

**SPORTS IN SEABROOK, NEW JERSEY
1944 TO CIRCA 1989
RECOLLECTIONS OF
MINORU HIRATA, JAMES OKINO AND HENRY WAKAI**

INTRODUCTION

During World War II Seabrook Farms, Seabrook, New Jersey became the single largest employer of internees from the ten Relocation Centers beginning in January, 1944. Some 2,500 people relocated to Seabrook, a little known historical fact.

COMMUNITY HOUSE

James Okino, a former resident of Seabrook, says, "the Community House was the center of social life." Jim received a sports certificate which read:

**The Seabrook Athletic Union
Sponsored by Seabrook Farms
Awards The Recognition To Jim Okino
As A Member Of RAINBOWS
1947-48 Champions
Class A League**

**Ryuji Yokoyama
Chairman of the Board
Henry Wakai
President S.A.U.
Nattie Taniguchi
Secretary S.A.U**

The Community House was a facility provided by Seabrook Farms Company headed by Miss Dorothy Chapman, Director, a Company employee beginning around 1944. The facility previously was a USO Center during the War led by Mrs. Annice Locke who initiated many of the social programs inherited by Miss Chapman. Miss Chapman in a publication (*Passè*) created by the young people of the time (1948) had a staff which included Keiko Ogata, Frances Nakamura, Mayor Sasaki, Joe Eto, and Gene Nakata. Reiko Ohara was on the staff prior to 1948. The social life of young people was organized around clubs. These clubs also served as the nucleus of sports teams.

Intramural Basketball

The most active sports program was basketball since the Community House had an indoor basketball court. The governing body was The Seabrook Athletic Union, an elected body from the social clubs. They prepared the schedules and awarded certificates at the end of the season. It is believed the first organized league began before 1945 with four teams and culminated in about 1949. The league was organized in three levels: A, B, and C leagues. The teams had names such as: (A League) Rainbows (photo Okino, James 002) later renamed the El Lobos, Zebras, (photo Taniguchi 002 + 003) El Toros, Convicts; (B League): Blue Devils (photo Hirata, Minpo 002), Yogis, Toppers, Jokers, Bucs, Hornets etc. The A League champions were: 1946/47 and 1947/48 the Rainbows. and in 1948/49 the El Lobos. The B League champions were: 1945/46 the Seven Dwarfs, 1946/47 the Eagles and in 1947/48 and 1948/49 the Blue Devils.

Intramural Softball

Minoru Hirata recalls the first baseball team in 1945 was called The Eagles (photo Hirata, Minpo 003) and later became the Blue Devils. This group was made up primarily of those who were members of Bridgeton High School class of 1948. He recalls they were unable to join any organized league so a sand lot league was formed. The original league had four teams among them were: The Eagles, Hopeless Nine, and the Zebras. Later the three leagues were organized and in 1946 the Zebras were the A League champs and the Eagles the B League champions (photo Hopeless Nine Okino 001)

Little League Baseball

The first company little league teams was sponsored by Seabrook Farms in the early 1950's (photo Ikeda, Albert 028). Later LoBiondo Trucking Company sponsored a team that became the league champions in 1964 coached by Jim Taniguchi and Ben Ogata (photo Taniguchi 029). The same team won the title in 1966 (photo Taniguchi 030)

Traveling Baseball

Baseball was sponsored by Seabrook Farms Co. and a company employee union (teamster local 676) (photo 01842). The organizer of the team was Richard "Dick" Kunishima that Jim Okino refers to as "the Zenimura of Seabrook." Mr. Zenimura was the organizer of the well known baseball team prior and during camp days at the Gila River Relocation Center. Dick Kunishima was the supervisor of the Seabrook Farms Beet Canning Storage Department which gave him

the freedom to recruit the best players for the "all star" company team. Kunishima was a classmate of former President Richard Nixon at Whittier College in California and was instrumental in bringing the presidential candidate to Bridgeton for a campaign stop.

The teams started playing pick-up games. Jim Okino recalls, "baseball was the medium to interface and become acquainted with people of the surrounding communities that resulted in lasting friendships."

The team became a member of the South Jersey Industrial League and the Bridgeton City League. They played teams as far away as Atlantic City, NJ, Pleasantville, NJ, Woodbine, NJ, Lancaster, PA, and New York City as well as against the Delaware State Trooper (photo 01915), Leesburg and Trenton State Prison teams. In 1948 the team became the Bi-County Industrial and City Leagues Champions (photo Nakamura 103)

Bowling

Bowling for the Nisei of Seabrook Village began before 1948 and lasted until the early 1990's as a formal intramural league. The first tournaments were held in the Bridgeton Bowling Alley, Bridgeton, NJ. Okino and Henry Wakai remember teams then had to have six members for one member had to set up pins since the alleys then were not automated. Later the tournaments moved to the Pike Lanes in Deerfield, NJ. Teams were sponsored by local business such as: Seabrook Farms, Popkin Shoes, Chairi's, Austine Clothing, Red Brick Tavern, Okamoto Jewelers and Morio's Delicatessen. Later the league became multi-racial with Estonian and German teams in the league, but all were from Seabrook Village. Dick Kunishima organized a traveling team that went to neighboring bowling alleys to compete(photo Ogata, Tadashi 015). The Seabrook Chapter JACL also sponsored a bowling tournament during the 1950 Eastern District Council JACL Convention (Ogata, Tadashi 027) Minoru "Minpo" Hirata remembers after work and bowling a favorite Seabrooker hang-out was called the Chicken Coop that played country western music.

Bridgeton High School

The Seabrook community contributed outstanding participants both scholastically and in sports at the Bridgeton High School during the 1940's and 1950's. Hank Wakai, Jim Okino and others recall:

Satoru Tsufura was the first Nisei four letterman in
1945/46.

George Murashige was the first varsity basketball player.

Judy Noda, Kate Kurabara and Irene Takemori were the first varsity girls basketball team players in 1944/45.

Tosh Hosoda was captain of the football team in 1953 (photo Dagostino 001).

Seiki Murono (Murono 041) was the first string quarterback for the 1959 Group IV division champs.(Murono 042). He attended Bridgeton High School from 1957 through 1960 (Murono 043). He attended Franklin & Marshall College in Pennsylvania and was their star quarter back for four years (Murono 044) His team had an undefeated season in 1963, the first time in the school's 50 year history. He was honored by the distinguished Maxwell Club of Philadelphia and named by the Brooker Irvine Memorial Football Club as South Jersey's intercollegiate football player of the year.

He played semi-pro football for the New York Jets and the New York Giants. He was the Senior Vice President for the Chase Manhattan National Bank for many years and is currently the Director of the Millennium Bank in San Francisco, California.

In 1972, Michael Asada (now Colonel Asada US Army) was awarded the second annual Bulldog Football Trophy and scholarship.

