

## **Publisher's Comments by Mark Linnemann**

For the first time in recent memory, and possibly for the first time since the CINCINNATI SOFTBALL NEWS began publishing in 1976, there will be no men's class "A" team representing the Greater Cincinnati area in 2007. Watanabe/Tiny Town Pizza/Superior/B & A/TPS called it quits after an heroic 2006 season, and while sponsor-manager Dave Watanabe and a handful of his players have joined forces with a local "B" team, GRK/Watanabe/Wessel/TTP/Easton/Blitz, indications appear to be that USSSA "A" ball may finally be finished in the tri-state.

The question is: what kind of impact will that have on area softball - if any?

With all divisions of upper level softball - including USSSA "C" on up - dying a slow death nationwide, the prospect that Cincinnati might someday be without an "A" team should certainly not have caught anyone off guard. A quick look at the world tournaments held over the last six years at [www.ussa.com](http://www.ussa.com) shows participation in the "A" World plummeting out of control. Back in 2001, thirty six teams competed in the "A" World Tournament. By last year, the event had sunken all the way to seventeen teams, with only thirteen of those being bonafide "A" teams.

In addition to attrition, the fact that Cincinnati "A" teams have traditionally operated on a shoestring compared to those in other areas, and have continued to buck the national trend and limit their recruiting to players in the immediate Greater Cincinnati area was almost certainly a prognosticator of things to come. Combine that with USSSA's decision to permit five major players at the "A" level - meaning that teams would need even higher budgets to step up their recruiting - and Cincinnati's "A" days were definitely numbered.

So what does it all mean, and will the situation ever change?

Well, beginning with this issue of the SOFTBALL NEWS, there is no "A" team being previewed for the first time in memory. And when the dust settles at the end of the season, there will be no "A" player to claim "Player of the Year" honors. In fact, the "open" or "major" All-City team published every fall by the SOFTBALL NEWS for the last 31 years is now history - at least for this year.

In addition, there will, of course, be no "A" players to feature on the cover, like Shane Spicer following Watanabe/TPS' third place finish in the "A" World. There will be no team for our softball community to rally behind at the World, or in Conference USSSA or any of the USSSA Major NIT's. No "A" team will be carrying the flag, so to speak, across the country to promote the Cincinnati area and help keep it on the map and in the national limelight, or vying for a top ten or top twenty five national ranking. There will be no more David and Goliath Metro tournaments, begging the question as to whether anyone will even bother to show up and watch two local "B" teams compete in the finals of the Major division later this summer. And for that matter, will there even be a Major division this year or beyond? And finally, when the pool of local "A" players runs dry in a few years, will the local softball Hall of Fame begin inducting "B" players?

What about the impact on other programs? It would seem undeniable that the area's class "B" program will be strengthened from the disbandment of last year's Watanabe/TPS squad, and possibly even some "C" teams. And will that help encourage weaker "B" teams and players down into class "C" and so on, with a domino-type effect?

Dave Watanabe, who carried the “A” torch for perhaps the final time in Cincinnati softball history last year, says he’s “not sure” what effect his dropping out of the “A” program will have on softball locally.

“With several players from last year’s team playing on two or three ‘B’ teams, some of those teams will get better,” he predicts. “And the Metro may become a more competitive tournament. There might even be more teams play in the upper division. It’s been called the ‘major’ division, but really for the last three or four years, there’s been no ‘major’ team that played in it.”

Nevertheless, he dismisses any idea that the upper level will be taking a step backwards.

“There will still be a lot of competitive spirit within the tournament,” he predicted.

The last time Watanabe pulled back the reins on sponsoring an “A” team, he joined forces with Perkins Roofing to form another “A” team, but gave up control of the team. After only two years, he was back running his own “A” team again.

This year, he’s taken his sponsorship and some of his players to Blitz, which will remain “B.” Will he again make a bid to return to the “A” level some day?

“If I felt my current participation did not satisfy me,” he allows. “But as long as it’s fun and everybody gets along, and we have a good, solid, winning team and program, I’m comfortable where I’m at.”

Still, won’t Watanabe miss participating in the nation’s premier events and seeing all the friends and acquaintances he’s made over the last few years?

Not to worry, he insists.

“There will be some crossover competition,” he points out. “We’ll play in three or four conference tournaments and maybe one or two of the Nationals. We’ll still see some upper echelon play.”

Watanabe says he enjoyed his experience competing as a dark horse at the “A” level with a predominantly local club and only one USSSA major player.

“I loved it,” he recalls. “I enjoyed the role of underdog in the upper level tournaments. It was very gratifying to excel with less according to the Major Player List. At one point we had two or three players on the list, but it’s hard to keep them all on the same team.”

What would it take to lure Watanabe back to organizing another “A” team?

“I think there is enough talent in the area that there could be a team crop up here,” he says. “It may just be a cyclical thing this year. There might just be a year or two span when there might not be an ‘A’ team, although there are less nationwide. Still, it might just be a coincidence that there is not one this year.

“I know if the right sponsor would come around, there wouldn’t be any difficulty fielding a really competitive team,” he says. “The talent is just kind of spread out at this point.”

## **Letter to the Editor**

Dear Mark:

On behalf of the entire Buckeye Umpires Association, we offer our sincerest condolences to the family of Wayne Rust.

Wayne was more than just our Umpire-In-Chief with the Buckeye Umpires. Wayne was a father figure to many umpires, and a constant leader who would do anything to help anybody in need. There was never a rule Wayne did not know even without opening a rule book. Umpire organizations throughout the state called frequently to get official rulings from Wayne.

Wayne was in the office daily and usually from sunrise to sunset on weekends. While his daily umpiring had subsided on weekends due to health problems, his leadership and commitment to umpires never wavered. He was a pillar of encouragement and dedication and will be truly missed by all the thousands of players and umpires he has touched. He had a hug for any child, and a smile for everyone. To quote Wayne, "softball is my life," and it really was. We will miss him dearly. He was the greatest.

Sincerely,

Bob Lipsky, and All of the Buckeye Umpires Association

## **In My Opinion by Ron Jeffers**

Last month I told you some stories from the past about the first female umpire in the Greater Cincinnati area, how I had to deal with racial problems that existed at the highest level in baseball and softball here, and how it came about that we began paying umpires before they worked their game. I didn't have all the degrees one needs to make all these important decisions, but I had a father from the mountains of Tennessee who came to Cincinnati on a freight train with a third grade education, a great work ethic, an undying respect for his Lord and men of any color, and as honest as any man who ever lived.

Try calling in sick some day when your father worked 55 years for the Cincinnati Metro Co. without ever missing one day's work. When my father was in his seventies he was still standing out in the rain and snow to catch a bus to go to work, and one bus driver would take him home whenever he could. My father introduced him to me once, and told me what a good friend this boy was to him. The African American MAN never batted an eye when my father said that, and I explained to my father later that it was not respectful to call him a boy. My father said he didn't mean to be disrespectful, he just seemed like a boy or young man compared to him in his mid-seventies. My father cleaned up the horse race tracks on his off days, and when he swept up the discarded betting tickets the men would go through them on their lunch time to look for winning tickets. My dad didn't know exactly what they were doing, but he found one of the tickets they were looking for. They told him, "hold on to that ticket. You have a winner, and you can cash it in for some money." He said "No, it isn't mine. It doesn't belong to me, and I can't keep it." I'll bet someone there found use of it. As backward as these values may seem in today's world, those are the values I was raised by, and those were the values I tried to apply to my life, my umpiring, my job, and to writing this insignificant article for some thirty plus years.

Well, as I sit here in my study and admire the beautiful snow scene outside, I realize my umpiring career is over, and my chance to talk to you in this way soon will be over too. I have a few stories

yet to tell, then it will be time for me to leave for someone with a better handle on the game as it is played today.

I had a young frail umpire from Amberly Village who was assigned to a young girl's softball game in Golf Manor, and I received a call from the coach telling me "My umpire had exposed himself to the girls at this game." I called him immediately, and he claimed he was taking his pants off at the car, and he had his bathing suit on under his pants. Every time I called his house the family was cursing and screaming at each other, and just giving him a game was uncomfortable for us all so with all that and the possibility he was exposing himself, I told him I couldn't use him any more. Being a bright grad of Ohio State, he then filed an unemployment compensation case against me, and if I lost that case, every assignor would have had to pay unemployment compensation premiums on each of their umpires. After a state investigator came to my office to check out how our association operated, they came to the conclusion umpiring was seasonal employment, and we needed to make certain that was spelled out clearly in our contracts with the umpires in the future.

About a year or two after this incident, I got a call from the FBI asking if they could come to my office to visit me. How do you tell them no? Two agents came by and asked me if I had had an umpire named so-and-so, and if I knew where he was. They told me he had joined the marines, and after some period of time he went AWOL. While he was AWOL from the marines he joined the Air Force, and was stationed at Wright-Patterson. He was living with a lady in the Dayton area, and went AWOL again from her and the Air Force. She contacted the FBI not knowing what could have happened to him, and this led to them visiting me. They asked me if I ever came across him to call them immediately, and they left me their business card on there way out.

Within the next few months I was watching a basketball game at UC when who should I see walking down next to the floor in a big oversized top coat but Mr. AWOL himself. I looked in my wallet for the FBI business card, and I went to the phone and called them, and told them right where he was sitting. They came and took him away, and, who knows, maybe he is umpiring in prison now. This guy was a real nut case.

The reason I had every umpire sign a contract with me before I would assign them a game was because of an umpire named Don Steinke.

Mr. Steinke was well-passed his better days as an umpire, to be kind to him, and he was trying to umpire the bases at St. Xavier High School, when he got hit with a batted ball. As luck would have it, a bone in his leg was broken, and he sued me and the umpire association with a Workmens Compensation Case for medical expenses and lost wages.

We went to court with outstanding legal counsel Randolph Freeking III representing us and won the case. Mr. Steinke then appealed the court's decision, and we had to go to court again. We won the case in the appeals court, and he appealed it again. This time we won for the third and last time, but can you imagine how much this would have cost me and our umpire association in attorney and court costs? Thank God Randy, which is the name I called him when he umpired for me while going to law school, took the case for me free of any charges. This could have bankrupt our umpire association had it not been for the generosity of Randy Freeking.

From that day forward every umpire had to sign a contract that stated he or she agreed they were an Independent Contractor, and not an employee of Ronald L. Jeffers. If they didn't sign that agreement they didn't umpire.

To this day if you assign umpires to your park, tournament or league, make them sign a simple agreement with you, and always provide them with a 1099 MISC at the end of the year, and never ever give them a W2.

If you get into trouble as I did, Mr. Steinke has since passed, but Randolph Freeking III is a very successful attorney who was representing Marge Schott and the Cincinnati Reds, and the Hamilton County Prosecutor when I last saw his name in the paper. Umpiring softball in the Greater Cincinnati area at least helped to further the education of this outstanding attorney, father and citizen of Cincinnati.

That is my opinion. What is yours?

### **What's Your Gripe? By Ron Jeffers**

**Q. Ron, I saw this play happen at the ASA "A" National Tournament last year and have been wondering about it ever since. In the bottom of the 7th inning of the semi-finals, the bases were loaded with two outs. The team at bat trailed by two runs. A pinch-hitter came off the bench and hit the first pitch out of the park for a grand slam home run to win the game. In his exuberance as the ball sailed over the fence, the batter jumped over first as he rounded the base, missing the bag. The defensive team appealed, but the umpire ruled that the players don't have to touch the bases in the Men's "A" program when a home run is hit. Was that the correct call? Seems to me that the visiting team should have won the game.**

A. ASA passed a rule a few years ago where the batter does not have to go to first base or run around the base path when he hits a home run out of the park. This was put in the rules to speed up the game, and I for one think it is a bad rule.

The Umpire was correct in the call he made.

ASA does not have this rule in any of their senior programs, though, and you would think if it was a good rule for class A it would be a good for all their programs.

In class D, if you hit a home run out of the park, the batter is out and the inning is over. I think these people have lost their minds and all contact with the players who play the game.

**Q. Ron, in a league game last summer, the other team had runners on second and third and no outs in the bottom of the 7th. The next batter hit a sacrifice fly to tie the game and the runner on third clearly left early. We walked the next two batters to load the bases, then appealed that the runner who had scored left too soon. But the umpire called him safe, stating that we lost our right to appeal because we walked the two batters! What does that have to do with it? We appealed before the next pitch. Isn't that all that matters?**

A. Intentionally walking a batter is considered the same as throwing a pitch to the batter and therefore no appeal is allowed. The team in the field should have made the appeal before they walked the next two batters, and none of this would have happened.

**Q. Ron I recently heard about the passing of Wayne Rust. What memories do you have of Wayne? I know he once umpired for you.**

A. Yes, you are right, Wayne did umpire for me for several years, and he could never get enough games. He was a real workhorse.

I once had to fine Wayne for umpiring his games one Saturday in his football referee uniform, and we parted ways when I caught him taking a tournament on his own without it going through our organization. With all our problems Wayne and I remained friends. I am saddened to hear of his death.

**Q. If a batted ball strikes the pitching rubber or one of the bases and then goes into the dugout between home plate and first base, what is the ruling?**

A. If a batted ball strikes a base and goes into a dead ball area such as a dugout, the ball is dead, and the batter and all runners are awarded two bases.

When a batted ball strikes the pitching rubber it is the same as hitting a piece of dirt in the infield and this is just ruled a foul ball.

### **CRC News by Ron Odenbeck**

The 2007 Cincinnati Recreation Commission Adult Softball Program registration for all teams - old and new - continues this month until all leagues are filled.

Lighted Leagues and Sunday afternoon leagues will begin play on Sunday April 1st. These leagues will play at Oskamp, Oakley, Salway, and Schmidt fields and will use an eight game season format. The fee for all lighted leagues is \$350 (eight games). The fee for Sunday afternoon (unlighted) games is \$285 (eight games).

Twilight leagues (unlighted) will begin on Sunday April 15th. These leagues will play at Airport, Oskamp, Oakley, Salway, Schmidt, and Withrow fields and will use a ten game season format. The fee for twilight leagues is \$345 (ten games).

### **DOWN PAYMENTS**

This year the CRC Athletic Division will allow teams to hold a spot with a \$100.00 down payment. The remainder of the registration fee is due by Thursday March 1st to allow time to get schedules out in a timely manner. Down payments are non-refundable. If full payment has not received by March 1st, your spot can be replaced by a full payment registration and without refund of down payment.

### **THREE SEASONS**

Our three season (spring, summer, and fall) leagues at Schmidt worked out so well again in 2006 the CRC Athletic Division will continue that program in 2007. Also, all CRC Softball field locations will again offer the one fee covers everything (registration fee, umpire fee, balls, and bases).

### **FIELD UPDATES**

The Athletic Division will also be offering field and weather condition updates at all field locations for the 2007 season. Each field will have its own individual rainout program cancellation number for the teams. This will provide better game day communication and help to prevent unnecessary trips to the fields by the teams.

## **All LEAGUES**

All leagues (lighted and unlighted) include ASA and USSSA registration, scorebook, rulebook, and Cincinnati Softball News subscription for each manager.

## **UMPIRES**

Umpires will be assigned by the Cincinnati Recreation Commission. The CRC Athletic Division will be holding umpire training on Sunday January 14th from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. The CRC is looking for ex players and current umpires who are on time, KNOW the rules, hustle, are professional, and believe in great customer service. Contact Ron Odenbeck at 352-1627 for further information.

## **CRC Leagues To Offer USSSA World, National, State Tournament Berths**

All Cincinnati Recreation Commission men's, women's, mixed couples and black american leagues will again offer berths into USSSA championship tournaments in 2007.

Men's, women's and mixed leagues will offer berths into both State Championship and Great Lakes Division National Championship Tournaments. Black American teams will be awarded World Tournament berths from selected leagues.

In men's, women's and mixed leagues, a berth into the Ohio USSSA State Championship will be awarded to the first, second and third place teams in each league. A berth to the USSSA Great Lakes Division National Championship Tournament will be awarded to the first place team in each league.

A berth to the USSSA Black American World Tournament will be awarded to the first place finishers in the Salway (Sunday) league.

Teams accepting berths are responsible for paying their own entry fee. The CRC League Supervisor and USSSA officials will determine the proper team classification. Tournament packages for Great Lakes Division National Tournaments and Ohio State Tournaments will be mailed to eligible teams by the USSSA. Teams must meet USSSA eligibility requirements to advance.

## **ASA News**

### **Rumpke Ballpark Launches New Website By Lindsey Yoder**

ROSS, Ohio-Feb. 16, 2007-With the spring season just around the corner, Rumpke Ballpark recently launched a new website, [www.rumpkeballpark.com](http://www.rumpkeballpark.com). The new site features information about the ballpark's history, league and tournament schedules, daily rainout updates and more. In addition, visitors are able to download all necessary league, tournament and sponsorship forms.

“We're very excited about launching this new site. It adds a great deal of convenience for our players and puts a wealth of information at their fingertips,” said Danney Saylor, executive director of Rumpke Ballpark.

Rumpke Ballpark is an Amateur Softball Association Hall of Fame member and was one of Cincinnati's first ballpark complexes. The ballpark offers first-rate, lighted fields and a family-friendly environment, including an extensive concession stand for fans and players.

Rumpke Consolidated Companies, Inc. is a family owned and operated company since 1932, providing residential, commercial and industrial waste and recycling services in Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana. Rumpke's headquarters are located in Cincinnati, Ohio.

### **Four Enshrined Into Norwood Sorrento's Softball Hall Of Fame Of Greater Cincinnati**

Springdale, OH.--Four more area softball greats were inducted into the Norwood Sorrento's Softball Hall of Fame during a banquet ceremony January 28th at the Radisson Hotel Cincinnati Riverfront in Covington.

The ceremony, attended by a robust crowd of 250, brought to 119 the total number of people who have been enshrined into the Hall of Fame since its inception in 1985.

Inducted into the Norwood Sorrento's Softball Hall of Fame of Greater Cincinnati were Theresa Marie Hirschauer of Aurora, In., a four time USSSA Women's "A" All-World selection with Empress Chili and Kinder Sharks; Mark William Huber of Cincinnati, who starred on the mound for the premier open and industrial teams in Greater Cincinnati and the Cincinnati Suds professional team; Michael Ray Kinnett of Harrison, who was a two-time Greater Cincinnati Player of the Year and was selected to a dozen Men's Major AllCity teams; and Jerry Albert Meyer of Cincinnati, a park manager who helped develop Kolping Park and Queen City Sports Complex into two of the areas most popular softball facilities.

WCPO-TV sports anchor Dennis Janson served as Master of Ceremonies at the banquet for the third consecutive year.

The afternoon program commenced with a cocktail hour featuring a slide show and memorabilia display. After a buffet dinner, banquet sponsors and past inductees were recognized.

### **Mark Huber Induction**

After a breakthrough season with Bushelman Construction in 1981, Mark Huber spent 1982 with the Cincinnati Suds and played every position except shortstop. He rejoined Bushelman in 1983, then in 1984 led Bogart's/Best Design to a third place finish in the USSSA "A" World. In 1985 his M. W. Tribble was ranked first in the nation, and finished second in the "A" World, where he was named to the All-World team. Two years later in 1987 he won a Metro title with VIP Limousine. It proved to be his last year of open ball, as he joined the Cincinnati Pipefitters Local #392 team in 1988. From 1990 until 2004, he pitched the Pipefitters to twelve ASA Major Industrial Metro titles, earning MVP honors in four of those events. U. A. Local #392 also won four UA National titles and two USSSA Industrial World Crowns. He was selected to the All-Decade team in 1990 and the Greater Cincinnati All-Century team in 2000.

Rex Kern, a former manager with Local #392 and a member of Local #392's softball committee, was the first testimonial speaker of the afternoon.

Kern congratulated Huber's family, especially his parents, Jean and Frank, who Kern called Huber's "lifetime supporters and motivators before softball ever became a part of his life."

Kern recapped many of Huber's long list of accomplishments playing with U. A. Local #392, focusing special attention on the annual U. A. International Tournament held each year in Cincinnati in June. Huber led Local #392 to three titles.

"The remaining years we were no lower than second," noted Kern. "This is a major accomplishment considering there are 50 to 60 teams participating every year from across the United States and Canada.

"Mark had the respect of all the players in this tournament because he raised the expectations and performances both for himself and everyone else on the field," said Kern. "And he respected the game and the players involved in the game.

"It was a privilege to be on the same team with you," said Kern in closing. "Congratulations."

Rick Yeager of R. L. Yeager Sporting Goods, who played with and sponsored some of Huber's teams, also spoke for Huber and concentrated on his pre-industrial career. Yeager traced Huber's climb up the ladder from the beginning of his open career with Loth Office Furniture until it ended with Treb De Fox.

Yeager said Huber "played the game the way you were supposed to, with dignity, class and heart.

"When Mark was on the mound, he not only knew where he was going to pitch the ball, he knew where the batter was going to hit it, and he moved his players accordingly. And they all listened to him. That's the kind of respect he was paid by all the players who played with him over the years. His legacy is that he will always be remembered with the great softball pitchers of our time.

"Congratulations on your induction," said Yeager.

After congratulating his fellow inductees, Huber thanked the Hall of Fame Committee, the DeLuca Family, the many sponsors and coaches he played for during his 28 years career, and his family, who he called "the most important people in his life."

Huber gave special recognition to his father and uncle, who "pushed us to do our best both in life and in sports," and to his cousin, Rodney. "He's been my inspiration," said Huber.

Some of his career highlights, said Huber, included playing on television with the Cincinnati Suds and in front of 3,000 people every Saturday and Sunday night, the U. A. National Tournament, and being ranked number one in the nation with M. W. Tribble, and pitching in the World Tournament finals and batting clean-up.

"I don't think it gets any better than that," said Huber.

Another highlight, said Huber, was "making friends with new people every time you stepped on the field, many of whom have become lifelong friends."

Huber summed up his accomplishments by saying that he felt he "made average teams competitive, good teams better and the best teams champions. Thank you all once again, and I'll see you on the fields in a couple of months."

## **Jerry Meyer Induction**

Inducted next was Jerry Meyer, who managed Kolping Park from 1985 until 1997, then became manager of Queen City Sports Park in 1998, a position he still holds today.

During Meyer's tenure at Kolping Park, league registrations soared from 40 teams in 1985 to a capacity of 160 teams in 1988. In 1996 Ohio USSSA honored him with its "Award of Merit" in recognition of the outstanding league and tournament program he had developed at Kolping. Later at Queen City, Meyer turned a troubled facility around and the park earned national "Complex of the Year" honors in 1999. Meyer's work ethic, relationships with his teams, staff and umpires, and his fairness and sound judgment are respected throughout the softball community.

Meyer's first presenter was Mark Linnemann, Editor & Publisher of the Cincinnati Softball News and a USSSA Executive Vice-President.

Linnemann talked about how a park manager has to wear many hats, from tournament and league director to finance manager, personnel manager, groundskeeper and umpire-in-Chief. They have to settle confrontations between players and managers almost every night, constantly change league and tournament schedules, and do all of that on very little sleep, said Linnemann.

But Linnemann said that lifelong friendships and other rewards, like the satisfying feeling that comes with shutting down the park on the final night of the year or wrapping up a big tournament, can make the job seem worthwhile.

"You would think it was time for Jerry to rest on his laurels after building one park from scratch into a reputable program," noted Linnemann. "But a chance meeting with Queen City owner Dudley Farrell led him to take on a new challenge."

That, said Linnemann, was to turn around the fate of a failing business, Queen City Sports Complex.

"Jerry awakened a sleeping giant at Queen City that is now the home for more softball teams than any other facility in Greater Cincinnati," said Linnemann.

"Jerry's work ethic, hands on approach, rapport with players and umpires and employees, his listening skills, and sound judgment have made him the first park manager in Greater Cincinnati softball history to earn the honor of being inducted into the Sorrento's Hall of Fame."

Kolping Park manager Kevin Sims, who is married to Meyer's neice, was next to speak.

After sharing several humorous family anecdotes, Sims recalled how his stepfather, the late-Lou Schmidt, had persuaded Meyer to leave his pony keg on North Bend Road to run the concession stand at Kolping.

"Who knew this would be the beginning of his career as Park Manager," said Sims. "He ran Kolping for thirteen years and made it one of the best parks in the city. Then in 1998 he left to manage Queen City. He has been one of the best park managers in the city. Teams have come to love and respect him. In 1999 he helped me become the next park manager at Kolping. Thank you. I still call him when I have a problem or a question.

“In closing, I’d like to congratulate Jerry on his induction into the Hall of fame. He has been an asset to the softball community for many, many years.”

“Thank you. What an honor it is to receive this recognition,” said Meyer in his induction remarks. He then thanked his family and friends for attending the banquet.

“I would also like to thank the Hall of Fame committee for electing me, Norwood Sorrento’s and all the other sponsors who make this annual banquet possible,” continued Meyer. “I also want to congratulate my fellow inductees.

“I share this award with the person who has been putting up with the long hours that it takes to run a softball complex, my wife of 47 years, Betty. I used to kiss her good bye in the spring and say ‘I will see you in the fall.’”

After introducing his family members, Meyer thanked USSSA Director Mark Linnemann “for all his help over the last 23 years.

“I am also grateful for Lou Schmidt, bless his soul, for getting me the job at Kolping. And to Dudley Farrell for hiring me at Queen City, and all my friends, employees, managers and players for making this award possible,” said Meyer.

“I really enjoy running a softball complex,” he added. “Where else can you meet and get to know so many people and have some of them tell you what a great job you’re doing one minute, then scream profanities at you the next.

“If I could do it all over again, I would.”

### **Theresa Hirschauer Induction**

Theresa Hirschauer, the third inductee, was a four time USSSA Women's “A” All-World selection with Empress Chili in 1994 and Kinder Sharks in 2002, 2003 and 2004. In 2002 and 2004, Hirschauer led the Kinder Sharks to USSSA Class “A” World Series titles. She has also been named to two USSSA 35-over All-World teams, and was named the Outstanding Defensive Player in 2003 and Most Valuable Player in 2004 while helping Ty-1-On capture their fifth and sixth 35-over World Championships.

Hirschauer has been named Greater Cincinnati “Player of the Year” at both the class “B” and class ‘A’ levels, and was named to the Greater Cincinnati All-Decade team in 1990. She has also been selected to numerous USSSA All-Tournament teams in National Invitational Tournaments, and she is a member of the Brown University Hall of Fame, Turpin High School Hall of Fame and Buddy LaRosa Hall of Fame.

Speaking first on Hirschauer’s behalf was her manager with her six-time USSSA 35-Over World Champion Ty-1-On, and a newly inducted member of the USSSA National Hall of Fame, Colleen Needham.

Needham’s first encounter with Hirschauer came on the basketball court, where Needham initially mistook Hirschauer’s “well-founded self-confidence in her abilities as an athlete” as being “too cocky for her age.”

Needham called Hirschauer a leader, a team player, a role model and a person of character.

“She has the ability to get individuals to work together for the common good and the best possible results,” said Needham. “She understands that team comes first, and will play through pain. She has the power to be a role model because of her hustle, sound fundamentals and effort. And she is more concerned about character than her reputation.

“Hirsh, your ability got you to the top, but it is your character that will keep you there. Congratulations, and thank you for letting me share with everyone here the incredible respect and admiration that I have and will always have for you as an athlete, a person, and more importantly, a friend.”

Also speaking on Hirschauer’s behalf was a 1995 inductee in the Sorrento’s Hall of Fame, a 1997 inductee into the USSSA National Hall of Fame, and the 2nd baseman for three-time USSSA Women’s “A” World Champions Empress Chili, Sharon Graham.

Graham described Hirschauer as “disciplined, hard working, fast, confident, intense, full of energy, a leader who never quits, smart, and a defensive gem - no matter where she plays.”

Graham talked about how growing up in a family with several brothers helped Hirschauer “develop a passion for the game and got her a chance as a freshman at Turpin High School and went on to play at Brown University.”

Graham recalled how Hirschauer had redeemed herself with a big hit to help Empress Chile defeat the defending USSSA World Champions in the losers’ bracket finals. Previously in the game she had hit into a double play.

Several years later in the 35-Over World, Graham described how a diving, tournament-saving catch by Hirschauer in left-center instilled the same type effort in one of her teammates, who later in the game came off the bench to make a key diving catch down the right field line.

Graham said Hirschauer can “truly play anywhere and she can do it well.

“She’s a talented outfielder with great speed and instincts, but she can also play the infield and do it without missing a beat. She’s truly an exceptional athlete,” said Graham.

Graham then relayed some compliments from several teammates, who called Hirschauer “one of the top outfielders in the country...confident, dependable (M. J. Ranz).” “A clutch player who I want to see up to bat when the game is on the line (Brenda Ryan).” “She motivates her teammates through her intensity, hard work and never give-up attitude. She expects the best from herself and nothing less. In the outfield she makes seemingly impossible catches look effortless (Sue Garnier).” “She is one of the most consistent players I have played with or against (Shelly Cummins).

“Hirsh, I am honored that you asked me to speak for you today,” said Graham. “You are a pleasure to coach and very deserving of this honor.”

“What a tremendous honor,” said Hirshauer when she came to the podium. “I have been extremely blessed and fortunate to be inducted into four different Athletic Halls of Fame and this honor along with the Buddy LaRosa Hall of Fame are by far the most special.

“I want to thank the Hall of Fame committee, Dennis Janson and the sponsors of this great day,” said Hirschauer. “The thank you that I express is not nearly enough for all the time, energy and passion you put into this day and your passion for softball. There will be a resounding theme of my speech - one that will be repeated over and over again - the people involved in the game of softball are what makes this day and so many other summer days so special in the last 25 years.”

Hirschauer then recalled how meeting Willie DeLuca 25 years ago, and weekly trips to Sorrento’s after league games in Norwood where hundreds of trophies and other sports memorabilia were displayed helped develop her passion for softball and reinforced stories her mother had told her of the great Dana Gardens teams.

“Speaking of my mom and dad, they have always been the guiding force and my inspiration in my athletic career. They always made sure that I never let honors or awards get in the way of making myself a better player. Because of my family, I was always able to be the best I could be. This special bond with my parents is what made the 2004 ‘A’ World Championship so special. It was a World Series that was held in Fort Knox and my parents were able to share in our great weekend and championship.”

Hirschauer then thanked her presenters, Colleen Needham and Sharon Graham. She spoke of Needham’s “passion, organizational skills and fiery competitiveness,” but noted that her “best side...being a caring friend...doesn’t always get noticed.

“She also represents a variety of people who have been critical to my softball success and to that of many other women in the game,” added Hirschauer. “Team sponsors, Joe and Carol with Empress Chili, Dave Greek with Hill & Griffith, Don Kinder from Kinder Sharks, Bernie from Bobcat - these are only a few people that have had a major impact financially to my career and have allowed us to play the great game of softball.

“Colleen also represents all the great coaches I’ve had the pleasure of working with, and I want to thank all the coaches and managers who do what they do for the game.

“Next I would like to thank Sharon Graham,” said Hirschauer. “One of the main reasons why I asked ‘Crackers’ to speak for me is because she is one of the few people who have watched my development as a person and softball player from a 14-year old at Turpin High School to my life as 40-year old today who still loves the game of softball.”

Hirschauer said that watching and learning to appreciate great players, like Graham, Jenny Johnson-Kappes, Jan Deters and Peggy Meachem, who played with passion and challenged each other to be better, “was one of the biggest reasons for my development as a player.

“But I have to admit - Sharon was the one who brought the best out of me. Although I’ve played longer with other teammates, Sharon had a lasting impression and a huge impact.”

Hirschauer said that a bet she made with Graham on who would hit the best in a weekend tournament “helped change my approach to the game and still pushes me today. In my current capacity at Cincinnati Country Day School as Athletic Director and coach, it is what we use everyday with our athletes...set a challenge..set a goal.

“Thanks again for this great honor,” said Hirschauer as she wrapped up her remarks. “The special people that I have played with and for are the reason the game of softball is my extended

family and why each and every one of you will have a special place in my heart. Thank you very much!"

### **Mike Kinnett Induction**

The afternoon's final inductee, Mike Kinnett, enjoyed his breakout season with Watanabe Optical when he was named Greater Cincinnati "Player of the Year" in 1992. The following year he led Watanabe to an ASA Men's "A" National Championship, then in 1995 was named "Player of the Year" for the second time in his career after earning ASA Men's Major All-American honors and being named MVP in the Hudepohl Classic. His second ASA Major All-American selection came with Planet Softball of Lexington in 1998. He finished out his career with EMR/Worth, winning a Major Metro title in 2000 and 2004, the USSSA Great Lakes "B" National in 2004, and the NSA "B" Regional in 2005. He was named runner-up "Player of the Year" for the second time in his career in 2004, and in 2000 he was named first team All-Decade and to the Greater Cincinnati All-Century team.

Introducing Kinnett were a former teammate, Marvin Doyle, who was the 2001 Greater Cincinnati softball Player of the Year and a member of the 2000 All-Decade Team and Greater Cincinnati All-Century team, and Don Holden, Kinnett's sponsor from 2000 through 2005.

Doyle told the crowd that Kinnett had excelled in three sports - basketball, football and baseball - at Harrison High School, where he learned to be a competitor. He went on to become a two-time team batting champion for the University of Cincinnati baseball team. After that, recalled Doyle, "we were lucky enough to get him to play softball."

"For those of you who know Mike, you know how lucky you are to have him on your team," said Doyle. "You've got the lottery pick. You don't want him playing against you. The young guys we meet nowadays come up and ask who the best player is; I tell them to see Mike. Folks, he can do it. We all know.

"I've been very blessed to be a friend of Mike's and his family," continued Doyle. "And all of you, everybody here, you're family to me. You all are very special.

"For Mark, Jerry, Theresa and Mike: congratulations. All the past inductees, family, friends, thanks, and we're here today for these guys."

Don Holden said he felt blessed to play with Kinnett and was honored to speak for him, but wanted to focus his remarks on Kinnett's "off the field antics."

Holden said that when he and team manager Eron Smith began forming their team several years ago, "not only did we talk about the player's ability on the field, but what he was off the field. Whether he was a gentleman - that's the kind of people we wanted on our team. And man did we ever hit a home run with Mike Kinnett. It didn't take long to see that this guy was tough, hard-nosed and never quit, and that he was a good ball player.

"But what really impressed me," stated Holden, "was what he did off the field. He taught Sunday school. He helped friends fix their roofs and their driveways. He calls people who are sick to check on them. He's truly extraordinary and I'm proud to say he's my friend.

"If you ask Mike what's important in life, he's going to say 'God, family and friends.' It's unbelievable how much love he has for his family and friends," said Holden.

“I can’t thank the Hall of Fame enough for showcasing what kind of talent we’ve got in this area,” added Holden. “So as I close, I want to say: Mike, you’re my friend, my teammate, and my brother, and I love you. You’re a great, great ball player.”

After thanking his presenters, Kinnett thanked the Hall of Fame committee and sponsors. “Without those people, none of us would be here. And each of us would agree it’s an incredible honor to be selected for this,” said Kinnett.

Kinnett then acknowledged his team sponsors through the years, including Watanabe Optical and EMR. “I’d also like to thank my teammates from the bottom of my heart,” said Kinnett. “We’ve accomplished a lot of things in softball, but to be honest with you, that hasn’t been the best thing to happen to me in softball. It’s the friends I have. It’s amazing how much these guys love you and would do anything for you.

“And lastly, I want to thank my wife, who has always been there, and has never asked me to stop playing. And I thank her along with my two lovely kids.”

Kinnett said that when he first started playing ball, winning tournaments and individual honors were the most rewarding things to him.

“But being a Christian, I always prayed that those things wouldn’t be my focus,” said Kinnett.

Kinnett then related an incident in which his team was involved in a heated game with one of their primary rivals. “We won, but it wasn’t a very good game because of the antics that were going on,” recalled Kinnett. “Then after the game, the other team’s sponsor came up to me and thanked me and told me how much he appreciated the way I lived my faith. My goal is always to act like Jesus would. That is my main goal. And to be honest, that was probably the greatest honor I have ever been given in softball.

“So, with that said, I thank everybody that had anything to do with my softball career,” concluded Kinnett. “There are so many people, that have done so many things for me. God bless you and thank you very much.”

Each inductee received a plaque courtesy of Sorrento’s Norwood, Hall of Fame rings through the support of some thirty gold and silver banquet sponsors, and medallions from the Cincinnati Metro Amateur Softball Association.

Thirty seven past inductees attended the function, including Jim Anaruma, Norma Eschenbrenner Ante, Ron Baird, Dave Beamer, Bev Beck, Kevin Birkofer, Marilyn Booher, Whitey Brown, Mike Burns, Jan Deters, Ken Ewald, Denver Gabbard, Bill Goedde, Sharon Graham, Roger Grein, Gloria Hill, Don Johnson, Carol Kiradjieff, Joe Kiradjieff, Jim Kuhn, Mike LaFever, V. K. Lehmann, Rick Linz, Bob Long, Paul McMullen, Fred Meinking, Marty Monterosso, Leo Osterday, Mary Jane Ranz, Don Rardin, Walt Roeckers, Dan Romanello, Carol Smith, Brenda Ryan, Mike Sullivan, Clyde Stafford, Mary Jane Tabeling Stille, Tom Taylor, Donna Wolfe, and Richard Zureick.

Deceased Hall of Fame member Ray Ernst was represented by his son, Dick, and Willie DeLuca by his son, Rico, brother Ralph and sister Esa Stewart.

**USSSA News**

## **7th Annual Mid-Summer Park Championship-Wayne Rust Memorial Returns To Expressway Park**

Milford, Oh.--Expressway Park has announced that the 7th Annual "\$2,500 Mid-Summer Championship Series-Wayne Rust Memorial" will be held at the park again in 2007. This year's event will be held the week of July 31-August 5. Only Expressway Park men's "D," "E" and Mixed league teams not competing in the ASA Cincinnati Metro will be eligible to participate. Regular league games will not be played the week of July 31st.

Last year's "Mid-Summer Championship Series-Wayne Rust Memorial" drew a solid field 30-team field. JB's Softball rallied for eight runs in their last two at bats to hold off O. C. Softball 19-13 in the second championship game of the Gold Division. In the Silver Division, Buffalo Wings & Rings mercy-ruled Silverton Cafe 14-1 in the second championship game to finish with a 5-1 mark. While in the Bronze Division, Who Dey battled back from a 9-1 deficit in the championship game to stun Bad Attitude 12-11.

Each of the champions made away with \$500 in cash, while the runners-up collected \$250.

The format will once again be a three game round robin Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, with all teams from each round robin division advancing to a double elimination tournament on the weekend. The "Series" will feature \$2,500.00 in cash awards.

Teams can obtain eligibility rules and requirements and other details by picking up a tournament packet at the park pro shop.

**Note:** A memorial service for former Buckeye Umpire Association Umpire-In-Chief Wayne Rust will be held on Thursday the week of the tournament.

### **"Super Raffle" Drawing March 14th At Expressway Park League Meeting**

Milford, Oh.--The drawing for the 2007 Expressway Park "Super Raffle" will be held in conjunction with the park's team managers' meeting on Wednesday, March 14th, from 7:00 PM until 8:30 PM at the Holiday Inn Eastgate.

Through late February, over 100 teams had taken advantage of the raffle, designed to assist teams with raising money to pay for their 2007 league fees.

Expressway Park provided made 20,000 tickets available to teams wishing to take advantage of the program. Prizes include a Pentium 4 Dell Computer, Portable TV, DVD Player, Boom Box, Holiday Inn Eastgate Weekend Getaway for 2 nights and dinner, 10 \$25 dinner certificates, Deer Track Golf Course Green & Cart Fee, Expressway Park Jacket, Free passes to Adventure Golf Putt Putt & Go Carts, plus more.

The deadline to turn tick stubs in to Expressway Park is March 11th. The raffle will be held at the league meeting on March 14th.

Also at the meeting managers will receive their managers' packets and 2007 league and rule changes will be reviewed.

Teams will also be able to register for March and April tournaments at the meeting, including the "Season Opening Round Robins" on March 31 and April 1. Teams that register and pay for both the March 31 and April 1 dates will receive one free round robin during the season.

Softball equipment will also be sold at the meeting, including bats, gloves, batting gloves, and equipment bags, which will be sold at thirty to forty percent off regular Expressway Park pro shop prices. Representatives of various equipment manufacturers, including DeMarini, Wilson and Worth have also been invited to show their bat lines.

Mike McNutt of "Ball Gloves Restring" will be available to restring softball gloves.

Managers are required to attend, and players are encouraged to attend. Refreshments and snacks will be served at the meeting.

For any additional information contact Expressway Park at 831-2273.

**For All Men's C And D Teams With 1,000 Points, And E Teams With 500 Points...  
Ohio USSSA District IX "Ultimate Super Softball Series Awards" Program Will Again Offer Paid World Berths, Travel Expense In 2007**

Local USSSA officials have announced features of the Ohio USSSA District IX "Ultimate Super Softball Series Awards" program for the 2007 season.

Now entering its sixth year, the program will once again provide paid berths and travel expense based on USSSA National Ranking points.

The points reflect participation and success in USSSA qualifying tournaments.

"Once again this year we're going to award every 'C,' and 'D' team in Greater Cincinnati that accumulates 1,000 points, and every 'E' team that accumulates 500 points, a paid berth to the World Tournament," says Ohio USSSA District IX Director Bob Owens. "And if the team has already qualified for the World, the team will receive \$300 in travel expense if the team advances to the World.

"In addition, the highest ranked men's 'C,' 'D' and 'E' team will receive an additional \$300."

The deadline to earn points is Labor Day Weekend at the conclusion of National Tournament play.

"We're very pleased to be able to offer these enhancements through the 'Super Series Awards' program again this year," says Owens. "Competition for these berths and travel expense has sparked tremendous interest in our qualifying program, and we are pleased to be able to reward teams at the end of the summer for their success and participation."

One of the most enjoyable aspects of the Super Series program, says Owens, is that teams will be able to track their points again this year on the USSSA's national web site at [ussa.com](http://ussa.com).

"USSSA's website is one of the most frequently visited websites in the world," says Owens. "Teams love to track their progress and that of other teams on the site."

The “Super Series” program also features travel expense money for the winners of each Cincinnati area USSSA Men’s Class C, D, E and Mixed Couples qualifiers and Mixed Couples NIT’s. Posting of USSSA national ranking points will be done weekly. Some tournament operators will also post the winning team’s picture on the USSSA website. And an article on the winning team will appear in the CINCINNATI SOFTBALL NEWS and be posted at [cincysoftball.com](http://cincysoftball.com) and on SOFTBALL MAGAZINE’S national website at [softballmagazine.com](http://softballmagazine.com).

Owens says that each qualifying tournament will award travel expense money again this year to the winner in the form of certificates, which can be redeemed towards State, National or World Tournament entry fees. Tournaments with four to seven teams will award \$50, eight to eleven teams \$100, twelve to fifteen teams \$150, sixteen to twenty teams \$200, and tournaments with more than twenty teams will award \$250. This program will be in place for all Men’s C, D and E and Mixed Couples State and National qualifiers as well as Mixed Couples National Invitational Tournaments. All Men’s E World qualifiers held in Ohio USSSA District IX will feature a paid World berth for tournaments with eight or more teams. Tournaments with fewer than eight teams will award half the World Tournament entry fee of \$150. If the winning team has already qualified for the World, the team will receive travel expense in lieu of the paid berth. An unpaid berth will pass down to the next highest finishing, previously unqualified team.

Last year, over \$30,000 in travel expense was won by teams in USSSA District IX events.

“This will be a tremendous opportunity for our local ‘C,’ ‘D’ and ‘E’ teams to advance to the ultimate tournament in their program - the USSSA World Tournament,” says Owens.

This year’s USSSA Men’s “C” World Tournament will be held September 20-23 in Lake Buena Vista, Fl. The “D” World will be September 20-23 in Sterling Heights, Mi., and the “E” World will be held September 13-16, also in Lake Buena Vista, Fl.

The U-Trip Mixed “C” World Tournament will be held in South Carolina, and the Mixed “D” World will be in Lake Buena Vista, Fl. Both events will be held October 19-21.

### **Assistant National U-I-C John Hart Tells Area USSSA Umpires: “Lead By Example”**

“Lead by example” and “Who is the best umpire here today” were the two catchphrases at the Ohio USSSA District IX National Umpire Clinic held September 18th at the Kolping Center in Mt. Healthy, Oh.

Assistant National Umpire-In-Chief John Hart of Abington, Ma., conducted the clinic, attended by approximately 85 umpires from eight different umpire organizations in southwestern Ohio. The clinic was also attended by Assistant State Umpire-In-Chief Mike McNutt of Springfield, Ohio State Director Scott Kuhnen of Dayton, and USSSA Executive Vice-President Mark Linnemann.

An umpire’s appearance, how they treat players and their willingness to help less experienced umpires are ways an umpire can “lead by example,” said Hart.

“And if you have pride and confidence in yourself, you should want to be the best official here today, and you have to be able to back that up. You need to improve your game and be competitive,” said Hart.

Hart kicked off the clinic by playing an inspirational USSSA promotional video, "Stepping Up To The Plate." He then discussed the importance of "leading by example" both on and off the field, and about how an umpire could develop their attitude, ability, appearance and performance towards the goal of "being the best umpire here today."

After lunch a USSSA mechanics video - "Umpire Basics" - was shown, and Hart discussed 2007 USSSA rule changes, the umpire insurance program, equipment, preparation for the game, and game control techniques.

The three major rule changes discussed included how once the first pitch is thrown in the game, that establishes a team's line-up; new optional 70' base paths; and the USSSA pitching rule that permits pitchers to pitch from up to six feet behind the pitcher's plate.

Hart told the clinic attendees that "some players, who think they're bigger than the game," are candidates for ejection."

On the other hand, cautioned Hart "a great umpire will find a way to keep players in the game."

Hart said local umpires were "lucky to work at complexes," which are almost non-existent in New England. He said he had always wanted to come to Cincinnati to conduct a clinic because of his respect for the area and "what Cincinnati has done for softball."

He encouraged umpires to seek opportunities - like umpiring in the USSSA world tournaments held every September at Walt Disney's Wide World of Sports Complex in Lake Buena Vista, FL. - "just to get out and see what it's like. That's what it's all about - opportunity."

Hart, who is entering his 27th year as an umpire, has officiated in some sixty USSSA NIT's, sixty state tournaments, the 1985 USSSA World Series, and has worked about 5,000 softball games during his career. He used his education background to help develop a mentor program for rookie umpires in his division to help them perform at the best of their abilities.

Working with USSSA National Umpire-In-Chief Rick Robertson, Hart helped develop two USSSA training videos, "The Pitching Rule" and "Umpire Basics."

Hart told umpires they need to "take charge, but don't be a dictator.

"Don't get into face-to-face confrontations," said Hart.

"We're here because this is something we love - we love the game," said Hart. "We enjoy being part of it."

### **Cincysoftball.com-Dick's "Big 64" USSSA World Qualifiers Boasts Unrivaled Array Of Paid Berths, Prizes And Awards**

When the second annual "Cincysoftball.com-Dick's Sporting Goods 'Big 64'" is held again this year on Saturday, April 28th ("E" division) and Saturday, May 5th ("D" division), it will again set the standard for USSSA "D" and "E" World Qualifiers.

"With a sixty four team field each weekend, we believe these will be the largest USSSA "D" and "E" tournaments in the country except for the World," says tournament chairman Jerry Meyer of Queen City Sports Complex.

“And to the best of our knowledge, our travel expense and awards packages are unmatched - anywhere,” adds Meyer.

Meyer says that with a value of over \$6,400 for each weekend, adding up to a grand total of almost \$13,000, he believes that the “Cincysoftball.com-Dick’s Sporting Goods Big 64” prize package will be the most lucrative of any USSSA tournaments in the nation.

“In both the ‘D’ and ‘E’ divisions, we’re giving away four paid berths, \$750 in travel expense, \$3,600 in gift certificates from Dick’s Sporting Goods and the host parks, plus trophies and t-shirts,” says Meyer.

For the second straight year, the tournament’s “D” division will feature a special “at large” World berth which was awarded by USSSA Executive Director Don DeDonatis and Assistant Executive Director Danny Brown.

“We’re thrilled to be awarded this berth,” says Meyer. “As far as we know this is unprecedented in the USSSA organization to award a ‘national at-large’ world berth in a qualifier other than a National Invitational or National Tournament. This should be a real drawing card and another opportunity for a local team to win a berth to the USSSA World.

“But,” cautions Meyer, “it is important to point out that this is not a National Invitational, and teams need to be aware that we are not awarding \$600 in travel expense, not awarding NIT points and not running the tournament with a double elimination format, and also that we are using single umpires in the round robin pools.”

Meyer points out that USSSA requires double umpires and the double elimination format in National Invitational Tournaments, and that the travel expense associated with an NIT, and the round robin format of the “Big 64” made it cost prohibitive to bid on as an NIT, and set the event outside of official USSSA policy.

“We wanted to keep the entry fees reasonable, and paying the standard bid fee for an NIT and using double umpires in our round robin pools would have added another \$100 to the entry fee,” says Meyer.

And the format, explains Meyer, is one of the facets of the tournament that teams love the most.

The park manager at Queen City Sports Complex, Meyer will be serving as chairman for the tournament for the second straight year. Meyer says that for the last three years, Queen City has co-hosted several “E” World Qualifiers, including the “Big 64,” which have featured multiple divisions of four teams. He says that after round robin play, each team advances to either a first place, second place, third place or fourth place elimination bracket to correspond with their order of finish in round robin play, then a paid world berth was awarded to each bracket winner.

“The teams love the idea that no matter where they finished in round robin play, they still had a shot at a World Tournament berth in the elimination round,” says Meyer. “And whether they finished first or last in their respective divisions, they were paired up with teams of about the same caliber.”

The only problem with this format, points out Meyer, is that some teams have been suspected of not playing to their potential in round robin play in order to be seeded in an easier bracket.

“We’ve come up with a way to discourage that in the ‘Big 64,’” says Meyer. “We’re going to award descending amounts of travel expense money in each bracket, so that there is an actual benefit to finishing first, second or third in pool play.”

Meyer says that in addition to a paid berth, the winner of the first place bracket will receive \$375 in team travel expense. The winner of the second place bracket will receive \$250 in addition to a paid berth, and the winner of the third place bracket is to receive \$125 plus a paid berth. The winner of the fourth place bracket receives a paid berth, but no travel expense money.

“We feel this will encourage every team to play their ‘A’ game,” says Meyer.

The paid berths in the “E” division of the tournament on April 28th will be berths to the USSSA “E” World September 13-16 in Kissimmee, Fl. On May 5th in the “D” division, there will be a huge difference: only the winner of the first place bracket will receive a paid “D” World berth. The winners of the 2nd place, 3rd place and 4th place brackets will only receive a paid “state” berth.

The “D” World is September 20-23 in Sterling Heights, Mi.

Each of the tournaments will be played in one day, says Meyer, with up to sixteen teams starting at each of the host parks: Queen City in West Chester, Eggleston Park in Colerain Township, Rumpke Park in Crosby Township and Pastime Park in Harrison, and Kolping Park in Mt. Healthy. Teams can register at the park of their choice. When a tournament site becomes filled, teams will be referred to another location.

After the completion of pool play, teams will remain at their respective park to play the first two elimination rounds, then advance to one park for the semi-finals and finals.

Entries will be listed at [Cincysoftball.com](http://Cincysoftball.com), which will promote the event during the month of April and feature special coverage after the tournament.

Meyer anticipates that the tournament will fill quickly, for several reasons.

“All of the parks involved have more class ‘D’ and ‘E’ league teams than they do in any other program,” says Meyer. “And we’ll be targeting them with fliers and posters. Plus the event will be promoted heavily on the [Cincysoftball.com](http://Cincysoftball.com) website, which was one of the most popular softball websites in the country last year with 20 million hits.

For additional information on the “Cincysoftball.com Big 64,” visit [www.cincysoftball.com](http://www.cincysoftball.com), or call Queen City Sports Complex at 513-777-8638, Eggleston Park at 513-385-5304, Rumpke Park at 513-738-2646, Pastime Park at 513-367-0266, or Kolping Park at 513-851-5657.

### **Wayne Rust “Touched Thousands” Umpiring, Assigning Softball Games**

Wayne M. Rust was more than just an umpire and umpire assignor.

“Everyone who played softball in the Greater Cincinnati area for the last forty years knew Wayne and thought of him as a friend,” said Bob Owens, manager of Expressway Park in Milford where Rust assigned umpires and worked thousands of softball games before his health deteriorated in recent years.

“He was the friendliest and most outgoing umpire in Greater Cincinnati,” said Owens. “No one was ever a greater ambassador for the game.

“He was also a mentor, teacher and father figure to our umpires,” added Owens. “He would do anything for them.”

Rust passed away Tuesday, February 13th at his home in Bethel of an apparent heart attack.

Rust was a registered ASA and USSSA umpire for the last forty years, and it is estimated that he umpired in some 35,000 slow pitch softball games, including 750 a year at Expressway Park. Rust served as Executive Director of the Buckeye Umpire Association, and in that position he assigned over 7,500 softball games at Expressway Park and other softball programs throughout Greater Cincinnati.

Rust served as U-I-C for the USSSA in 22 World or National Tournaments, 78 Ohio State Tournaments, 84 National Invitational Tournaments, and in excess of 1,500 other tournaments at Expressway Park. And as an umpire he officiated in an astounding 150 USSSA NIT's, over 125 state tournaments, and 5 USSSA World Tournaments, including the 1996 USSSA Men's Major World Series. The World Series is considered to be the most prestigious event in softball, and Rust was selected to work the championship game.

A member of the New Richmond High School Hall of Fame based on his baseball and basketball accomplishments, Rust received dozens of awards and honors relating to his softball umpiring, including several service awards and U-I-C awards from 82 through 1994. He was named Umpire of the Year at Expressway Park in 1984, 1986, 1987 and 1999, and Greater Cincinnati Umpire of the Year in 1995. He received the Ohio State Umpire-In-Chief Award in 1996, and the USSSA's National Director of Officials Award in 2002. The award is the highest award that the USSSA presents to one of its officials aside from selection to its Hall of Fame. All recipients of that award are reconized in the USSSA National Hall of Fame Museum in Kissimmee, Fl.

Then Director of Officials Jim McCarron, who presented Rust with the award during the USSSA National Meeting in Orlando, Fl., praised Rust at the time for both “his considerable accomplishments as an umpire” and for his “common sense while umpiring all levels of softball.

“His passion for the game is exhibited by his unique ability to umpire all levels of play, and his exceptional skills and compassion remain constant whether umpiring for the Special Olympics games, youth play or mixed couples,” said McCarron.

After receiving the award, Rust told the SOFTBALL NEWS that it came with “a lot of responsibility to live up to this standard.”

Rust credited a lot of people with helping him throughout his career. After umpiring in the military in California, he returned to Cincinnati and went through the Queen City Umpire school for rookies.

“I was really impressed with their organization and the way they ran their school and their classes,” recalled Rust. “I got a tremendous value out of that school, and I've always tried to emulate the way they ran their schools. Ron Jeffers (former Executive Director of the Queen City Umpires) had a big influence on me in the late sixties and early seventies.”

Rust also acknowledged the influence of local umpire veterans Ray Vaughn and Jim Hamilton on his career, Ohio State U-I-C's George Popp and Dale Davidson, National U-I-C Rick Robertson, and former USSSA Director of Officials Jim McCarron.

"I've always been around good, strong people and you pick things up from people you see and respect," said Rust. "And you can't ask for a better atmosphere to develop umpires and encourage them than the backing I get from Bob Owens and Expressway Park.

"It's all a people business," said Rust. "And what it comes down to is we love the people in the game - the coaches, families, players and fellow umpires. I really feel like I need to share this award with them.

"I'm in the twilight of my career and in poor health, and when I think about the camaraderie I've had with the players and my fellow umpires, I have nothing but fond memories," said Rust. "I feel like they're all part of my family."

Expressway Park's Bob Owens said Rust "knew the rule book better than anyone in Greater Cincinnati.

"Wayne would get calls in the park office from players and umpires and umpire organizations from throughout the state. And when he was still officiating, he was the best umpire in Greater Cincinnati, which was evidenced by his selection to work the USSSA World Series," said Owens.

After taking over the reins of the Buckeye Umpire Association as Executive Director in 1995, Rust was a "fixture at Expressway Park," said Owens.

"He was in the office every evening and all day on Saturday and Sunday. And he was a master of mediating disputes between players and umpires. No one can ever fill his shoes or touch the lives of so many thousands of players and umpires in such a positive way."

Rust, who was born in 1945, was the father of Wendi Hazenfield and Heather Rust (deceased), grandfather of Samantha Hazenfield, brother of Allyn, Kay and Lora. A memorial gathering will be held at the Milford American Legion, 450 Victor Stier Dr., Milford, Ohio 45150, on Friday, February 23, 2007 from 7:10:30 PM. In lieu of flowers, send donations to: Wayne Rust Memorial Fund, attention Theresa Napier, Treasurer, New Richmond Board of Education, P. O. Box 372, New Richmond, OH 45157.

#### **Four NIT's, State Tournaments Anchor Local Women's Program**

Four National Invitational Tournaments and the Ohio State Championship will be the marquis events on a ten-weekend USSSA Women's Tournament calendar for Greater Cincinnati in 2007.

USSSA State and National qualifiers will also be held at Northside K of C, Riverstar Sportsplex, Springdale Recreation Center and Triple Creek Park in Cincinnati and Pastime Park in Harrison.

NIT's are slated for Riverstar, Pastime and Expressway Park in Milford. The Ohio USSSA State Tournament will be played at Queen City Sports Complex in West Chester.

State and national qualifiers will be on March 17-18 at Riverstar (C and D divisions), May 26-27 at at Northside K of C (B, C and D), June 10th at Pastime (D and E), July 14th and 15th at Triple Creek Park (D and E), and July 21-22 at the Springdale Recreation Center (B, C and D).

Five National Invitational Tournaments, each offering direct berths to the USSSA World Tournament, will be held on April 7th (Saturday only) at Riverstar Park in California (B, C and D), May 5th and June 9-10 at Expressway Park in Milford (B, C and D) and June 23-24 at Pastime Park in Harrison (B, C and D).

Teams will have their choice of awards or travel expense money at some NIT's and qualifiers, says Ohio USSSA Women's State Director Myra Burwell.

"It's our experience that teams are getting a little tired of trophies and plaques and want all the financial help that we can give them," comments Burwell.

In addition to the travel expense money awarded, teams will receive USSSA ranking points, which can be tracked throughout the season at [ussa.com](http://ussa.com), the USSSA's official website. Participants are ranked at the State, Divisional and National level. The teams with the most points receive the best seeding at USSSA post-season events, and often receive first round byes. Also, winning team photographs will be posted at [www.ussa.com](http://www.ussa.com), and tournament highlights at [www.cincysoftball.com](http://www.cincysoftball.com), throughout the season.

Last year's Worth-Bud Light Commie Currens Memorial USSSA Women's NIT was won by the Northern Diamonds/Worth/Tanel (class C) and Intimidators/Sneaky Pete's (class D). The Northern Diamonds, last year's "C" runner-up, shelled Hill & Griffith 31-21 to complete a three game sweep. The Intimidators dismantled four opponents in the class D division, mercy-ruling three of their victims.

The following month in the Worth-Bud Light "May Classic," Ty-1-On battled past The Shooters 11-6 in the deciding game to complete a four game sweep of the "B-C" division. While in the "D" division, Pelle's went 4-1, including 3-0 in the elimination round, and outlasted James Arnold/-Beaches 9-8 in the finals, en route to the title.

Then in the Blue Chip Classic NIT at Expressway in June, Ty-1-On and Pelle's each scored another victory, as Ty-1-On knocked off Hill & Griffith 5-3 to wrap up a three game sweep of the "B-C" division, while Pelle's double-dipped Tri-County Softball 14-9 and 12-2 to capture the "D."

Then in the area's final NIT, the Queen City Classic at Pastime Park, the Shooters of Dayton repeated in the "C" division, squeezing out a 10-9 victory over James Arnold/Beaches in the finale. While in the "D" division, the Battin' Bullets (In.) bested Sneaky Pete's/Milford Hit-Hers for the title.

Championship play will commence with the Ohio USSSA State Tournaments for class B, C and D teams on August 11-12 at Queen City Sports Complex in West Chester. Great Lakes National Tournaments will be held over August 25-26 (class "B" and "C") in Canton, Mi., and on Labor Day Weekend in Ft. Knox, Ky. (class "D").

Teams must compete in their respective National Tournaments in order to advance to the World Tournaments, which will be held this year in conjunction with the USSSA Men's Major World Series and the USSSA Men's "B" and "C" Worlds.

A complete list of local USSSA Women's state and national qualifiers, National Invitational Tournaments, and State, National and World Tournaments appears below. For information

regarding USSSA Women's NIT's outside the Cincinnati area, visit the USSSA national website at [usssa.com](http://usssa.com).

### **2007 GREATER CINCINNATI USSSA WOMEN'S SOFTBALL TOURNAMENT CALENDAR**

March 17-18 USSSA C-D State-Natl. Qual. (Riverstar Sportsplex)  
May 26-27 USSSA B-D-C State-National Qual. (Northside K Of C)  
June 10 USSSA D-E State-National Qualifier (Pastime Park)  
July 14 USSSA D-E State-National Qualifier (Triple Creek)  
July 15 (Sun.) USSSA D-E State-National Qualifier (Triple Creek)  
July 21-22 USSSA B-C-D Qualifier (Springdale Rec Cener)

### **USSSA NATIONAL INVITATIONAL TOURNAMENTS**

April 7 USSSA B-C-D National Invitational (Riverstar Park)  
May 5 USSSA B-C-D National Invitational (Expressway Park)  
June 9-10 USSSA B-C-D National Invitational (Expressway Pk.)  
June 23-24 USSSA B-C-D National Invitational (Pastime Park)

### **OHIO USSSA STATE TOURNAMENTS**

August 11-12 USSSA Ohio B State (Queen City Sports Complex)  
August 11-12 USSSA Ohio C State (Queen City Sports Complex)  
August 11-12 USSSA Ohio D State (Queen City Sports Complex)

### **USSSA GREAT LAKES NATIONAL TOURNAMENTS**

August 25-26 USSSA Great Lakes B National (Canton, MI)  
August 25-26 USSSA Great Lakes C National (Canton, MI)  
September 1-3 USSSA Great Lakes D National (Ft. Knox, KY)

### **USSSA WORLD TOURNAMENTS**

September 21-23 USSSA B World (Lake Buena Vista, FL)  
September 21-23 USSSA C World (Lake Buena Vista, FL)  
September 21-23 USSSA D World (Lake Buena Vista, FL)

### **Five NIT's, Ohio, Kentucky State Tournaments Again Highlight 2007 USSSA Mixed Couples Slate**

Five National Invitational Tournaments and the Kentucky and Ohio State Tournaments will be the featured events on a 23-weekend USSSA Mixed Couples Tournament calendar for Greater Cincinnati in 2007.

USSSA State and National qualifiers will be held at Expressway Park in Milford, Kolping Park in Mt. Healthy, Pastime Park in Harrison, Queen City Sports Complex in West Chester, and Riverstar Sportsplex and Triple Creek Park in Cincinnati. A 2007 USSSA mixed couples tournament schedule appears below.

A total of twenty eight USSSA Mixed Couples State and/or National qualifiers are scheduled for area parks in 2007. Each event will be part of the "Ultimate Super Softball Series Awards" program initiated two years ago by local USSSA officials. A principle feature of the program is that every USSSA State, National and World qualifying tournament held in Greater Cincinnati will award travel expense money to the winning team.

"The awards will be made in the form of certificates which can be redeemed towards State, National or World tournament entry fees," explains USSSA District IX (Cincinnati) Director Bob Owens.

The Kentucky State Tournament entry fee is \$200, the Ohio State and National Tournament entry fees are \$225, and World Tournament entry fees are \$300. Tournaments with three to seven teams will award \$50, eight to eleven teams \$100, twelve to fifteen teams \$150, sixteen to twenty teams \$200, and tournaments with more than twenty teams will award \$250.

In addition to the travel expense money awarded, teams will receive USSSA ranking points, which can be tracked throughout the season at [ussa.com](http://ussa.com), the USSSA's official website. Participants are ranked at the State, Divisional and National level. Also, throughout the season, winning team photographs will also be posted at [ussa.com](http://ussa.com), and tournament highlights will also be posted at [cincysoftball.com](http://cincysoftball.com).

In addition to the state and national qualifiers, there will be five National Invitational Tournaments. Those will be on April 28 at Riverstar Sportsplex, May 12 at Kolping Park, June 2 at Riverstar, July 28 at Expressway Park, and September 15 at Pastime Park. These events will feature the same travel expense awards, national ranking points, and other elements of the State and National qualifiers, plus offer direct berths to the USSSA Mixed World Tournaments. The USSSA Mixed C World Tournament will be held on October 19-21 in South Carolina, and the D World October 19-21 in Lake Buena Vista, Fl.

The local NIT slate will get underway on April 28, when Riverstar will host the 8th Annual Worth-Bud Light-Mike Adler Memorial Mixed NIT for Mixed C, D and E teams. Last Surprise Attack/ADGO polished off Advanced Physical Therapy 17-9 en route to the Mike Adler "C" title, while Sizzle Softball/Cherry Grove Lanes squeezed out an 8-7 victory over DP/Wessel Sports.

The following month on May 12, the 8th Annual Worth-Bud Light Mixed NIT will be held at Kolping Park. Half & Half of Cleveland finished with a 3-1 mark and was awarded 1st place based on tournament tie-breaker rules. Buckeye Express and Circle City also posted 3-1 records.

Three weekends later on June 2, the 15th Annual Worth-Bud Light-Stan Kutcher Memorial Mixed Couples NIT will be held at Riverstar Sportsplex. Hill & Griffith bested Advanced Physical Therapy (C division), while the Bomb Squad outlasted DP/Wessel 15-14 (D division) to take first place in their respective divisions of the Stan Kutcher Mixed NIT.

Next up will be the 11th Annual Worth-Bud Light-Mixed Couples NIT at Expressway Park on July 28th. Last year's tournament was captured by Speed Kills of Columbus, which staved off eventual USSSA "D" World Champion Dented Bats (In.) 13-11 to wrap up a 5-0 day.

Greater Cincinnati's final mixed NIT, the 26th Annual Worth-Bud Light scheduled for September 15th at Pastime Park, is one of the oldest in the country. Last September this long-standing classic featured a showdown between the eventual USSSA "C" and "D" World Champions,

Arni's Prime Players of Indianapolis, In., and Dented Bats of Mooresville, In. Dented Bats romped past Arni's 20-12 to complete a four game sweep.

Championship play actually gets underway three weeks prior to that on August 26-27 when the Ohio USSSA Mixed State Tournament is held at Riverstar Sportsplex and Expressway Park. With over forty C, D and E teams participating last year, it is believed to be one of the largest mixed tournaments in the nation. Like the Mixed NIT's, the Ohio State Tournament offers direct World Tournament berths.

The Mixed Couples National Tournament, which attracted twenty one teams in its sixth year last fall, is scheduled for October 6-7 at Kettering Fields in Dayton. The event offered direct berths to the USSSA World Tournaments to the highest finishing C and D teams.

A complete list of local USSSA Mixed Couples state and national qualifiers and National Invitational Tournaments appears below. For information regarding USSSA Mixed Couples NIT's outside the Cincinnati area, visit the USSSA national website at [ussa.com](http://ussa.com).

### **2007 GREATER CINCINNATI USSSA MIXED COUPLES TOURNAMENT CALENDAR**

March 11 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Pastime Park)  
March 31-April 1 Pre-Season Round Robins (Expressway Park)  
April 8 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Pastime Park)  
April 22 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
April 29 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
May 5 State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
May 6 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
May 12 State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
May 13 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
May 13 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Pastime Park)  
May 28 (Monday) State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
June 2 State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
June 10 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Pastime Park)  
June 23 State-National Qualifier (Triple Creek Park)  
June 24 State-National Qualifier (Triple Creek Park)  
July 4 (Wednesday) State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
July 7 State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
July 8 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Pastime Park)  
July 15 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
July 21 State-National Night Qualif. Round Robin (Riverstar Park)  
July 22 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
August 5 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Pastime Park)  
August 12 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
August 19 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
September 3 (Monday) State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
September 9 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)  
September 9 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Pastime Park)  
September 23 (Sunday) State-National Qualifier (Expressway Park)

### **USSSA NATIONAL INVITATIONAL TOURNAMENTS**

April 28 National Invitational World Qualifier (Riverstar Park)  
May 12 National Invitational World Qualifier (Kolping Park)  
June 2 National Invitational World Qualifier (Riverstar Park)  
July 28 National Invitational World Qual. (Expressway Park)  
September 15 National Invitational World Qualif. (Pastime Park)

### **USSSA STATE TOURNAMENTS**

August 4 Kentucky State Tournament (No. Ky. Sports Park)  
August 25-26 Ohio C State Tournament (Riverstar Park)  
August 25-26 Ohio D State Tournament (Riverstar Park)  
August 25-26 Ohio E State Tournament (Riverstar Park)  
August 25-26 Ohio E Rec State Tournament (Riverstar Park)  
September 22 Kentucky Fall State (No. Ky. Sports Park)  
October 6 Ohio Fall State (Riverstar Park)

### **USSSA GREAT LAKES NATIONAL TOURNAMENTS**

September 29 USSSA Great Lakes C National (Dayton, OH)  
September 29 USSSA Great Lakes D National (Dayton, OH)

### **USSSA WORLD TOURNAMENTS**

October 19-21 USSSA World Series (Lake Buena Vista, FL)  
October 19-21 USSSA B World (Lake Buena Vista, FL)  
October 19-21 USSSA C World (Lexington, SC)  
October 19-21 USSSA D World (Lake Buena Vista, FL)

### **Popularity Soars For New “Two-N-Out.com-Northern Kentucky-Greater Cincinnati Conference”**

Probably most great softball ideas are conjured up over a cold beer.

The new “Two-n-out.com-Northern Kentucky-Greater Cincinnati Conference” is turning out to be another classic example of that recipe.

“I was drinking a beer with a buddy and we were talking about the USSSA Major Conference, and we said ‘wouldn’t it be neat to run something like that off the two-n-out.com website,’” recalls Shawn Sproles, webmaster for the popular local softball site.

“Then I started reaching out to a couple of teams who had been part of my website for a long time and who I knew I could get stats from. Then I got the word out and more teams jumped in, including two from Cleveland and two from Columbus, and before I knew it, it got bigger than I expected,” says Sproles.

Through mid-February, Sproles had eighteen C, D and E teams signed up for the new conference. He’s hoping to recruit some more during the “Bash-For-Cash” tournament next month and by partnering with cincysoftball.com.

So what’s it all about?

“It started off the with the idea of mimicking the USSSA Major Conference (Conference USSSA),” says Sproles. “I thought personally it was neat to get on the USSSA website and see tournament results and player stats and rankings. So I thought I’d start our own thing around here where teams can track player stats, and team stats and have our own ranking system, and have an end of season tournament for the conference championship.”

Last year’s Conference USSSA took the country by storm. The USSSA’s flagging Major NIT’s were losing participation due to the decline in Major and “A” teams.

So in November of 2005, USSSA Executive Director Don DeDonatis unveiled Conference USSSA at the USSSA National Meeting in Championsgate, Fl.

Conference USSSA was a complete restructuring of the USSSA World Series. But it was much, much more. Enticements included a new point system that would award berths to the World Series, qualify teams for a year-end Conference tournament, award world tournament berths and travel money to USSSA B, C and D teams, feature individual player pages and conference statistics on the USSSA website, and recognize stat leaders and an All-Conference team.

The conference proved to be nothing short of a resurrection for the upper programs. And lower division teams turned out in droves to earn a shot at the berths, travel money and ranking points...and to share in the limelight. At the Cincinnati Major NIT last July, an astounding 43 teams stormed Eggleston Park to part of the hoopla.

Sproles entertains no illusions of competing with Conference USSSA. He just wants to emulate it.

“Part of the concept will be to have a ranking system since teams will be from different classes,” he says. “Players can follow their team’s success against other teams, and also have the ability to see how players on their team and even themselves are hitting compared to other teams. They can see how teams stack up against each other, and eventually how they stacked up with teams from a few years ago. We hope each player will eventually have his own player page.”

Stats being tracked this year will include batting average, home runs, home runs hit for outs in “D” and “E,” runs batted in, runs, at bats and hits. Awards will be made, and Sproles is hoping to get some help with those from sponsors.

Stats will only be considered from USSSA tournaments, probably NIT’s, state tournaments and nationals, says Sproles.

A conference championship will be held September 9th at Riverstar Sportsplex. Sproles is also hoping to get some sponsorship help with that as well.

Sproles says there’s “sure to be some pitfalls the first year.

“There will be a lot of things pop up that we maybe hadn’t thought of, but there’s no money being charged,” he says. “We’re just looking at it as a fun thing to do. This season will be a guinea pig year for us. I’m sure some issues will come up. We’ll see if it works.”

Sproles’ two biggest concerns are getting teams to turn in their stats and tournament results in, and coming up with a ranking system that will work.

“It may be a little rough this first year relying on teams to send in their stats, and it will be hard to come up with a ranking system because of the variety of levels in the conference. Some ‘D’ and ‘E’ teams may never play in the same tournament as some of the ‘B’ and ‘C’ teams.”

In the conference tournament, Sproles says the teams will use different home runs rules depending on their class, similar to what USSSA does when teams of different levels compete in Conference USSSA. He hopes this will help the lower division teams to compete.

Teams who want to join the conference can contact Sproles through his email address located on the two-n-out.com website.

“The only requirement this year is to send in your stats, to play in the USSSA NIT circuit and a commitment for the end of the year tournament,” explains Sproles.

“We hope this year goes well so when next year comes around, people will be begging to get in.”

**2007 GREATER CINCINNATI CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS** - Through February 15:  
BCP Associates, Cooper Auto, Dawg Pack, Elk and Elk/Easton, Extreme Softball, Four Star Machine, Franchise, Good Guys, JLC/Legends, Nasty Boys, NKY Thunder, Sentry Fire, Team Bring It/Mad Max, Team Insanity/MFAB, TPE/Backstabbers, Trailblazers, Two-n-out.com, Young Gunz.