

## FEATURE

### BASEBALL SEASON IN MIAMI COUNTY AND BEYOND

by Wade Westfall, Miami County Commissioner & Midwest Ohio Baseball League President

#### Can you tell us about the Midwest Ohio Baseball League?

The Midwest Ohio Baseball League began operations in 2005 but has roots in a previous organization dating back to 1990. Currently there are more than 135 teams involved in the league. (Prior to COVID-19 the league had over 265 teams).

The Midwest Ohio Baseball League is a select baseball league, which offers a competitive baseball environment. The format of this organization enables coaches to develop their players' skills to prepare them for successful high school, and potentially, college competition. The format is designed to allow youth in the area the opportunity to play the highest appropriate level of competition available.

Age groups from 10-14 are divided into Competition Based Divisions in order to maximize competition and parity. This allows our players to be pushed by competition to be the best they can be while recognizing that there are different levels of select baseball. In 2007 the Midwest Ohio Baseball League expanded from its traditional age groups of 9-14U to include a 15-16U group and in 2008, 8U (8 and under) was added. The league continues to try to meet the needs of the coaches, players and parents who love baseball. The league is a coach driven organization. This allows coaches/teams to structure schedules around needs of the team and their parents, and not the organization.

#### How long have you been involved in leadership positions within the league?

I first became a part of the league in early 1990 with our oldest son Blake who is now 39.

#### How did you initially get involved?

Watching our son play t-ball in our local recreational league, I noticed the coach doing his best to control a dozen 5&6 year olds. I offered to help. That led to coaching a team the following year and then being a part of the local little league administration as a commissioner. After spending a few years and having a few more children we started noticing that the structure of the little league organization was becoming very time consuming and not necessarily competitive based, we started looking for something different. That's when we got involved in the League.

We also had a farm that allowed us to build our own baseball field. It was called Four Sons Field of Dreams. It was in existence for over 25 years and hosted countless games and families.

#### Which communities in Ohio does the league serve?

The league serves Miami Valley as well as a few teams inside the Indiana line. Teams from as far north as Bellefontaine, as far west as Richmond, as far east as Springfield and as far south as Cincinnati are members of the league.

#### Do you partner with other community organizations? Which ones?

We work well with all local recreational leagues including Centerville, Piqua, Tipp City, West Milton, Greenville, Beavercreek, Bellbrook, Springfield and Springboro to name a few. We believe that we are an asset to the recreational system. The Midwest Ohio Baseball League, over multiple decades has partnered with communities that have made an investment in their parks for the economic benefit of the entire community. The league is partnering with these communities to provide game and practice fields and host local tournaments for those teams who need or want it. This allows communities and organizations ability to raise funds to support their efforts. In addition, the Midwest Ohio Baseball League continues to provide Professional Baseball Skills Camps to the Miami Valley.

#### Do you follow college or professional baseball teams? Have any of the kids in the league gone on to play college or professional?

Midwest Ohio Baseball League has been the formative League for thousands of players who went on to play high school baseball, hundreds of players who went on to play college baseball and dozens of players, including some Major Leaguers, who have gone on to play professionally. We are proud of our impact on the Baseball Community and intend to continue to positively influence baseball in the Miami Valley for many years to come.

#### Part of a county commissioner's role is to serve the community. How does your involvement with the youth in your community inform the work you do county-wide?

It's truly an honor to be a public servant. My



Commissioner Westfall with baseball players at the Dayton Dragons Stadium

involvement in multiple organizations laid the ground work for me to be an effective county commissioner. It's the opportunity to serve our community that gives me great satisfaction and purpose.

### **Is there anything about operating the league that has surprised you?**

Over the years I've witnessed a deterioration of behavior from adults and at times has filtered down to children. There's not a year that goes by that I don't say "I should have kept track of the bad behavior. It would have made a great book." But all in all, kids are kids and parents just need to let them be just that.

### **What is the most rewarding part of your work with the league?**

I like the organizational aspect of the league, taking the burden off of coaches and allowing them to focus on the kids. Each year thousands of games are being played in the league and the good always shines brighter than the bad.

My favorite night is our award night at the Dayton Dragons. Normally, the league would offer an end-of-season tournament for those teams that finished in the top of their brackets. A number of years ago when the Cincinnati Reds announced the location of a minor league affiliate organization to be located in Dayton, we immediately partnered with them to host our 8, 9, & 10-U age groups. At this level, we have found kids want to be kids, and after a long season they really do not miss another game.

### **Can you tell us more about the Dayton Dragons Night and End-of-Season Tournament?**

All of our top teams in every divisional split of every age group receive an award such as a high quality medal. Depending on age groups, we also award our teams with an end-of-season tournament or our Midwest Ohio Baseball League night at the Dayton Dragons.

11, 12, 13, 14 & 15-U teams experience an all-expense-paid single elimination one-night league tournament. 8, 9 & 10-U teams receive the Dragon's night, experience a fun-filled night at the Dayton Dragons game. Divisional first and second place coaches and players receive admission to the game. Players are chosen to throw out the first pitch. Teams experience a parade on the field prior to the start of the game. A team is chosen for a meet-and-greet with the professional players and a behind-the-scenes private tour.

Last year nearly 1,000 players, coaches, parents and family attended the Dragons night. For many years now, we have filled the entire outfield stands plus all the lawn sections including the Dragons Lair with Midwest Ohio Teams and families. Please keep in mind that the league has not raised fees in over 8 years. We work hard to keep our expenses down and pride ourselves in putting the league fees back into the kids. Over the last several years a former Cincinnati Reds player has been our guest. Last year Tom Browning (Mr. Perfect) signed well over 250 baseballs and spent hours with the kids.

Our most important award and recognition is also this night. Each year a team is selected and is recognized for sportsmanship. This award is recommended and voted on by our umpires, with final approval by the administration and board. This is the most important award that the league gives. The team receiving the sportsmanship award is recognized with a special medal at the Dayton Dragons night. They enjoy the game in a private party deck in center field with food and soft drinks. This award not only recognizes the coaches and players but also their family members. We believe sportsmanship is not limited to our coaches and players, but also the fans that follow them.