

Sports

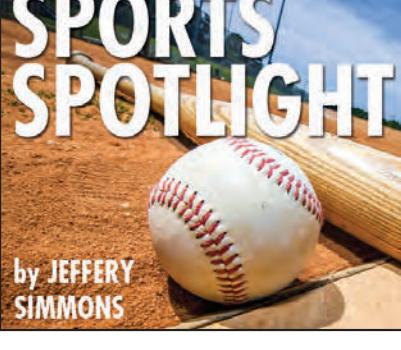
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City officials address youth sports

Grumblings about the McMinnville Youth Baseball and Softball leagues have been going on ever since the city assumed control in 2013. The main complaint, in one form or another, was summed up by longtime league coach and player Kyle Holder.

"It's treated like a business," said Holder, who coached World Finance in the boys 9-11 league this season.

Leaders in the Parks and Recreation Department want to push back on the idea they don't have the same investment in youth sports, as they feel their roots run just as deep in baseball and softball.

"Baseball was my first true love. I was raised by a single mom and my grandmother and I started playing when I was 7," said Parks and Recreation director Scott McCord. "My coaches were my surrogate fathers. My coach's wife would pick me up from school, I'd go to their house and study and then we'd go to practice and then they took me home. And it happened five days a week."

McMinnville Parks and Recreation athletic director Terry Beard also longs for the days when he was growing up and going out every day to play ball.

"When was the last time you drove down the road and saw a group of kids playing baseball in the backyard?" asked Beard. "When I was a kid, it was going on all over the place. Kids would come from all over the neighborhood."

Beard and McCord sat down for a lengthy meeting with the *Southern Standard* June 28 to discuss a wide array of topics, including the dropping participation in youth sports.



MCCORD



Jeffery Simmons photo

Isaiah Robledo turned in an all-star performance in Friday's 6-4 win for McMinnville Funeral Home. Robledo went 3-for-3 and made several defensive plays to help his team win its opening game in the Morrison youth league tournament.

Morrison tourney time

BY JEFFERY SIMMONS
*Sports Editor for the Southern Standard
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did have one glimmer of hope. Isaiah Robledo was due up first.

The team's speed demon didn't disappoint. Robledo scorched a shot into left field, flying around the bases for a lead-off triple. Rylan Rucker followed with a RBI single – her second run-scoring hit – to cut the lead to 4-2.

Braylon Torres put the tying runs in scoring position with a double, which was followed by Amelia Smith's RBI single. Peyton Ernst promptly followed with a single to third,

knotted the score.

McMinnville Funeral Home took the lead for good when Smith was able to avoid an errant throw to third, giving her enough time to make a quick turn and head home. Ernst added insurance when he won a race to home with Hullett's pitcher July Jones after a hit by Donovan Wellman.

Hullett's had a chance to rally in the sixth, but Rucker shut the door with a snag of a hot shot to her at second base. Rucker was able to turn and fire to first in time, stopping

Hullett's after the team had put the tying runs aboard.

Hullett's had rallied into the lead in the bottom of the fifth, scoring three runs to break a 1-1 tie. Jones highlighted the frame with a big shot into deep center, one he turned into a little-league home run when he squirmed out of a pickle at second and sprinted home to score after a wild throw. Kinsey Ferrell added an RBI single in the fifth for Hullett's, scoring Bryant Ralph.

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Final thoughts on youth participation



Ryan Boyd, right, coached two teams this summer in the MYBS leagues. More volunteers like Boyd will be needed for the leagues to thrive.

It's time to put the final bow on a project which has been a focus of mine for nearly three months.

After countless calls and interviews – many of which could make for 3-4 more stories – I think we've adequately explored the participation issues facing youth baseball and softball at McMinnville Civic Center. Over the course of six stories, there's been debates about direction, reviews of umpiring, exploring travel tournaments and city leaders giving their take. It's been an expansive project, one where I still have people reach out each time a story drops to add their perspective. And I've loved talking to everybody about it because it gives me faith there's enough people out there invested in the success of youth sports – to be full once again.

I know people long for the days when league commissioners were behind the fence at every field, all with full investment in the league's suc-

cess, not an individual or a particular team. I do too.

When I was 8, my dad was a league commissioner. Every night I would go to Hoover and Milligan Field as he oversaw games. Between chicken sandwiches, I ran the scoreboard for games. When our games ended, we would walk over to the other leagues to scout.

I watched Glenn Rogers become a legend at Dottie West Field by belting three home runs in a single game, the last flying over Club Drive and giving some homeowner a souvenir. I remember cup ball being played under the huge tree behind Hoover and Milligan Field. I raced after foul balls like every other young kid, hoping to claim a free Sun Drop as my prize.

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SIMMONS SAYS



JEFFERY
SIMMONS

chance to thrive locally.

Let me be clear – I think this is an issue without one clear-cut cause that could be easily corrected. It's going to take a lot of people coming together and developing a plan of action to make it possible for the

McMinnville Civic Center fields – some of the nicest

I've ever seen for youth sports – to be full once again.

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