



Big Ed Klecker – The Fireball Hurling Fireman

Ed Klecker is generally recognized as one of the hardest throwing pitchers in the history of fastpitch softball. Primarily using a devastating drop ball, thrown with pinpoint accuracy, Ed was the strikeout king of the sport during his reign as the ace pitching star for Lakewood California franchises, of the early, to mid, 1970's. Ed began his softball pitching career as a teenager in 1957 for the LDS Church. As an 18 year old in 1958, Ed was named the outstanding pitcher in the LDS Jr. Division's National Championship Tournament. Through the late 1960's, Ed continued playing ball for the LDS Church in the local leagues. The church team allowed two non-LDS members to play on each team. One of those two players on Ed's team was catcher, Lanny Rupp, who would have a huge influence on the up-and-coming softball superstar.

Rupp was a fastpitch impresario, who knew that he could build a World Class ball club around Klecker's amazing right arm, and outstanding pitching talents. Lanny convinced Ed that he needed to play ball on Sundays, in order to achieve his full potential in the sport. Playing on Sundays meant that he would have to give up playing for his LDS church team, but bigger and brighter fastpitch days were on Ed's horizon. He would now take up Rupp on his offer, and test his skills against some of the very best players in world. With Big Eddie in the circle on Sundays, Rupp's ball clubs qualified to play in ASA National Championship Tournaments in 1970 at Clearwater Florida, and in 1971 at Springfield Missouri. With that National Tournament experience under his belt, Ed proceeded to make the ISC World Tournament his domain of dominance for the next 3 consecutive seasons.

In the 1972 ISC World Tournament at Kimberly, WI, Ed Klecker of the Lakewood Jets lead all pitchers with 71 strikeouts in 38 innings. Ed allowed only 15 hits, and 5 walks, while posting a 3-1 won – loss record, and a brilliant ERA of 0.55. The next closest in strikeouts was Jerry Ralf's 38 Ks in 41 inns. The Jets finished in 4<sup>th</sup> Place in the Tournament.

Ed's star was on the rise entering the 1973 World Tournament at Rock Island, IL, where he teamed up with ISC Hall of Fame pitcher KG Fincher. Fincher and Klecker were firing bullets, as the Lakewood Jets won the 73 ISC World Championship, with Eddie posting 5 wins, without a loss. He was named both the ISC's Outstanding Pitcher, and the Most Valuable Player. Ed allowed one earned run in 45 1/3 innings, again leading the Tournament pitchers with 67 strikeouts, and posting a microscopic ERA of 0.150. The next closest was ISC Hall of Famer Gil Aragon's 27 Ks in 42 innings.

At Sun City, AZ in the 1974 ISC World Tournament, Ed again was named 1<sup>st</sup> Team All-World pitcher, leading all of the World Tournament pitchers in strikeouts, with a total of 59. His 0.57 ERA and 4 wins with 1 loss, capped an incredible 3 year run, for the 6'4" 240 lb hurler, who made his living as a Fireman.

A blown out rotator Cuff in Ed's right shoulder at age 35, forced him into early retirement at the conclusion of the 1975 season. Although his career ended prematurely, while he was throwing the ball in his prime, his star shined as bright as any pitcher who ever threw a softball.