

The things kids do for fun has changed dramatically from the time we were kids to now, as we all try to figure out raising kids of our own. The days of going to the library to study with friends has been replaced by laptop computer studying on the couch. "Playing outside" has gone from taking the bike and having to be home by dinner to supervised play in the back yard. Instead of collecting and trading baseball cards or reading comic books, kids now download apps on their iPads or iPods. And "I Spy" on car trips has been replaced by watching DVD's or playing hand-held video games.

Through all this change, one game has withstood the test of time.

Wiffle Ball.

The equipment is dirt cheap and indestructible. The balls and bats can't break windows or injure siblings. You don't need a half acre backyard to get a game on. And it can be played by moms, dads, brothers, and sisters.

We're very lucky in Twinsburg to have an all volunteer board comprised of genuinely great people that put in a lot of their own personal time to help improve the youth baseball experience for the 700+ rec and travel players that choose to play baseball in our city. When we started brainstorming ideas for a late summer fund raiser to help upgrade some of the old, beat up equipment for our rec baseball players and to make some improvements to the fields at Liberty Park ... the idea of hosting a big Wiffle Ball tournament in late August sounded good ... but so do a lot of ideas before you start working through the realities of planning, promoting, and executing them. Do people still play Wiffle Ball? Would people actually come play in a tournament? Would it draw players of all ages? And could we round up enough volunteer help to handle everything that would go into planning and pulling this off.

Yes, yes, yes, and yes.

55 teams made up of over 200 players entered the 1st ever Twinsburg World Series of Wiffle Ball. 107 Wiffle Ball games were played this weekend to crown champions in 7-10, 11-14, and 15+ age divisions. The feedback was 100% positive, with one player and parent after another commenting how they would be back next year, would be telling others, and speaking to the potential of making this event even bigger and better. This event will happen every year in Twinsburg on the Saturday and Sunday of Labor Day weekend - so mark your calendars now. We made all kinds of notes how to make it even better next year. There are a couple rules we need to clarify better (plastic cleats are allowed, pitchers cannot re-enter, will be quicker to adjust pitching distances to account for wind) ... but all in all, the rules held up great and games flowed like we thought they would. Next year we'll also set up 3-4 fields in each outfield to accommodate more teams, more games, and to get those outfields even more loaded with spectators than they were this weekend. We'll have more of a precedent to work with sponsors on, many of whom were potentially interested this year, but were questionable of what they were sponsoring and what we were trying to pull off. And we'll have more volunteers, a couple of whom will work at the home run derby full time and a large hospitality tent at the entrance to Liberty Park. We'll also work to get the local media more involved next year.

Before I get to some of the memories from this year's tournament, **and this is very important: SEND US YOURS.** Any good pictures you took of the event. Pictures of your kids spray painting wiffle ball field lines into your backyard this week. ;-) Pics of the uniforms, email anecdotes from the weekend or the Draft Draw Party, we want it all, sent to this email address, so we can collect and organize it all to preserve the memories of this inaugural event.

Thanks to long time TBL board member Karen Labbe, we have close to 100 great pictures from the weekend up on the TBL Facebook Page. You can see them all at the link below, and "like" our page while you're at it, so you can make sure to stay caught up on all the cool baseball related things we're doing here in Twinsburg (and we do a lot ... we love our baseball in Twinsburg). Link: <https://www.facebook.com/TBLBASEBALL>

While you're at it, like Hook's Grill on Facebook as well. While some sponsors were leery to get involved year one, the great people at Hook's were on board from day one. These are great folks that are heavily involved in the Twinsburg community that did an outstanding job hosting the Bracket Draw Bash Wednesday night, and were up at Liberty Park morning to night Saturday and Sunday serving up burgers and hot dogs to the several hundred in attendance. They're always running great specials and holding events at Hook's, and you can make sure not to miss any of that by liking them on Facebook, right here: <https://www.facebook.com/HooksGrill>

In looking back at the event, let's start with our winners. Pictures of all of our winners and the final copies of all the brackets can be found on the home page of our website at www.TwinsburgBaseball.com.

7-10 Age Division Champs - The Weekend Warriors - Tyler Barni, Eddie Musbach, and Stan Musbach. Went undefeated to barnstorm through a 20 team bracket of very talented 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders! Their closest game was an eight run win. Good pitching beats good hitting, and that was the story for this trio, who made big pitchers and big plays in the field to etch their names into Twinsburg World Series of Wiffle Ball history by defeating the State All-Stars (Kyan Barnes, Ernie Phillips, Reggie Bussey) in the title game.

11-14 Age Division Champs - Balls O' Wiff - Matt Christopher, Nick Bonnizzio, and Bobby Hausler. 11-14 was our biggest and most talented age division, drawing 24 teams of mostly very talented travel baseball players from all over northeast Ohio. Balls O'Wiff needed seven wins to win the championship, including five on Sunday, and two in a row over The Future (Chase Oberthaler, Nino Liotta, and Reese Larch) ... who they lost to earlier in the day in the winner's bracket final.

15+ Age Division Champs - Team Wrobel - Dave Wrobel, Nick Wrobel, Phil Wrobel. The Wrobels went 4-0, allowing only 13 runs all tournament en route to the title in the 15+ age division with a 9-5 victory in a very entertaining championship game over The Eventual Champs (Ron Schultz, Rick Hollan, Trev Larch, Chris Kimmel). Phil Wrobel was dazzling crowds all weekend with his sidearm "riser" pitch, by throwing pitches and batting right and left handed, and with some majestic moon shot home runs. But it was his brother and fellow teacher Dave who delivered the crushing blow with a grand slam home run late in the championship game to make the Eventual Champs the Eventual Runners Up. The Wrobels were definitely the family of the weekend: daughter Summer also hit several grand slam home runs as part of the all female "Ponytail Express" team that made some serious waves in one of the younger age divisions.

There were a lot of other great memories. Starting with Wednesday night, when over 150 people were packed into Hook's Grill as we blind drew the brackets, and voted on our best Team Name Contest, which went to "Wiff That" (MeganHollan, Tiftn Velican, Mary Schultz, and Sandi Passek). There was a lot of hooting, hollering, and harmless smack talk when we started pulling names, matchups, and bracket assignments. It was a great start to the week, and that party will remain our kickoff to this event in the years to come. Thanks again Hook's!

Here's some other memories from this weekend ...

~ "The Turtles", who came from Aurora in the 7-10 age division, coming to their Saturday night game (85 degree heat) in full Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle outfits (pics up on [TBL Facebook page](#)) to win our Best Uniforms Award.

~ The Ponytail Express, who scored 20 unanswered runs (12 coming via grand slams) to get the tournament started at 7:30 Saturday morning with an exciting win that had spectators going crazy before they finished their first Starbucks.

~ Rick Hollan: Easily the most entertaining individual of this inaugural event. He had Field 5 laughing all weekend, and also displayed some nasty stuff on the mound to pitch the Eventual Champs to five consecutive losers bracket wins to get them a shot at the Fabulous Wrobel Trio in the 15+ Finals.

~ The almost rain out: Ron Schultz, Jason Passek, Jim Porach and I were all huddled under the tent by the brackets at 1:15 discussing whether or not we should call the tournament as rain pounded Liberty Park. We decided to hold off and have faith that Mother Nature would not bring a premature end to this event. By 1:45 we were back out on the fields, on schedule. By 2:15, the rain stopped. By 3:00 the sun was shining and the rest of the day was gorgeous.

~ Nick Bonnizzio: A nasty collision with the outfield fence left this kid with a shiner on his eye. Not only did he gut through it, but helped lead Balls O' Wiff to an amazing run through some great teams in the 11-14 bracket to help them bring home some hardware.

~ The loser's bracket runs in the 11-14 age division: In a 24 team double elimination tournament, if you lose early, you are tasked with winning many games in a row to get to the finals, and we had three teams making

amazing runs in the loser's bracket of the 11-14 age division. The Junkyard Dogs (Sylvan Wiley, Jack Gojdics, Nick Teodosio, Robbie Pasci) won four in a row starting at 7:30 Sunday morning. The Warheads (Carter Miley, Cooper Bizjac, Ethan Donley, Carter McNamara) lost their first game Saturday, then won games Saturday night at 7:30 PM, and then on Sunday at 8:30, 11:30, 12:30, and 2:30 to advance all the way to the Final Four of the tournament. And even more amazingly, check this run from Wiffle Wafia (Mitchell Voytek, Jon Szydowski, Sean Williams, Seth Grabowski)! They lost 12-2 in their first game Saturday. Then won six consecutive games at 6:30 PM Saturday, and at 7:30 AM, 10:30, 12:30, 2:30, and 3:30 before coming up short in the loser's bracket final en route to a third place finish.

Many thanks to all of you for coming out and participating, and taking a chance on an event that I know sounded crazy to some people when we first told them about it. And many thanks to our volunteers. Most people don't realize, Twinsburg Baseball is an all volunteer organization, with no involvement from the city. Everything that happens with Twinsburg Baseball from registration, to workshops, to care of the fields at Liberty Park, to events like this ... is done by dads and moms with other jobs.

And special individual thanks to this group of people, who gave so much of themselves this summer to pull this off: Ron Schultz, Jason Passek, Sonny Bennage, Jim Porach, Ken Erdmann, Karen Labbe, Andy Chenkus, Raj and Patty Taneja, Tom Barni, Jeff Soppel, Tony Liotta, Rick and Max Hollan, Chris Hojdar, Brent Horvath, and Bill and Nick Tisone. And the spouses that put up with them.

Rich Swerbinsky
Twinsburg Baseball League