

# TEAM SPOTLIGHT

## Team Sinister

Submitted by Rob Partain - Team Sinister



**B**ud Light returns to Conference USSSA under the same leadership it's had since the 2007 season. During the last three seasons, the team has been referred to as respectful, competitive, innovative, and champions. The roster has gone through some changes over the past several years and 2010 is no different. One of the most significant changes is the identity of the team. Bud Light has changed sponsorship and will be known as Sinister. Sinister is a company that makes durable batting gloves with unsurpassed style and quality along with other apparel. The team is excited to represent Sinister along with co-sponsors Worth and Mojo. Many of the Michigan-based returning core players have been with the team since its inception in 2007. A handful of players from other states round out what should prove to be a very competitive Class A squad.

Bud Light sponsored most of the core group of players for seven years and this will be the first time the Bud Light logo will not appear on their jerseys. After winning the 2006 USSSA Class A World Series, Northwest Pipe/Bud Light was effectively disbanded as competitors successfully signed many of their key players. Manager Larry Quartuccio took a number of those players to 2006 Class A runner up Jean Shoppe, where he went on to win two more consecutive Class A championships. Rob Partain, commonly referred to as "RP", decided to take his Bud Light sponsorship and build a grass roots softball program beginning with the remnants of the 2006 championship team. Partain began retooling as a Conference B team. "I never planned to be the main sponsor of a men's softball team, it just evolved that way," said Partain. "The friendships that you make and the opportunity to compete with the best just pull you in." Partain took his philosophy of building a team and mixed proven veterans with young talent and managed to create a consistent winner.

The 2007 edition of Bud Light featured some very young players mixed with some "role players" from the Northwest Pipe/Bud Light A championship team. They quickly realized how difficult it was to compete with the Major and Class A teams every weekend while playing a full USSSA Conference schedule. Partain stated, "Class B teams have a unique challenge in that they build teams to win the Class B World Series yet they must play under Class A rules when competing against Major and Class A teams in the Conference. It's a major

adjustment to return to Class B rules for the biggest tournament of the year." The 2007 team had an up and down year and ended up finishing fifth at Class B World Series. Partain recognized the need to retool to compete for a Class B ring in 2008. In 2008, Bud Light brought back a few key members from their 2006 championship team. None was more important than their manager Manfred "Freddie" Budnarowski. Budnarowski was key to building the team that ultimately won both the Class B Conference Championship as well as a Class B World Series Championship. Although 2008 provided another roller coaster ride for the Bud Light squad, they turned up their intensity to play their best ball in September when it counted.

After winning two B titles in 2008, Partain was confronted with a new challenge. USSSA rules forced the team to move up to Class A for the 2009 season, and that couldn't be done with the existing 2008 team. Working together, Partain and Budnarowski approached finding talent in the same manner it was done for prior teams. Partain retained his core of veteran players for leadership and gave Budnarowski the task of finding talent wanting a chance to play upper-level softball. Budnarowski took what he explained as a "difficult task at this level", and responded beautifully by convincing a blend of younger and veteran recruits to sign with Bud Light. The team finished sixth in the overall Conference standings, and the team managed several high finishes, a Conference tournament win, and many quality wins over some Major and Class A teams. In the end, a lack of production in the World Series led to a disappointing finish to what was an otherwise successful year. As Budnarowski said, "It was a great disappointment to finish the year the way we did. All teams have one or two bad weekends over a season. We just happened to pick the worst time for it."

The 2010 season poses another challenge, and Sinister is preparing to compete against what promises to be the strongest field of Class A teams in memory. Partain and Budnarowski have assembled a group of players that will represent Sinister in the same manner people have grown accustomed to seeing them represent prior Bud Light teams. Sinister will be playing a full USSSA Conference schedule and hopes to compete every weekend and have a chance to win the Class A World Series.

This year's Sinister Team (player's home state in parenthesis):

**PITCHING:** Billy Barrett (Michigan) is rejoining the team after taking most of 2009 off due to the birth of his second child. He played the final two months of the 2009 season and managed to win a Class B Conference Championship with AJS out of Florida. He brings with him leadership, experience, and a history of

success on the mound at the Class A level. Barrett was a member of both the 2006 Northwest Pipe/Bud Light Class A and 2008 Bud Light Class B championship teams.



**PITCHING:** Jeff Graus (Michigan)

returns from last year's squad and provides Sinister another option and contrasting style to Barrett on the mound. A solid glove man, Jeff has the ability to play multiple infield and outfield positions in addition to pitching. He should see considerable time on the mound this year. Jeff was a member of the 2008 Bud Light team.



**CATCHER/AH/OFF:** Brian Puckett

(Indiana) returns for his second with the team in the primary role of catcher. Puckett earned All Conference 1st team honors in 2009 with 51 Home Runs and an On Base Percentage of .724. Brian displayed an unusual talent for a power hitting catcher by hitting to the opposite field when the situation dictated it. Liked and respected by all of his teammates for his approach to the game and will to win, Puckett is also the fastest catcher in the game.



# Team Spotlight: Team Sinister

**INFIELD:** Jeff McGavin (Michigan) returns to the fold after three years at the Major level with Team Combat and Dan Smith, where he won a Major World Series Championship. This former 2006 Northwest Pipe/Bud Light SS is expected to solidify Sinister's shortstop position. When Jeff became available, the team jumped at the opportunity to sign him and play him next to Allen in the infield. McGavin's exceptional glove and versatile hitting will fit nicely into Sinister's revamped lineup.



**INFIELD:** Chris Kirian (Michigan) returns as the team's most fiery emotional leader. "CK" was a member of both the 2006 Northwest Pipe/Bud Light Class A and 2008 Bud Light Class B championship teams and is recognized as the heart and soul of the team. A versatile infielder capable of playing multiple positions, Chris hits for power and average while playing within the context of the game. After being named a second team All Conference selection in 2009, Kirian is working as hard as ever to improve his game for 2010.



**INFIELD:** Josh Frank (Michigan) returns for another season after playing with the 2008 and 2009 teams. Frank displayed excellent power at the bottom of the order and had several game winning home runs. He has displayed tremendous talent at third base, often times making diving stops and then showing off his "rocket" arm while throwing out runners. Josh is the "X factor" on this year's team and his performance will have significant impact on the team's success.



**INFIELD:** Jason Crain (Michigan) joins Chris Kirian as the longest-tenured Partain-sponsored players, returns for the 2010 campaign. Jason consistently puts up impressive numbers year after year while batting from the left side of the plate. A classic set-up man, his on base percentage allows for hitters behind him to swing for the fence. Jason also plays a steady 2B.



**INFIELD:** Willie Allen (New Jersey) was the rock of the Bud Light infield in 2009. He will return in 2010 and should continue to sparkle as one of the best middle infielders in the game. Allen is a vocal leader and team favorite that "brings it" game in and game out.

**INFIELD:** Todd Pease (Virginia) returns for his fourth season with the squad. Pease joined 2007's Bud Light B team in 2007 to provide consistent power to a lineup that was missing that element. As the team evolved, Todd adapted his game accordingly, becoming a better base and opposite-field hitter in the process. That said, Todd can still hit tape measure home runs with the best of them, igniting his team in the process. His performance earned him a spot on the 2010 USSSA Major Watch List.



**CATCHER/AH:** Rob Partain (Michigan) is the sponsor of the team looking to follow up on a productive 2009 season. Partain will primarily come off the bench but will start on occasion. Role players are generally undervalued and Rob's teammates are excited to have an experienced, pressure-tested player to come into the game when needed. As a sponsor, Partain has built one of the premier programs in the country and continues to give younger players opportunities to prove themselves on the biggest stage. He enjoys being around the game, team camaraderie, and competing against the best.



**CATCHER/AH:** Kevin Filby (Ohio) comes over from GTL after winning his 5th A title in 6 seasons, making him one of the most successful players of the past decade at the Class A level. Obviously, his consistent hard work and dedication have served him well. Hitting from the left side, Kevin is a clutch hitter who puts up good numbers while always doing what's right for his team. Strictly a catcher/AH on the 2010 Sinister team, Filby is excited to be reunited with several former teammates from the Northwest Pipe/Bud Light 2006 championship team.



**Outfield:** Rick Sedlacek (Ohio) joined Kevin Filby in coming over from GTL in hopes of capturing another Class A Championship. Rick is recognized as one of the game's best all around players and Sinister is excited to have him in this year. Hitting from the left side, Rick will bat leadoff and is expected to put an end to the revolving door the team has seen in that spot for years. One of the truly tough outs in the Conference, Sedlacek will be expected to mentor the young, talented outfielders that will roam the outfield with him.



**Outfield:** Nick Musselman (Michigan) returns for his fourth season with the team. This tall, lanky right fielder is still only 24 years. Musselman is noted for his strong arm, which has turned many extra base hits into singles. Always capable of producing a great game from the moment he arrived on the scene, Nick has steadily improved his consistency each year since starting with the team in 2007. His performance earned him second team All Conference honors in 2009 and an addition to the Major Watch List. Nick was part of the 2008 Class B Championship team.



**Outfield:** Brandon Dillon (Indiana) joins the team as a relative unknown on the USSSA circuit. The 27 year old earned MVP honors for Lazer Show in the 2009 NSA B North National Tournament. Brandon's speed, power and glove are being counted on to solidify Sinister's retooled outfield for 2010.



**Outfield:** Casey Rogowski (Michigan) has only been playing softball for one year, but don't let that fool you. Casey was drafted by the Chicago White Sox out of high school and played in the minor leagues for 10 seasons while playing AAA for the last 3 seasons. While in the minors, the 6'3", 265 lb. Rogowski earned awards as top-fielding first baseman in his league. He has proven to be a quick study and has picked up the game of softball quickly and, despite his size, is athletic enough to play CF. He spent most of his youth around softball watching his ASA Hall of Fame father play the game. Rogowski was looking for a chance to play in the Conference and Sinister is very excited to have him.



Brian Basierbe will keep the score books up to date again this year.

Sinister is excited to swing Worth bats this year using their Sinister batting gloves (getsinister.com). The team hopes the combination of a great bat manufacturer and durable batting gloves will provide a winning combination for the 2010 season.

## TEAM SPOTLIGHT Harbortown Marina

The Harbortown Marina Over 50 Senior team finished their 2009 season run by winning the honors of Florida Half Century Team Of the Year in their bracket.

With an overall 24-10 record in FHC play, Harbortown went on a 17-1 winning streak from July through December along with a fourth place showing in a Las Vegas National and a SSUSA Winter Nationals third place showing.

"Winning 'Team Of the Year' just topped off a great season for our team and we appreciate the recognition by the Florida Half Century administration," said Mike Correa, Coach of Harbortown. "We have the best sponsor with Harbortown Marina and we have great team chemistry."

Sponsor Harbortown Marina Boatyard is a beautiful, full service marina located in Merritt Island, Florida.

Harbortown's roster includes veteran softball players from Florida's Space and Treasure Coast coun-



ties. Players are Scott Donaldson, Gene Smith, Skip Ryan, Joe McArdle, Allen Friedenstab, Rick Hankins, Ken Rouh, Mike Chnupa, Tom Dempsey, Frank Straub, Jim Duffy, Buster Brister and Mike Correa. Harbortown looks to stay healthy, play hard and have fun for the 2010 season with a full tournament schedule. If you are ever in Merritt Island, Florida and want to support a great softball sponsor, be sure to visit Harbortown Marina for lunch on the water!