



Personal Best Athlete Profile

Bill Altman, 82

San Antonio, Texas

Senior softballer proves “If you build it, they will come”

When Bill Altman retired from his Air Force career, he was itching for something to do to keep moving. He had played baseball in high school, fast pitch softball at the University of Michigan and had even spent a year on the Air Force all star softball team. But after flying missions over Vietnam and starting a family, he had not found time for sports. When he learned about senior games having softball, he found some guys his age to make up a team. It was fun and he wanted to play more. But there were no other senior teams in San Antonio.



Bill Altman changed all that. He and his team found more players, and the [San Antonio Senior Softball League](#) was founded in 1987. He is still its chairman and primary advocate. The league obtained old fields from the city and fixed them up with money they raised. Today there are hundreds of seniors from every walk of life that are sharing the love of baseball and staying fit for life. The league has a plan to expand to a modern complex that will meet their growing needs and can host regional tournaments to bring in tourism. In addition to managing, playing and running the league, Altman has participated in state and national senior games in softball, tennis and track and field events. He’s also been inducted into the Texas Senior Softball Hall of Fame. Along the way he has maintained his Personal Best and helped thousands of others do the same.

How did the San Antonio Senior Softball League begin?

The whole effort started because of the state senior games in San Antonio in 1987. I had not played softball since I went into the Air Force and thought it would be a good thing to see what it was all about. We formed a team and it was fun. But at the time there weren’t any senior softball teams to play against in San Antonio and it was frustrating. But we worked at it and got a few teams going and it just grew from there.

Finding places to play has always been a challenge. We were using a city field when it was available. When the teams grew we moved over to Our Lady of the Lake University with a field we could use all the time. After five years they started a women’s softball team and told us we had to move out. So we went back to the city and they gave us a couple of fields that had not been in use at Normoyle Park. We converted them into two first-class regulation softball fields with about \$50,000 of our own money.

We now have over 500 men on 30 teams playing in five leagues each year. It’s one of the largest local organizations in the country now. The league has been growing exponentially. The more guys we have, the more we attract. Our players are from every walk of life and ethnicity in the city.

Some men think they aren’t good enough to be on a team. Our motto is “No Player Left Behind” and we try to put everyone on a team regardless of skill level. It’s been 98 percent successful and the players usually improve a lot once they get going. But it’s just about going out and doing it. When a guy eeks out a single it can be the most significant thing that’s happened for him in some time. Everyone enjoys their participation.



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Why did the San Antonio Senior Softball League become such a mission for you?

I felt it was the way to go for physical and mental fitness. It was keeping me in shape and I thought others were missing out on this. There was nobody over 60 playing in town back then but our team went out and found more guys with a little friendly persuasion. I remember seeing people our age in the stands watching us and I'd ask them to come join us. At first they weren't willing to try it but eventually some of them did. Some turned out to be pretty good players too! A lot of people are reluctant to try, but once they do you can't pull them away from it.

Plus, I have baseball in my blood. My whole dream in life from the age of ten was to be a major league baseball player. I grew up in Detroit and I used to usher at Detroit Tiger games and wiped off seats for a quarter. But watching the game was the big thing - rooting for guys like Birdie Tebbetts, Hank Greenberg and Rudy York was a thrill.

What plans does the league have to meet ongoing demand?

We have a detailed \$2.7 million proposal to build a softball complex at Normoyle Park with four fields so we can have plenty of room and can host tournaments. This would be good for the citizens and for tourism. I just came back from a tournament in Georgetown and they had four fields running steady from Thursday through Sunday. That's a lot of visitors coming to town.

It's been an uphill battle trying to get the city to give us what we need. There is a half billion dollar bond issue of which \$50 million is for parks. They only allocated \$500,000 for our park and that was for all of the repairs and amenities, not for softball fields. They seem to have made their minds up on what they want to support and our plan isn't one of them. We haven't given up and we're still fighting for it. Cities like San Antonio need to get onboard and provide the facilities, and not third class facilities, to help seniors stay fit. That's the battle we've been fighting.

How do you motivate others?

I just try to be an example, even to people younger than I am. I say keep fit, stay active if you want to grow old - physically and mentally. I want to know who made up "the old fogey rule." There's no reason for people in their '50s, '60s, '70s and up to give up sports. There's always something you can do.

I started the San Antonio Senior Softball League in 1987 because my team couldn't find other guys our age to play in town. We now have over 500 players from 50 on up to their '80s having fun and keeping fit playing ball. I guess being motivated myself got others to be motivated too.

One day we were having a practice at our field with a mixture of old guys from 50 to 80 out there. There was a little league team practicing next door and they all came over with their parents and watched us. They told us 'you guys are a real inspiration for us.' The parents told them if they stayed active all their lives they could be like these guys. That was really something.

Is competition your main motivation for participating in sports and Senior Games?

I love competition and I love the camaraderie. There's also the mental aspect. Mental and physical fitness go together. That's the secret I think.



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Have you always been active in fitness and sports?

I played baseball in high school and softball for the University of Michigan. I played one year on the Air Force fast pitch softball all star team out of Keesler Air Force Base, but I stopped because I got so busy with work and raising a family. My sons both played hardball and I coached a bit with them. There wasn't much time for sports for me, but I exercised. Kids and yard work kept me active when I wasn't in sports.

Besides playing and coaching softball, I play golf about once a week and walk my dogs every morning. It's also a physical and mental exercise to run the softball organization. All that keeps me going and it does keep me fit.

I played tennis in senior games for ten years but had a shoulder issue and had to give it up. I didn't want hurt my other sport activities. I still do some track and field at the games too. I qualified in the 50 yard dash for this year 's National Senior Games.

Do you surprise doctors with your level of fitness for your age?

I do surprise the doctors. I take no prescription medicine at all. I'm an anomaly for people my age with the doctors. I had a pulled groin muscle last year and had a minor shingles complication but got over that pretty well. Other than that I've stayed active and been a healthy guy.

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