

SIMMONS SAYS

**JEFFERY
SIMMONS**



Missing church league

It's sad to see the fair-ground fields, no longer playable, waste away. Once a place where men, women and children would go to battle for their churches, now it's primarily a parking lot awaiting the fair to come to town.

What caused the demise of church league softball? Well, it's a good question. As a longtime participant myself, I know plenty of people who believe week-end warriors ran off the purists. Others believe once games moved away from good-natured fun into cut-throat competition, it was doomed. I think it was both.

Less than a decade ago, the league was flush with teams. There were three different men's leagues, with six teams in each based on expected talent level. The women's division also had close to 10 teams, all stocked with 10-12 player rosters.

Most were directly affiliated with churches, or at least featured several team members who regularly attended services. Pickups of non-church goers was permitted, but always agreed upon between both teams. And never were ringers to play over a church member, if they were available to play.

The divisions gave a chance for all talent levels to flourish, with 15- and 16-year-olds testing the waters against grownups and old-timers getting the opportunity to play out their twilight years. Players of all ages and skills were able to enjoy the love of the game and the camaraderie of a team.

Then a few teams joined who were stacked with players hoping to get a few cuts in during the week before competing for trophies on the weekend. There was never a church affiliation to fall back on, nor a following of the long-accepted rule of not bringing in lots of ringers.

They wiped out teams with kids. They destroyed older teams in it to have fun. Those people stopped playing, dropping participation.

When stacked teams ran up against other similarly built squads, tempers flared and trash talking spiked. The games were competitive, but they didn't promote the spirit of church league.

I've never forgotten covering a game where both teams scored in the 30s and ended on a walk-off homer. I had several participants tell me it's the best church league game ever played. I didn't write a word about it, other than to post the score.

Why? Because I remember the near fight at home plate, the multiple F-bombs dropped and the general anger and contempt the teams showed for each other. They did pray afterward.

Maybe one day the league will return. It'll take strong leadership, renovated — or new — fields and an infusion of church goers.

It can happen, but I won't hold my breath.

Tournament time



Jeffery Simmons photo

First National Bank's Livia Jaco makes a run-saving tag on Charley Moore during Monday's tournament game in the girls 7-9 league. It was a pivotal play as First National Bank hung on to beat Citizen's Bank 9-8.

First National Bank tops Citizen's Bank

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

In a battle of banks, First National Bank had just enough runs deposited to take home a victory.

Citizen's Bank fell one run short of pulling off an upset in the opening round of the girls 7-9 league, falling 9-8 in its comeback attempt Monday.

The two teams were vying for a spot in the semifinals to

challenge undefeated Netherton Dentistry. It came down to the last out to see who would get that chance.

Citizen's Bank started the fourth trailing 9-4, but the top of the lineup came up at the perfect time. Charley Wilson started a rally with an RBI double, then came in to score on Lorelei Griffith's single.

Taylor Gann, who hit an inside-the-park HR in the first inning, smacked an RBI double into centerfield to

make it 9-7 with no outs. After a strikeout, Eden Grissom's single scored Gann and put the tying run aboard for Citizen's Bank.

Grissom was able to move to third on a groundout by Adelaide Davidoff, but she ended up 60 feet away from tying the game. Citizen's Bank was unable to come up with one more clutch hit and fell as time expired before First National Bank had a shot to hit in the fourth.

The lead bounced back

and forth early, with Gann giving Citizen's Bank a lead in the top of the first before extra-base hits by Leah Mara and Alisson Young pushed First National Bank ahead 2-1.

Grissom's triple and Maci Parsley's single flipped it back to Citizen's Bank 3-2 in the second, but First National Bank started taking control in the bottom of the frame.

Mara's two-run triple played a big part during a

five-run second inning, started by a Zara Laxson single. Abygayle Jones, Brianna Turner, Adyson Shay and Kyslin Cantrell each had singles in the third, when First National Bank posted two runs to push its lead to five.

Jovanna Turner, Peyton Rowland and Livia Jaco all had hits for First National Bank in the victory.

Caroline Boyd added a double in the loss for Citizen's Bank.

Shutout victory

BY **JEFFERY SIMMONS**
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Facing a win-or-go-home situation, Denning and Cantrell found a fool-proof way of advancing in the girls 7-9 tournament. Don't let your opponent score.

Denning and Cantrell advanced to the championship game in the single-elimination tournament by defeating Tennessee Warehouse 10-0 Monday.

Denning and Cantrell, the No. 2 seed, ripped off five runs in the first inning and never looked back, stifling Tennessee Warehouse's bats to earn a right to play for the championship.

Brooke Kesey and Kaidence Crouch were a driving force offensively, with both finishing 3-for-3 in the victory.

Crouch began the scoring in the first, with her two-run double bringing around Kesey and Courtland Porter after early singles. Ruby Denning and Samara Harris also singled and scored in the first, giving the home team more than enough run support behind a strong defense.

Kesey was the defensive stopper in the first inning, snagging a hard grounder in the first inning and retiring Kate Williams before she could reach first with two runners on. Denning and Cantrell continued the strong defense in the second, winning races to second twice for force outs before a strikeout ended the frame.

Porter stopped another scoring threat in the third, snagging a fly ball two runners on.



Jeffery Simmons photo

Brooke Kesey fires to first for an out during Denning and Cantrell's win Monday. Kesey played a big part in helping her squad shut out Tennessee Warehouse 10-0.

Continued on 2B



**July
21st**



1ST ANNUAL TREE CITY INVITATIONAL

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Late Registration: July 1-10 (\$120)

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