

**Robson Ranch > 70 AA**  
**Texas State Champions 2024**

Gauthier, Hughes, Schwertner, Braam, McKie and Ford were our Iron Men playing every inning of every game at this year's Senior Texas Softball State Championships. Gary King & Gary Warrick were our winning pitchers. The top hitters were Warrick and Wendt who both hit it over .700. Bob Laderach batted over .600, had a team high 3 extra base hits and the most slides into base of any of our players. Okay, maybe Gauthier had more slides but I'm not sure you can technically call what he does, a slide. Tumbling sideways or falling backwards and coming up bleeding might not be the best sliding form.

Ford & Laderach had sterling games at the plate against our first opponent, the Austin Wizards, with Bob getting his first of 3 doubles in addition to anchoring the defense at rover. Even so, the >65AA Wizards eeked it out in the end with RR losing 13 – 14.

Next up, Gary King tossed a victory over our sister RR >65 AAs. The >70s jumped out early behind the bats of Rocky Dudley and David McKie who ripped a triple and helped wrap-up a 19 – 15 win.

Warrick came back for the next game with a victory over the eventual >65 AA Champs, the Electrifiers from Lubbock, TX. Mike Braam and Ken Ford tripled, and Laderach got one of his 3 extra base hits to take home the win and set up the bracket finals.

With that, it was over to Coach Gary Smith to sort out the championship series. RR was facing a best 2 out of 3 with Triple Deuce, a newly promoted and young >65 AA team as the opponent with rain projected during the night. Gary's choices were to accept a 'one and done' scenario with the winner taking the Texas State Championship, or play out the best of 3: back, to back, to back (if necessary), all in the same night with the loser having no excuses. It was assumed correctly that because of the predicted rains there would be no games as scheduled the next morning.

After deftly deploying all 16 players and administering a few needed 'butt chewings' (technical softball term), Gary was convinced that RR had the advantage in stamina & spirit. He chose the back, to back, to back playoff all in one night, starting at 5 PM and continuing under the lights, until a champion was crowned. Game on!

The RR >70's AA don't actually have a great track record of coming out strong after a long delay, in this case well over 3 hours. The > 70's performance didn't change that observation. They came out flat. Triple Deuce jumped out to a 9 – 2 lead. RR, not prone to whine about umpires or make excuses, were discombobulated and thrown off by the moment, the umpire's calls and the strong start by Triple Deuce. Even the #3 hole, (3<sup>rd</sup> batter), Johnny Blecher seemed to struggle at the plate. John Gauthier, Bob Laderach (another double and probably another slide), Ken Ford, David McKie, George Wendt and Mike Braam seemed to put the team on their backs and RR was clawing their way back in the game. RR went into the buffet as visitors, trailing 16 – 19. Johnny B got his act together and singled after one out. The next batter lined out and Johnny B was sitting on

1<sup>st</sup> with 2 outs and RR looking at being in a 0 – 1 hole in the series. Ken Ford grounded one to the left side and it was a race and a dirty, but perfect slide to barely beat the throw and keep the inning alive. The RR bats went on a tear and a 2 out rally to produce 6 runs to go up 22 – 19 with Triple Deuce holding the hammer (home team).

With two singles and a walk, Triple Deuce loaded the bases and liked their chances. Jim Reese made one of his many spectacular circus catches, but Triple 2 scratched out a run. Another single scored one more for Triple 2 and it was down to a two-run lead for RR. Triple Deuce got yet another run to close the gap to 1 run, but it cost them an out at second base. With the tying run on third and two outs, pitcher Gary Warrick faced the lead off batter. He screamed one right back at Gary's thigh and with lightning reflexes and protective instincts taking over, Gary backhanded the drive to preserve the 22 – 21 victory.

Triple Deuce was gutted and the RRers could feel it.

Coach Gary Smith told the boys there would be some changes for the next game. The injured Lynal Carey was asked to 'suck it up' and play the bucket. And play it, he did. Lynal made 4 of the first 6 put outs allowing Triple Deuce only one run while RR scored 9 in the first two innings behind the big bats of David McKie, Ron Schwertner, Gary Warrick, Jimmy Reese and Tim Hughes. The onslaught continued and the RR >70's AA ran away to take the crown with a 17 - 2 victory.

After the after-game handshakes and prayer, one of the Triple Deuce players told Johnny G they were going to Albuquerque in June to get away from the same ol', same ol' RR match-up. Johnny G said, sorry to inform you, but that's our next tournament also.

After losing to RR in Bryan, TX in late March, Triple Deuce brought in a couple new players to improve their odds for a Texas State Championship. One thing RR prides itself on is that we don't recruit players outside of the Ranch. The > 70's will see some new teams at Albuquerque (NM & Colorado to be sure), but rest assured there will be a hungry Triple Deuce with most likely some new faces added.

Cheers,

Johnny B