

Frank Mione's

Recollections  
PS 217 Schoolyard

My earlier recollections of growing up in Brooklyn center around the PS 217 schoolyard.

It was a central meeting place of the neighborhood kids. It was used all year round, even though, at times, the gates were locked. We knew how to climb fences or someone knew how to unweave part of the fence for a slithery entry.

The Panthers used to practice walk-throughs of the football plays on the concrete surface of the schoolyard. At times it was better than playing on the hard grassy surface behind the Newkirk Ave apartment; especially because we didn't have to worry about tackling Ron.

The schoolyard provided the opportunity to play softball, touch football, basketball, handball, stickball, Johnnie on the pony, tag and what ever else kind of games we came up with.

Softball – If you brought a ball to the schoolyard you were KING. No matter how bad a ball player you were you always got to play. We used to use a popular ball called the CLINCHER. It usually lasted two or three days of play and then the concrete surface of the schoolyard would tear the cover to shreds. We'd take up a collection of pennies and nickels and go to Madineks Pharmacy to buy half inch adhesive tape. We would tape of the softball and it was good for another day or two. When we didn't have enough players (notice I didn't say guys – remember Betty Herrmann) we use to play one-o-cat or two-o-cat or three-o-cat. Usually the better hitters had an advantage and therefore played less in the field and batted more.

I remember as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader I hit the left field fence (remember it wasn't too far). I mentioned to my brother Ben that I could hit the ball over the fence. He asked if I had hit a ball over the fence. I said "no I hadn't, but I could." He said "you can't hit the ball of the fence until you've done it." I worked hard at trying to hit the ball over the fence. The proud moment came a few weeks later and I couldn't wait to tell Ben of my accomplishment, which was followed by "good job."

Remember how we used to choose teams for pick-up softball: toss the bat to one of the would-be captains. He would catch it, with one hand, about in the middle of the

bat. The other would-be captain would grab the bat above the other guys hand. They would alternate grabbing the bat above the other guy's until there was no bat left to grab. That guy got to choose the first player and they alternated picks until the last guy. Oh to be the last guy picked. He probably played right field. Remember the small right field alley that extended to the adjacent play area. It was about 10 feet wide. Needless to say not many balls were hit to that area.