



Longest-running Arizona softball tournament comes to an end ?

by Tariq Lee - Jun. 14, 2012
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The longest-running softball tournament in Arizona has come to an end. After more than four decades of the Firecracker Tournament, Phoenix Parks and Recreation officials called it quits because teams had been heading elsewhere the past several years. The tournament was annually played during a weekend near July 4. "We stopped running it for the most part because, in the last few years, our numbers have declined drastically," said Robert Estfan, Phoenix softball staff recreation coordinator.

Last year when we ran the tournament, it took pretty much everything we had to get that portion off the ground." The tournament, which started in 1967, regularly ran up to 12 divisions for youths and adults, including fast pitch and slow pitch, but last year, it was down to six.

It had 115 to 120 teams show up to the tournament in the past, but 2011 saw approximately 50 teams participate in the annual event at Rose Mofford and Papago softball complexes.

The tournament, which ran Friday through Sunday, included a Friday-night fireworks show at Rose Mofford. Estfan pointed to the competition from other softball organizations -- such as the Amateur Softball Association, Triple Crown Sports and United States Specialty Sports Association, in which teams can earn points to make it to a national tournament for competing in the respective associations -- as a reason for the decline.

"If they're going to spend money, especially when money is tight, we would assume they spend it in their association as opposed to our tournament," Estfan said. "Our tournament only gets you some fun gifts at the end, as opposed to bids for a national-type tournament."





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The Grand Canyon State Games have been sending softball players to the Firecracker Tournament to play because of scheduling conflicts. However, it could return the sport to its summer games with the Firecracker Tournament gone. "That will take some research and some deep thought, but it's always a possibility," Grand Canyon State Games Executive Director Erik Widmark said.

With 2012 being the centennial year for Arizona, the departure of the Firecracker Tournament will leave a void for those closest to the event. "As far as the city goes, we're obviously very disappointed in it," Estfan said.

"It's something we've been pretty proud of, but because it has declined so much over the years, we foresaw it coming, and we had a feeling at some point we would have to step away from it."

Read more: <http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/local/articles/2012/06/06/20120606longest-running-arizona-softball-tournament-comes-an-end.html#ixzz1yGqfoog1>

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