

EVERLASTING JOY

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Love of baseball waning

The *Standard* is putting the finishing touches on a series that discusses the decline in youth baseball and softball participation. As a guy fortunate enough to coach baseball teams at the Civic Center for 10 years, I have my own feelings on the situation.

I've heard just about everything blamed for the dwindling numbers and fewer teams. The thing I'd like to stress is I don't think there's any person, or any organization, to blame. Fewer kids playing ball is a reflection of where we are as a society.

Here are my personal reasons why youth sports, including baseball, are taking a hit.

KIDS DON'T WANT TO PLAY

Adults like to reminisce about the days when they were kids and playing baseball and softball were the things to do. More nights than not were spent at the ballpark and when kids weren't involved in an actual game, they were playing cupball outside the fence.

Those days are gone.

Today's kids don't have the same interest in playing ball. Video games, Snapchat and other things are certainly responsible, but what can we do? We're never going back to the days without cellphones.

TRAVEL BALL HAS HURT LOCAL LEAGUES

As a generalization, most travel teams are composed of 11 players, maybe 12. If those players don't participate in the local leagues and play exclusively travel ball, it makes a dent.

A league that might have had eight teams is reduced to six teams if there are two teams playing exclusively travel ball. What's more, travel players are some of your better athletes so losing them impacts the overall quality of play.

Teams go from having maybe six really good players to having four. Routine grounders become errors, the games become sloppier, and no one is as enthused about participating.

PARENTS NOT AS SUPPORTIVE

As a parent who has encouraged my two boys to play football, baseball, soccer, basketball, tennis, and run track, it's still a constant battle to get them to participate. Sometimes, despite my urging, they have no interest.

Now think about kids who never receive encouragement from home. Some parents don't care if they play or not. They'd would rather save the \$50 entry fee and spend it on something else.

Having kids plays sports, and hanging out at the ballpark all summer, are no longer priorities. Between practices and games, it's an extra burden some parents don't like.

I can think of several more factors I'd include in this list, but I firmly believe the most overwhelming reason comes down to that age-old saying, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink."

We can try our best, but we can't make kids want to play ball. If kids were tugging at shirts and begging mom and dad to let them play, most parents would find a way to make it happen.

Countdown starts Monday

Pioneer football team ready to hit practice field

BY JAMES CLARK
Editor for the Southern Standard
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

The TSSAA dead period ends Monday and the Warren County High School football team plans to spring to life with a six-week sprint until the season opener Aug. 17 in Smithville.

"I'm really anxious to see how we compete this year," said WCHS coach Tom Moore, entering his fourth season at the Pioneer helm. "We have a lot of guys coming back who got a bunch of playing time last year. I'm expecting good things."

The Pioneers won't waste any time building speed. They will participate in a 7-on-7 tournament this Monday and Tuesday in Cookeville and play three games each day. The 7-on-7 drills emphasize passing schemes for the offense and defense and do not include linemen.

WCHS will have a new quarterback with the departure of Isaiah Grayson to graduation. Moore says sophomore Clay Thompson is a leading QB candidate and has impressed this offseason with his leadership and work ethic.

While the perimeter players are in Cookeville, the Pioneer big boys will travel to Goodpasture on Tuesday to compete in a linemen's challenge.

Moore says he expects offensive line to be a strength with Devin Jordan, Austin Jakes, Noah Martin, and Kaden Jordan among those returning.

Punishing RB Jay Rozier promises to be an offensive centerpiece. Raven Lewandowski and Jorge Sifuentes figure to be prominent receivers.

"We'd like to be a downhill running team," said coach Moore. "Jay is a really good back, a good between-the-tackles back. If we can run the ball, we'll be able to throw the ball."

Moore says the Pioneers have added two assistant coaches. Matt Turner will be coaching defensive line and Nick Cantrell will be coaching running backs. Moore says the two are additions and there are no coaching departures from last year.

The Pioneers are not scheduled to compete in a jamboree. The two preseason scrimmages will both be on the road – July 27 in Lincoln County and Aug. 3 in Tullahoma.

The same teams remain on the schedule as last year, but the home and away will be flipped. That means the Pioneers will play their first three games on the road against DeKalb County, White County and Cookeville.

Warren County will play its first home game Week 4 against Shelbyville, then play host to Coffee County.



The Pioneer receiving corps will benefit from the return of Jorge Sifuentes who was injured during the third game last year and missed the rest of the season.

City Triathlon set for August 18



Bicyclists are shown on Vervilla Road during the 18-mile bike portion of a previous McMinnville City Triathlon.

BY JAMES CLARK
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Athletes of all fitness levels are being encouraged to swim, bike and run their way to the finish of the annual McMinnville City Triathlon.

The event is scheduled for Saturday, Aug. 18 and is set to begin at Gilley Pool at 8 a.m.

"One of the great things about our triathlon is it's a community event," said Paige Northcutt, one of the organizers. "We give back the money we earn and award two \$1,000 scholarships."

Two local scholarship recipients received their ceremonial checks last week. Grant Hitchcock and Marlie Henegar both received \$1,000 to continue their education. Students who participated in one of the triathlon events in high school are given scholarship priority.

Hitchcock plans to begin his freshman year at Lipscomb University next month. In high school, he was a blistering runner in track and cross country events. He was strong individually and also shined in relay events.

Henegar starred in the water as a high school swimmer. She qualified for the state tournament in the 100-meter freestyle as a junior. She plans to attend Milligan College beginning next month and will be a member of the swim team. She's been swimming since she joined McMinnville Swim Team as a first-grader.

McMinnville City Triathlon is viewed as a sprint triathlon because of its short distances. The event involves a 400-meter swim, an 18-mile bike ride, and a 5K run. The winning time is usually around one hour.

Northcutt says not to be intimidated if you've never competed in a triathlon. She says it's a great entry-level event and teams can be formed if needed.

"If you're not particularly strong in one area, let us know and we can find someone to compete in that leg for you," said Northcutt. "Or if you'd like to get a team of three together with one person doing each leg you can do that too."

Go online to register or to find out more information at mcminnvillecity-triathlon.com.



McMinnville City Triathlon organizer Paige Northcutt, left, presents a ceremonial \$1,000 check to Marlie Henegar, who plans to continue swimming at Milligan College.



McMinnville City Triathlon organizer Freddy Hoover, right, presents a ceremonial \$1,000 check to Grant Hitchcock, who plans to attend Lipscomb University.

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