

# NOMINATION FORM



125

Nominee Larry Sillanpa Birth date 4-27-48

Address 5434 Upstad St. City/State Duluth, MN Zip 55810

Softball Community where major accomplishments were achieved Duluth

Is that softball community's program currently affiliated with the MSF, the MN Softball Hall of Fame Administrator/Custodian? ☒ Yes ☐ No

Home Phone (218) 624-2391 Cell Phone ( )

Email Address lsillanpa@gmail.com

Check the Nomination Category: ☒ Superior Performance

☐ Meritorious Service

☐ Pioneers of Yesterday

Check all that apply:

☒ Player

☐ Manager/Coach

☐ Promoter

☐ Administrator

☐ Umpire

☐ Sponsor

Check all that apply:

☒ Fastpitch

☐ Modified Pitch

☐ Slowpitch

Nominated by Don Olson Date of Nomination Dec 25-2024  
(if a relative, must have a seconding nomination by non-relative)

Address 3000 Hughitt Ave City/State Superior Zip WI 54880

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Seconding Nomination Name \_\_\_\_\_

- CONTINUED ON REVERSE/NEXT PAGE -



Only year I remember is 1978 when I was 13-3 and batted .32.  
**Nominee's Personal Stats**  
I started out as an all-star shortstop in the late 1960s age, playing in the men's league starting in 1964. I became a pitcher under duress and perfected a drop ball to stay on the mound and be competitive. In a 30+ year career I played every position which made me a very good fielding pitcher. I loved to run the bases until the coach designated hitter replaced me so I wouldn't get hurt (comp the D).

**Nominee's Personal Accomplishments** I was MVP of the MN State Tournament in 1992, an MVP in Thunder Bay and Chippewa Falls WI. I was picked up to pitch by many teams including Stewart-Taylor, Thunder Bay (beat S-T in ISC, a just for the Canadians), White Bear Lake (ISC) and Geneva among others.

**Nominee's Team Accomplishments** Played on 5 state championship teams: 1978 Superior Cement Products; 1988 Rustic Ben (beat Stewart-Taylor in back to back title games, they won national title later); 1990, 92, 94 Instate Spur/VCS. We played in national tournaments in Sacramento (CA), Salem, Ore., Las Vegas, MN, ND, and Fargo.

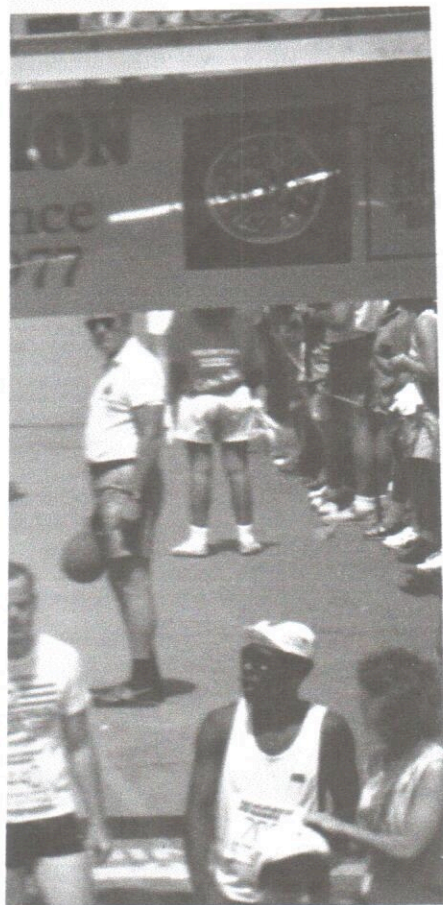
- ATTACH ADDITIONAL SHEET IF NECESSARY -

Attach a one or two page narrative, as you would want their bio read at the nominee's potential induction ceremony. Provide pertinent accomplishments of nominee in city, district, state, regional or national competition. (See reverse side for sample bio). Also, attach newspaper clippings, letters of reference or other forms of documentation. Include statistical information in the bio.

Send to: Minnesota Softball Hall of Fame Committee • 118 12th Ave. N. • South St. Paul, MN 55075  
(651) 451-3140

DEADLINE FOR SENDING THIS NOMINATION IS JUNE 1





GRANDMA'S MARATHON  
June 11, 1988  
Marathon Foto



Softball 1988

# Rustic wins state title

MANKATO, Minn. — Rustic Bar of Duluth beat Stewart-Taylor of Duluth 3-2 and 9-6 Sunday to win the Minnesota state Class A fast-pitch softball tournament.

Rustic won seven straight games in the loser's bracket to advance to the championship game. Larry Sillanpa was the winning pitcher in seven of Rustic's nine tournament victories. He pitched a no-hitter, a one-hitter and two two-hitters.

Kevin Hendrickson had four hits in the championship game and finished with 14 for the weekend. Denny Davis, Roger Plachta and Brett Hull each added two hits in the final. One of Hull's was a home run.

Rustic qualified for the national tournament in Fargo, N.D. Stewart-Taylor will play in a Class A regional tournament next weekend in Duluth.

Michael Light of Duluth de-

OVER



Bruce Bennett

# Rustic's pitcher blossoms at 40

Larry Sillanpa completed his first marathon run this year in Grandma's. He also broke 80 on the golf course for the first time. And next week he'll pitch in his first national tournament when he and his Rustic Bar teammates from Duluth head for Fargo, N.D., for the Amateur Softball Association Class A fast pitch competition. For Sillanpa, sporting life is indeed blossoming at age 40.



Larry Sillanpa

"I've always dreamed about getting to the nationals, ever since I was a kid," he said. "I've been playing 20 years and thinking about it most of the time. It's funny how things happen. Most of us on the team didn't think much about it this season, but now here we are, going."

Rustic won the Minnesota championship Aug. 14 in Mankato to qualify

directly for the nationals, bypassing last weekend's northern regional in Duluth. Rustic won eight of nine games, coming through the loser's bracket by winning seven straight after dropping its second game in the double-elimination event. Sillanpa was 6-0 at Mankato, including pitching a no-hitter, a one-hitter and two two-hitters.

"It was the best state tournament I've ever had — by far," said Sillanpa.

"I've played with and against Larry for the past 18 years," said Rustic player-manager Ernie Conito Jr. "He probably doesn't have the notoriety or talent of some of the pitchers we've had around here, but nobody has more guts. This is the best I've ever seen him pitch.

"We beat some pretty good teams along the way at Mankato — Scandia, which won the regional last weekend, and Stewart-Taylor of Duluth twice, among them. Both those teams will also be going to the nationals."

**MOST PITCHERS** worry about their arms, but Sillanpa says his feet have been the key to his recent success. "I've never, ever really had any arm

Please see **Bennett**, Page 3C



# Bennett: Sillanpa leads Rustic Bar to nationals

8-25-88

From Page 1C

trouble," he said. "I get an occasional sore back, but I learned long ago that no matter what you do, you use major muscles.

"The only thing I've done different this year was to change shoes. I'd been watching these power pitchers and they look like tractors out there, the way they dig in. I'm not a power pitcher, but I figured I could use more traction.

"I'd been using a turf spike, so I went to a more cleated shoe. I think it helped all my mechanics. They were suffering because I was slipping and sliding. When you're a finesse pitcher like me, sometimes it comes and goes. You struggle with it and find something that works and stick with it."

The switch in footwear boosted his confidence, Sillanpa said. "I told Ernie before we went to Mankato that I was ready," he said. "We'd been struggling a bit, not playing real well, not getting games in. I just felt ready and I knew it.

"I'm a little bit like Allan Anderson of the Twins. He pitches my kind of game, changing speeds, hopefully just walking one or two, maybe none. My infielders love me. With my dropball, I get a lot of grounders. So I love infielders. They're my bread and butter and we've got a great infield."

Rustic's infield is the cornerstone of the team, Conito says, with veterans Red Nelson at first

base and Denny Davis at second, and a left side of shortstop Mike Sather and third baseman Roger Plachta. "I keep them busy," Sillanpa acknowledged.

**SILLANPA**, a construction laborer, has come a long way and played on a lot of teams since he began pitching on the Merritt School playground as a kid. George Moore, the playground director there who played for Norman's Bar in the City AA league, got Sillanpa started throwing and playing shortstop.

He was playing for Somebody's House at Wheeler Field when the pitcher threw a couple against the backstop one day. "The guy called time and called me in from short, handed me the ball and said, 'Here, you pitch.' That was 1971 and I have been pitching ever since," Sillanpa said.

And he's seen some changes in the game through the years: "When I was playing for Grussendorf Nursery in the old Skyline League, instead of numbers on our jerseys, we had items they had for sale at the nursery. I was apples," he laughed.

He gravitated to the AA league and pitched many years for the Paul Bunyan. For the last six summers, he and many of his current teammates have been with Rustic teams. "There are fewer and fewer teams today, but the guys who want to play are still playing, so the competition is still pretty good," he said.

"Years ago, we had teams made up of guys who lived within two miles of each other. Now we've got guys who grew up all over the state playing on one team. We've got Brett Hull from Canada on ours. The old-timers will tell you we're no better than they were, but they'll also say in every other sport athletes are better today than ever.

"We've got some great athletes on this team. Hull. Kevin Hendrickson's our best hitter. Davis. Red Nelson's still going past 50. These guys don't have to take a back seat to anyone."

**RUSTIC BAR** will take a 35-10 record to Fargo. "Like Larry, most of us have never been to a nationals before and we figured maybe Father Time had caught up with us and passed us by, so winning the state was kind of a surprise," Conito acknowledged. Still, he figures his team has a chance there.

Stewart-Taylor was runner-up

in the nationals three years ago, a real shot-in-the-arm for Minnesota softball. "We think we match up pretty well with them. We've split eight games this year," Conito said. "The top teams at nationals traditionally are from California, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Minnesota. If we get a good draw, who knows?"

The tournament runs next Wednesday through Labor Day. Ron Fetsch, who beat Scandia in the state semifinals, is Rustic's other regular pitcher, and the team has picked up Tony Price of Wabasso, Minn., for the nationals.

"I hope we go far enough so all of them have a chance to pitch," said Conito. "Price was the only pitcher who beat us at the state, plus he has been to the nationals before. So we're going in with three strong arms."

Bennett is associate sports editor of the News-Tribune.



# THE STRONG ARM TACTICS

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OF

## LARRY SILLANPA

By GUY HANSON

Larry Sillanpa doesn't think he's reached his peak yet as a fastpitch thrower, although Twin Ports Fastpitch League batters can't imagine the 33-year-old Paul Bunyan chucker getting much tougher than he has been this summer.

Sillanpa, who is enjoying his finest personal season in his 12 years of competitive pitching, led Paul Bunyan to a third-place tie in the Twin Ports league.

"I don't feel like I've made it as far as I can as a pitcher," said Sillanpa, who has pitched a perfect game, and a no-hitter this summer and chalked up 26 victories. "But this is my best season yet. I still feel I have a lot more to learn. I can still improve."

Sillanpa, who has thrown two perfect games in his career, has made his greatest improvement in the past five years, when Paul Bunyan has been near the top of the league each season.

Sillanpa, his teammates agree, is the primary reason for their success.

"He's (Sillanpa) practically the whole team," said batterymate Jerry Hill, who has caught the hard-throwing righthander for the past five seasons. "Pitching is so much a part of the game of fastpitch. When you have a guy like him, who can throw five games on a weekend, he's got to be an asset to the team."

Sillanpa, a 1966 Denfeld grad, played in the shadows of veteran Don Olson for the past few years. But Olson, who formerly pitched for Midway Bar of Duluth, now hurls for All-American Bar of Minneapolis. Now, Sillanpa and Midway Bar's Lonnie Gray are the league's top throwers, although Sillanpa may have a slight edge in overall talent.

"I would say that he's (Sillanpa) as good as anyone around," said Hill. "He has four pitches that he throws for strikes. And his biggest asset may be that he throws strikes, averaging only about one walk every 21 innings."

Sillanpa threw mostly drop balls during his first few seasons with Bunyan, but developed a riser and changeup out of necessity.

"The batters knew what to look for against me," he said. "I had to go with a longer leg kick, which helps me to get a longer arm extension and more velocity on the ball. I've also worked hard in the past few years to

It has always been that way, and it will probably always be—that's the way they like it in the West End and West Duluth. Tough kids.

Sillanpa also mixes in a knuckleball, just to "keep 'em guessing," he said.

Twin Ports batters have played the guessing game against Sillanpa all season, however, few teams have been able to figure him out.

"I'm not looking at picking up that much more ability, just get a little craftier," said Sillanpa.

Sillanpa also concentrates on keeping his cool on the mound, an important part of becoming a winning pitcher. "I've had a problem with keeping my poise out there in the past," he confessed. "But you can't let yourself get too far down with the wins and losses during the season."

Sillanpa started pitching competitively in 1971 and has played with the same group of guys throughout his career. For one season, though, Sillanpa pitched on with Superior Cement Products, where he posted a 13-3 record for the State Class AA champions in 1978.

But a year later Sillanpa was back with his old teammates. "I made a commitment to play with these guys, and I felt I should stick with my word," he said. "I enjoy playing with this group."

Sillanpa would like nothing better than to lead his Paul Bunyan club to a state championship. Paul Bunyan has never played well at state, but the potential to is there, Sillanpa said.

Sillanpa hopes to pitch around 50 games this summer, anymore, he says, could lead to injury. "A finger injury is bad enough for a fastpitch pitcher, but a back injury, for example, could be horrible," he said.

Sillanpa's biggest advantage over opposing batters is his competitiveness. "When he gets in trouble he really bears down," Hill said. "He's such a competitor; He'll do anything to win a ballgame, like throwing his body in front of the ball if he has to. He's such a competitor."

Sillanpa also is thought to be the area's top defensive pitchers. In fact, he is so agile around the mound that Paul Bunyan infielders allow Sillanpa to field bunts, which permits the third baseman and first baseman to lay back.

"He's the best fielding pitcher I've ever seen," Hill said. "And I've seen an awful lot of Minnesota and Wisconsin teams during my career."



# Interstate Spur set to defend state title

**T**hank goodness it's Saturday so Larry Sillanpa can be outside. It should save him the bumps and bruises he'd get if confined indoors — where he'd be bouncing off the walls.

"I've really been looking forward to this all week," said Sillanpa, referring to the Minnesota state Class A fast-pitch softball tournament starting today in Duluth. His Interstate Spur team meets Millroad Inn of Stillwater in its opener at 12:30 p.m. at Emanuel Field in Woodland.

"Just thinking about it makes me feel good," Sillanpa said. "I told somebody Monday, 'This is the greatest week of the year,' and they said, 'What's wrong with you? How can you be so happy on a Monday?' I said, 'Hey, it's state tournament week.'"

State tournament week has been good to Sillanpa in recent years. The 45-year-old pitcher helped Interstate to its third state title in five years last August in Mankato and the year before that Interstate was second. The team also won the Class B title in 1990, and in '88 won the A title as Rustic Bar.

His club is 28-4, not many games for most teams, but "it's a lot for us because we got rained out so much and we didn't travel to any tournaments," he said.

"For a bunch of guys who don't play that much, we've had a lot of success. It makes us hungry and excited when we get to the state tournament. We've got a focused group of guys — we know how to



**Irv Mossberger**

get the game faces on."

That includes fellow pitcher Corey Thomas, who Sillanpa calls "our big thrower. He's a big, powerful, intimidating guy. He's a hard thrower and a little wild and probably the worst guy in the world to catch, which means he's not a good guy to bat against."

"Me, I don't throw so hard," Sillanpa said. "I just throw it up there and hope for a grounder. We have totally different styles."

Other local teams in the tournament are Foster Trucking of Duluth and Michelob of International Falls, who meet at 9 a.m. at Minnesota-Duluth's Junction Avenue Field. Security Pacific Financial of Duluth plays Perkins of St. Paul at 10:45 at Wheeler.

The state Class B tournament is being played concurrently and like the A tournament is a 16-team double elimination affair. La-Bounty's of Carlton meets Wanda at 9 a.m. at Woodland in that one.

Games are scheduled through 9 p.m. today and resume at 8:30 a.m. Sunday. Championship games in both classes are set for 3:30 p.m. Sunday, with a second game at 5:15 if the team from the loser's bracket wins.

## Interstate Spur stays unbeaten at state tourney

News-Tribune

**ST. PAUL** — Clayton Kerr and Ron Puig had two hits apiece Saturday night as Interstate Spur-VCS beat Moose Lodge of Sioux Falls, S.D., and remained unbeaten in the American Softball Association Class A fast-pitch tournament.

Larry Sillanpa was the winning pitcher for Interstate Spur, which advanced to today's 11:30 a.m. semifinals.

Interstate Spur won its first game Saturday 4-3 over the Sioux Falls Chiefs as Kerr's double in the bottom of the seventh inning scored Kevin Hendrickson. Cory Thomas pitched a five-hitter for Interstate Spur, which trailed 3-1 entering the bottom of the seventh.

## LOCAL BEAT 9-4-94

**Interstate Spur wins:** Larry Sillanpa allowed one hit and struck out 10 Saturday afternoon as Interstate Spur-VCS of Duluth defeated Bryan Jensen Clothing of St. Paul, Neb., 10-0 in the Class A national men's fast-pitch softball tournament in Salem, Ore.

Mike Thomas and Clayton Kerr added two-run hits for Interstate Spur.

Corey Thomas threw a one-hit shutout as Interstate Spur beat Intersect Systems of Longview, Wash., 8-0 to win its second game Saturday. Jim Olson hit a three-run home run and Kerr had two hits, including a home run, and two RBIs.

## LOCAL BEAT 8-23-94

**Spur takes title:** Interstate Spur-VCS won the Midwest Regional Fast-Pitch Softball Tournament with a 3-1 victory over Kegeo Sign of Fargo, N.D. on Sunday at St. Paul.

Clayton Kerr won the game with a two-run home run in the bottom of the 10th inning. Winning pitcher Larry Sillanpa went the distance, throwing a five-hitter while striking out 17. Ron Puig was 8-for-11 on the weekend as Interstate won all four of its games in the tournament.

With the regional win, Interstate Spur qualified for the ASA Class A National Fast-Pitch Tournament over Labor Day Weekend at Salem, Ore.

## Interstate Spur moves to regional

VCS-Interstate Spur of Duluth plays the Sioux Falls Chiefs at 11:30 a.m. today at Dunning Field in St. Paul in the Amateur Softball Association's Class A fast-pitch regional playoffs.

The regional winner goes to the national tournament in Salem, Ore., Labor Day weekend.

Interstate went 18-0 in winning the Woodland league title this year and is 37-12 overall behind pitchers Larry Sillanpa (19-4, 2.25 earned run average) and Corey Thomas (17-8, 1.90 ERA). Paul Friesen has five saves.

Left fielder Randy Hill leads the team in hitting with a .537 average, while third baseman Jim Olson is batting .510.

First baseman Mike Thomas leads the team in home runs with 10 and has driven in 34 runs; he's batting .485. Second baseman Clayton Kerr is batting .483 with 33 RBI and nine homers. Catcher Brad Emanuel leads in runs scored with 31 runs and is hitting .472.

The other team members are outfielders Scott Bloom, Kevin Hendrickson, Jeff Emanuel, and Ron Puig; infielders Mike Morrissey and Dave Liteke; catcher Scott Lord; and utility men Pete Cieluch and Craig Freirecks. Skip Winkler

OVER



# ARM of STEEL

At 47, Duluth pitcher  
Larry Sillanpa is  
still going strong  
in fast-pitch softball

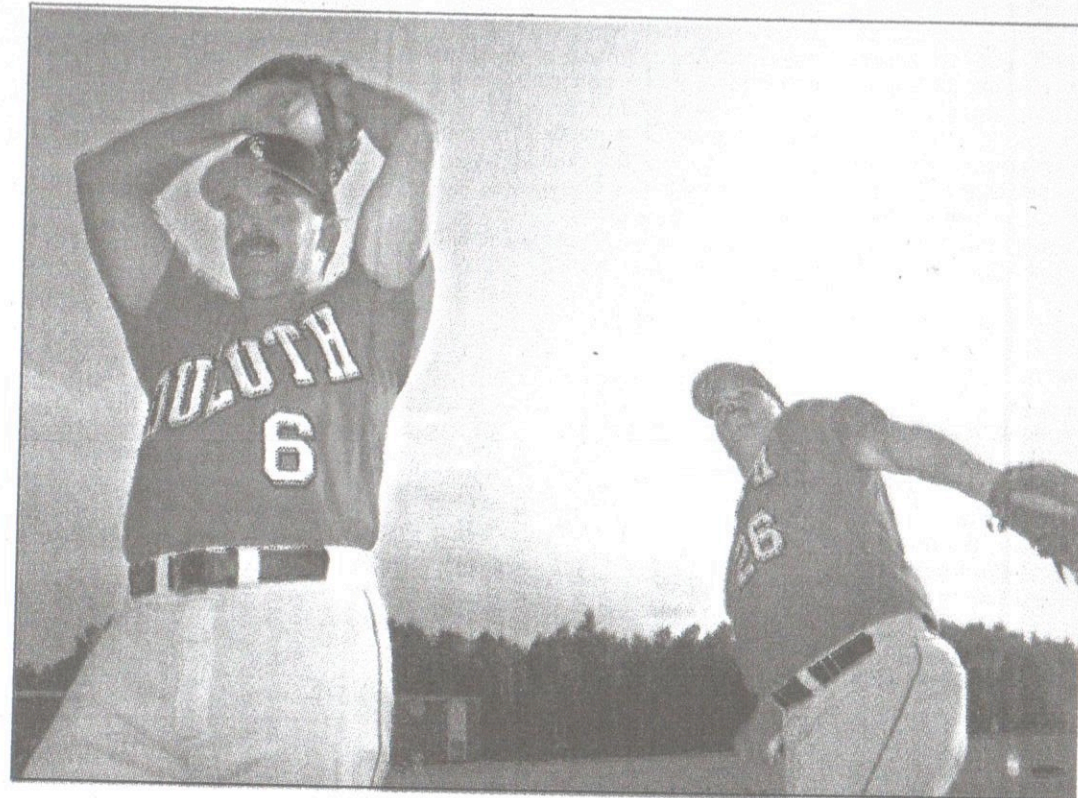
By Irv Mossberger  
News-Tribune staff writer

By the time baseball pitchers reach age 47, they are no longer pitchers.

They've long since turned their weary arms to less-strenuous activities like casting lures and swinging at golf balls.

But that's baseball. In fast-pitch softball, 47-year-old Larry Sillanpa not only has been getting his share of innings, he's pitched his Interstate Spur-VCS team into the Class A national tournament.

That tournament starts today in Minot, N.D. Last weekend, he pitched for Geneva, Minn., in the Over-40 national tournament



Josh Meltzer/Ne

Pitchers Larry Sillanpa (left) and Cory Thomas are heading to the national fast-pitch softball tournament with Interstate Spur-VCS of Duluth.

in Bloomington, Minn.

Interstate is 45-20 this year, and Sillanpa has pitched about two-thirds of those games. That's more than he'd normally throw. But an injury to Spur's other pitcher, Cory Thomas, and a season-ending injury to Paul Friesen of Bemidji, Minn., who is picked up by the team for tournaments, shifted a big burden onto Sillanpa's shoulders.

Sillanpa, managing editor of Labor World, has responded like mild-mannered newspaper reporter Clark Kent's alter ego. By the way, Jimmy Olson is the team's third baseman. Hmm.

"I've thrown most all of the games the last two months," said Sillanpa. "I've been pitching for more than 30 years, and I've found out he's not Superman."

"It's been a rough year for me. I've pitched five games on a weekend, and have had to hold of a chiropractor to get my shoulder put back in place."

Fortunately, Cory Thomas happened to be a chiropractor. Normally, he'd do the share of pitching but a leg injury he suffered in June led to problems in his throwing side when he tried to control the ball.

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# Softball: Sillanpa keeps pitching

From Page 1C

for the injury.

Still, his contributions as a chiropractor have helped keep Sillanpa up and throwing.

"He sees me and some others. We try to keep his frame in shape as much as we can and keep him going at a ripe old age," said Thomas, 31.

His brother, team manager and first baseman Mike Thomas, said Sillanpa "did a yeoman's job for us this year. He had to pitch a lot of games — too many for a guy his age."

Sillanpa points out he is far from being even the oldest pitcher in the Woodland League, which has veterans like Dale Swenson, Chuck Walczak, Doug Cameron, Jim Liebaert and, when his back allows, Don Olson.

"The way fast-pitch is going, we're waiting for the younger guys to show up," he said.

But if he isn't the oldest, he's certainly one of the most successful. This will be his fifth straight national tournament trip.

"He's by far the best of the older pitchers," said Cory Thomas. "He's in tremendous physical shape, he runs and he takes care of himself. He looks like he could be 30."

Sillanpa has the energy of someone that age and his 190 pounds are well-distributed on his 5-8 frame. He was married last year and he and his wife, Jennifer, are building a house. It's the first marriage for both and softball isn't separating them. She travels with him to the many weekend tournaments Interstate plays.

It's at tournaments, Sillanpa said, where other teams remind him and his teammates of their ages.

"Every place we go, the other teams say, 'there's the old guys.' You look at our team, the Clayton Kerrs, they're in their mid-30s, but to the other teams they are the old guys. I'm the guy they get frustrated with and they wonder why they can't beat the old guy," Sillanpa said.

One reason they can't, said Cory Thomas, is that Sillanpa uses his head.

"What's kept him around so long is he's smart. He never throws a gut shot (down the middle). He moves it around, keeps it on the corners and changes speeds. He uses location, like a lot of veterans in the major leagues.

"a very good rise, or a very good drop or very good changeup."

He said he tries to get hitters to hit grounders, and relies on the Interstate defense to do the rest.

Sillanpa said he also doesn't throw the ball very hard, and that opponents think the same thing.

"That's the first thing I hear," he said. "I've got big ears and every time I start throwing I hear the guys tell the next guy: 'Now wait on it.' Then I think, 'Here, wait on this,' and I try to pop a few."

That's one reason Cory Thomas calls Sillanpa "the most competitive pitcher I've ever seen; he never says die, never says quit. He tries to coax the most out of the team he can. I think he's learned how to do that over the years."

Cory Thomas, who is back in the lineup for the nationals, said he's learned from Sillanpa the importance of the game's mental aspects. But Sillanpa says he knows that can go only so far, especially in the stiff competition the nationals will offer.

"I'm the kind of horse they ride when they're out tending fences," he said. "When it's time for the big show, it's Cory's turn."

However, Mike Thomas said Sillanpa will see his share of pitching time in the nationals, which run through Labor Day, because the team could play 10 to 12 games and as many as four in one day.

As many tournaments as Sillanpa has made, including those to nationals at Las Vegas, Sacra-

mento, and Oregon, he says "it's still fun to go. It always is. There's nothing better than when you're playing the best competition."

He said he also realizes there might not be too many chances left to do so.

"Baseball is for little boys that never grew up," Sillanpa said, coming close to wistfulness. "Then somewhere along the line we turn into Old Man River."

Until this year, he said, he never thought much about life after softball.

"Now, I do think about it," he said. "I'd love to get into golfing a lot more, but you can't fish and golf and play softball, too."

"But this spring, at our first practice, it was a cold night and I was in center field shagging balls, and for the first time it crept into my mind: 'You've seen this movie before.' I started wondering how much longer I'd do it."

Of course, eventually Sillanpa will have to give up the ball, but Cory Thomas doesn't think that'll be anytime soon.

"I don't know how long he wants to keep going, but he's got another 10 years left in him, at least," he said.

■ ■ ■

Interstate Spur-VCS national roster:

Pitchers: Larry Sillanpa, Cory Thomas; catchers: Brad Emanuel, Roger Plachta; first base: Mike Thomas; second: Clayton Kerr; third: Jim Olson; short: Mike Morrissey; outfield: Mike Petrich, Jeff Emanuel, Ron Puig; designated hitter: Kevin Hendrickson; utility: Scott Lord, Scott Bloom.

## Duluth-Superior Dukes Professional Baseball



vs. *Sioux Falls Canaries*

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday

Game Times: 7:05 PM,

Gates open at 6:00 PM

Happy Hour: 6:00 to 6:45 Beer only \$1.00

078558