

## League participation

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Roberts accepted a different position within the city in January 2016. His assistant Terry Beard was promoted to city athletic director a month later.

Have the goals changed? Not necessarily, according to Beard. "First and foremost, we'd love to see the leagues grow," said Beard. "Secondly, we want kids to have fun and learn the game. I want it to be a recreation for them to get physical activity and grow bonds in a team setting."

And yet, school coaches are finding out quickly it is getting harder and harder to find developed players.

"A healthy feeder system combined with hard-nose, consistent, transparent coaching in schools will lead to success," said WCMS baseball coach Chad Young, who recently had just 21 players show up for a tryout. "I would like to see more competitive leagues and teams. We have awesome fields to play on."

WCMS softball coach Joe Damon – who helps coach a city league team and works with travel teams as well – added, "The oldest softball league plays with a smaller ball and the rubber is a shorter distance than we play in school. I think it hurts a lot. All the girls we travel with, they didn't play in the league. It's not going to benefit them."

### BY THE NUMBERS\*

YEAR	TEAMS	LEAGUES
1988	55	7
1998	77	8
2008	45	7
2018	22	5

\*Numbers compiled for leagues ages 7 and up

Participation is down all around. From T-ball up to senior leagues in baseball and softball, Beard estimates 360-370 youth players at McMinnville Civic Center, compared to Morrison's 470 participants. Morrison officials reported being down from a peak of 550, while Midway officials estimate a loss of 25-30 players from just a few years ago.

Beard also estimates a drop of 25 participants in the city league since last year.

But the city leagues are the only ones to offer baseball and fast-pitch softball, sports where the school coaches count on youth development to succeed. And in those numbers, the drop has been massive over the decades.

In 2016, the decision was made to change the age groups for baseball and softball. In baseball, boys 7-8 machine-pitch changed to 6-8; boys 9-10 junior league moved to 9-11; and boys 11-12 senior league turned into 12-14. Girls softball took 7-8 coach-pitch and



Jeffery Simmons photo

**Parks and Recreation athletic director Terry Beard, left, gives out trophies following the championship game in the girls 7-9 league. Beard was hired as the league's athletic director in 2016.**

turned it to girls 7-9 while the girls 9-10 junior league morphed into girls 10-12 division, eliminating a 11-13 senior division.

This season, only 22 teams play in the five leagues. In 2008, there were 45 teams in seven leagues. In 1998, there were 77 teams in eight leagues.

Just the year before the city assumed control of the leagues (2014), there were 37 teams in six leagues.

Is there coming a time when youth recreation baseball and softball no longer exist in McMinnville? It may be possible.

In the coming issues, reasons

for dwindling participation will be discussed, highlighting such topics as travel teams, youth inactivity, league direction and umpiring supplemented with candid interviews with coaches, past youth league organizers and city employees.

Sports editor Jeffery Simmons can be reached at 473-2191.

## Jennings receives TBCA scholarship



Jeffery Simmons photo

**Wesley Jennings was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship from the Tennessee Baseball Coaches Association.**

BY JEFFERY SIMMONS  
Sports Editor for the Southern Standard  
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

Praise for Wesley Jennings continues to come from far and wide.

The senior captain for the Pioneer baseball team was recently awarded a \$1,000 scholarship from the Tennessee Baseball Coaches Association. Jennings was the Region 3 recipient, one of eight players across the state honored by the TBCA.

"We want to recognize young men in the region that are not only good athletes, but also good young men who are involved in their community," said Pat Swallows, TBCA executive director. "We know Wesley had some personal tragedy with the passing of his dad. He's held up through that and been a leader on his team and in his school."

Jennings lost his father Tim Jennings shortly before the start of the season. A super fan of the Pioneers and his kids,

Tim's memory was forever present at Patrick Ramsey Field, with a sign in his memory hanging on the outfield fence.

Wesley was a vital part of the Pioneers' region run this season, starting a majority of games at first base. He was given the Hilda Lowry award following the year, an honor bestowed to the player who showed excellence in sportsmanship and citizenship.

Coach Trice Powers has sung the praises of his senior leader, somebody who he saw guide his teammates through his play and demeanor on the field.

"Wesley was a great teammate to everybody despite going through some things," Powers said at the team's banquet in late May. "He found a way to keep working and bounced back. It was pretty special."

Jennings plans to attend Union University in Jackson in the fall, where he'll be majoring in exercise science.

## Bowling

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Dennis Parrish, who competes in the Wednesday league for Storm Nation, owns a couple ceiling tiles. An avid bowler for several decades, Parrish believes perfection isn't achieved without a little help.

"You have to be rolling it good and get lucky too," said Parrish, owner of a 204 average – the third highest in the league.

Wiley Simmons, who carries a 215 average while teaming with the Perrys, also knows luck has to come into play to bowl an elusive 300.

"Professionals can throw it perfect, and sometimes it won't carry," said Simmons, who says he's been bowling since he was 9. "You have to practice and be diligent about bowling. And then throw in some luck."

A big attraction of bowling is the ability for the game to be enjoyed by all ages and talent levels. Cordell Dykes, 83, has taken up the game in the last six months and is now a regular. Christy Perry, the daughter of the owners, is one of the youngest bowlers in the league at 25, though she believes her son could already compete.

"Bucksley is 3 years old and he's already rolling a six-pound ball without the bumpers," said Christy Perry. "He's going to be a good one."

Some visitors don't even pick up a bowling ball. Giant cheeseburgers, loaded nachos and a slew of other options have some coming just to get their dinner.

"We have people who will call in and come pick up dinner," said Betty Perry. "We like to think we've got the best hamburgers around."

For those looking for a night out on the lanes, weekend specials are in place, including cyber bowling on Fridays and family specials on Saturday and Sunday.

## Europe, South America dominate knockout phase

**MOSCOW (AP)** — The thunder-clapping Icelanders have gone home, along with the Egyptians and Peruvians. Now comes the business end of the World Cup, a European- and South American-dominated club that rejects most new applicants as unwanted hoi polloi.

The group stage is the crossroads of cultures, a mixture of multitudes filled

with happiness and hope.

Then comes the knockout stage, where soccer's powers pump their pecs and the blue bloods almost always prevail.

Ten European nations reached the round of 16, matching 1998 and 2006 for the most since 11 in 1990, the record since the current format began in 1986.

Four South American teams have advanced, plus

Mexico and Japan. For the first time since 1982, no African team made it past the first round.

History is instructive: Europe earned 41 of 64 quarterfinal berths and South America took 16 since 1986. Among the other regions, Africa and CONCACAF got three apiece and Asia one.

Winnowing to the inner sanctum becomes even

more pronounced after that: Europe filled 23 of 32 semifinal spots and South America eight, with South Korea in 2002 at home becoming the only outsider to reach the final four.

Among 20 previous World Cups, Europe has lifted the trophy 11 times and South America nine.

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## Puzzlemania solutions

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### CELEBRITY CIPHER

"Crossing the border into Canada, they asked if I had any firearms with me. I said, 'Well, what do you need?'" — Steven Wright

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