](http://www.sfaecsl.com) which lists the schedule, league playoff champions going back to 2003, and League rules intended to make softball safer, more fun and more inclusive. The League also continues to use [www.sportability.com/sfaec](http://www.sportability.com/sfaec) for game schedules, score reporting, and even batting statistics. Come out for a few games and keep the tradition going!

