

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa—"We are all in a dream, and don't anybody wake up until after the final game!" These were the words of Manager Jim Caviness to his Welty Way Softball Team from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, after they had won their second game on their way to the National Men's Fast Pitch Championship in Springfield, Mo.

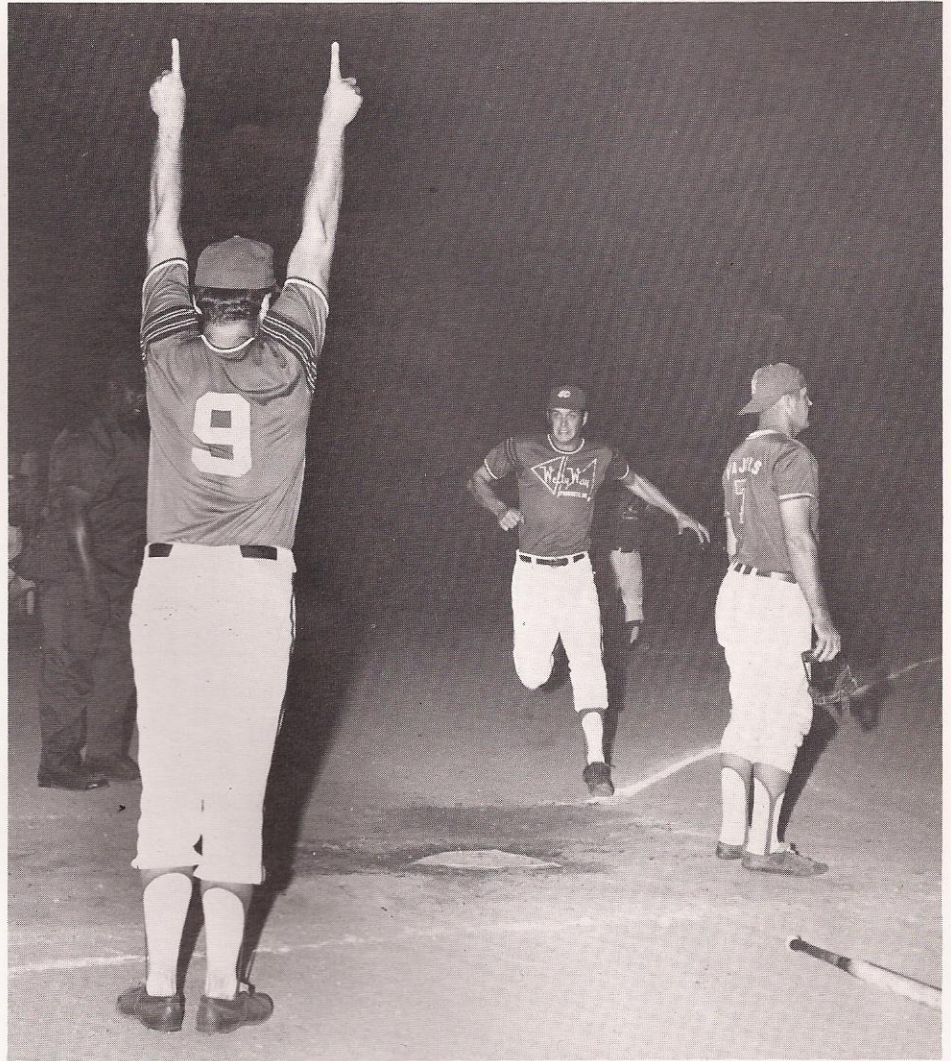
Welty Way was the darkest of dark horses going into the tournament and surprised everyone by winning five straight games and becoming the first Iowa team ever to earn the national title. Only three members of the team, Jerry Ralfs, Rich Stephen, and Dick Zuccato, had ever participated before in a national tournament.

When asked if he wasn't amazed, himself, at how well the team did, Caviness replied, "We knew we could play ball as well as any team there, if we played our best. We watched the other teams play and saw that they made mistakes too, therefore we figured we had a chance, if everything went just right. We wanted to finish higher than any other team from our region had ever finished. Several of the teams that played against us had many opportunities to score and win, but failed to take advantage of them. We had fewer opportunities, but capitalized on most of them."

It was an interesting year for Welty Way. Their first game was with Jesup, Iowa, a small town team, and the last one was with Stratford, Conn., the defending national champs! Welty Way went undefeated through the sixteen games of the state, regional, and national tournaments. However, the Cedar Rapids team isn't undefeatable or overpowering. In fact, a local pitcher shut them out in a city league game. In 1970 the team placed second in the Mid-Central Regional.

Cedar Rapids provided several tense games in the national tournament. The quarter-final game versus Reading, Pa., went 15 innings, ending at 2:10 a.m. with Welty Way winning, 2-0. Reading's pitcher, Ty Stofflet, had 33 strikeouts. One fan commented, "You Iowa players take too long to win a ball game." The next game was with Anixter Brothers of Chicago and went 16 innings. Chicago pitcher Roy Burlison had 35 strikeouts, but Cedar Rapids was victorious, 5-2. The Iowa pitchers, Jerry Ralfs and Rich Stephen, didn't have an outstanding number of K's, but when outs were needed, they came through.

It was a rough tournament for catcher Dick Zuccato. In the game against



*All American Mike Pallesen scores easily for the champs as Roger Aceto gives the "no slide needed" sign.*

Reading his finger was broken by a foul tip. But Zuccato didn't let that stop him. He taped it up and commented, "I've got all winter to rest." Then while playing Chicago in the semi-final game, Hap Cox tried to score, but Zuccato was like a brick wall in front of the plate. Cox broke his shoulder and Zuccato suffered torn knee ligaments and was put in a cast the next morning. Centerfielder Cliff Rice did a tremendous job as catcher in the final game.

Welty Way Products, Inc., team sponsor, is a manufacturer of sheet metal shearing and fabrication equipment. Welty Way is a relatively low budget team, whose members often work together weekends and evenings on odd jobs to raise money to cover the team expenses.

They also are a fun-loving team. Members sport several nicknames, such as "Hammer," "Deputy," "Buddha," "Owl," and "Hawk." Pitcher Rich Stephen is called "The Duck" because of the straight bill on his hat. The team enjoys singing accompanied by third baseman Eddie Williams on the guitar, and dedicated "Rubber Ducky" to Stephen. Steve Andrew, infielder, earned a new nickname, "Prophet," when early in the tournament, he opened the motel room Bible to Philipians and said, "Well, here we are in the Philippines. Thou shalt go to Manila."

Each team competing in the National Tournament was assigned a local businessman as host. Cedar Rapids' host was Harold Wresche, circulation manager of the Springfield News and