

SPORTS BARREL



photo by Scott Meyers

Sluggo Sean Hartigan swings away during the Last Steep Bombers opening day victory over Irwin Lodge.

Slowpitch softball is underway

Rainbow Park to be renamed Tommy Villanueva Field

by **Than Acuff**

By order of the Crested Butte Town Council at their meeting on Monday night, it was decreed that Rainbow Park, the field adjacent to the Crested Butte Community School, would be renamed Tommy Villanueva Field. A fitting memory to a friend and member of the community who spent summers driving softballs over the fences of every Crested Butte softball field for the Idle Spur men's team and Talk of the Town coed team.

Plus, the timing could not have been more perfect as the 2002 Crested Butte softball season opened Monday evening.

That's right, Crested Butte softball is back and better than ever with 18 teams split between the two different coed leagues, recreational and competitive.

Let me start by saying that in my extensive now, six years! Wait a minute, six years? Upon this revelation, I can't help but think of that opening scene in *Apocalypse Now* when Martin Sheen is staring at the ceiling fan and says,

"Saigon. S—t, I'm still in Saigon."

For me, it goes something like this as I sit in front of my computer with the "Trucker's Speed" taking hold at 3 a.m. and my desk plant is spinning in front of me.

"Softball. S—t, I'm still covering softball."

Anyway, as I was saying, in my six years of covering local softball, I've never seen so many teams actually "practicing" prior to opening day. Last weekend, I saw one team circled around a guy who was demonstrating the proper form for fielding ground balls. You know, bend the knees, shoulders square, glove on the ground, the whole bit. Literally, the same thing you see on those Tom Emanski School of Baseball ads with Fred McGriff.

By the way, if you are playing softball and you went as far as to order the instructional

video. STOP! Not only have you lost focus of what coed softball in Crested Butte is really about, and we all know what it's really about, but you'll more than likely injure yourself trying to perform the drills. Getting hurt playing softball I can understand. Getting hurt practicing softball is downright pathetic.

On a different day, I witnessed what appeared to be a "manager" giving some sort of opening pep talk to the team after which they dispersed to their respective positions as hit-

home plate that you are supposed to cross instead, "the safety line," to avoid any possibility of collision. I'd explain the rule but I did so last week and still people are confused.

"I even read it in the paper and I still don't understand it," said one player.

Let the ump tell you. But, at its most simple level, it goes like this: don't touch home plate!

I agree with Sean Hartigan of the Last Steep Bombers. It does take something away from coming home when you can't stomp on the plate.

Anyway, the game. It wasn't until the second inning that things got rolling. Irwin shortstop Tom Rutherford led off the top of the second with a single and scored when wife Jessica Rutherford looped a double to shallow right. Graham Roberts knocked Jessica in with a triple and then scored on another base hit. Liz Sawyer drove in a fourth Irwin run on a power bunt and the team was rolling. Luckily, Bomber third baseman Lisa Sacco was able to stop the bleeding when she charged on a grounder and made the tag to end the



Bomber Ryan Loflin

four run rally. The Bombers came back in the bottom of the inning as Adam Christ drove in two runs with some risky hit-and-run tactics and another Bombers run came across, the safety line, to close the Irwin lead to one.

The Bombers took the lead in the bottom of the third inning and then blew the game wide open in the bottom of the fourth with a seven run rally to give them a 14-5 lead.

Irwin reeled the Bombers back in during the fifth inning with key base hits from Kari Roberts and Liz Sawyer, capped by a three run inside the park home run by Mark Sawyer to pull Irwin within three.

The Irwin comeback merely fueled the Bomber fire as they tacked four more on in the bottom of the fifth to go up 18-11 before the game was called due to time.

Inside the park home runs, strikeouts, solid third basemen and a new softball rule. Oh yeah, beer, sunflower seeds and cigars. It's good to be back in the bleachers. See you out there and, I know, "Dude, you should've been there."