

Sports

Baseball Team Continues Long Tradition in Many New Ways

Ozark Generals have been playing baseball in the Ozarks since 1945 and start this season with many firsts

by Mert Seaton

Baseball has had a long tradition in the Ozarks. Everyone knows the Cardinals of the past and present, but there is another team that has been a staple of the baseball community for over five decades.

The Ozark Generals, formerly the Springfield Generals, take the field again this summer at their new home, Price Cutter Park, and plan to continue their long tradition of great baseball.

The Generals operate as a not-for-profit collegiate summer team that has a semi-pro feeling to it.

"What we play is the remnants of semi-pro ball," Generals manager Rusty Aton said. "Our league and play involves the same semi-pro ball things."

The Generals' roster includes college players from local high schools and colleges along with players from across the country. Aton said fans should expect to see a very good product on the field.

"We play at a very high level and there is a lot of talent on the field," Aton said.

"Our recruits this year have exceeded our expectations and we should be very competitive."

Pitcher Lucas Vestal, the only three-year player for the Generals, said a summer team like this gives college players a good chance to improve their skills.

"You are out of school so you don't have to worry about books or studying," Vestal said. "You can go to sleep and wake up thinking about baseball."

This season will have many firsts for the Generals, starting with their move from Meador Park to Price Cutter Park.

"We are very excited about getting baseball back in here and the Generals are going to be a big part of that," said Brad Eldridge, who directs activities for Price Cutter Park. "I really hope we can get the word out and I hope we can get some people out here to see some good college players."

Aton said he expects his team to provide a cheaper way to see good baseball in a good park.

"We can provide a low cost alternative for area baseball by having cheaper tickets, cheaper concessions and free parking," he said. "We plan to make Price Cutter Park our permanent home."

'As long as our pitching is there we will be competitive. We have had more pitching in the past but we are going the other way this season. We are going to score a lot of runs this year.'

— Rusty Aton, Ozark Generals Manager



Photos Courtesy Ozark Generals

The 2004 Springfield Generals played at Meador Park and were an independent team. The Generals are now the Ozark Generals, play in Price Cutter Park and are part of the nationally known MINK League.

Below: Springfield General Tire distributor C.E. Russell created the 1945 Springfield Generals as an American Legion team. The Generals became a semi-pro team in 1946.



Read about Generals' schedules and radio broadcast times on page 12.

Price Cutter Park

Owner: Chicago businessman Horn Chen

Location: Behind Lambert's Café in Ozark

Built in: 1999

Cost: \$3 million

Seats: 4,000

Seat Types: Molded plastic and benches

First Game: June 10, 1999

Original Home Team: Springfield-Ozark Mountain Ducks 1999-2004

Current Home Team: None

Time Vacant: Six months

Recent Updates: Field grass reseeded and plumbing replaced

Employees: None, everything is done on a volunteer basis

Ozark Generals

Background 1945:

Springfield General Tire distributor C.E. Russell established the Generals as an American Legion team.

1946: Russell changed the team to a semi-pro team.

1947: Mickey Owen coached the Generals

Late '50s: Russell left the team.

Late '50s-1994: Generals went in and out of existence

1994: Jason Mohler reformed the team into a summer team for collegiate players.

Home Park: Price Cutter Park

Ticket Price: \$5

2005 Record: 15-23

Board of Directors: Rusty Aton, Jason Mohler and Chad Stills

Organization Funding: Player fees and advertising (T-shirts, billboards)

Volunteer Needs: Gatekeepers, statisticians, host families and on-field operations

If Interested Contact:

Rusty Aton at Extra Innings 417-881-2920 1900 W. Sunshine Building B - Suite 100 10-9 Weekdays 9-9 Saturday 9-6 Sunday

Web Site: www.generalsbaseballclub.com

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Sam Westervelt (right) of the Springfield Soccer Club makes a slide tackle against a Kansas City Pace player in a semifinal match in the under-17 division at the 2005 Missouri Youth Soccer State Cup in Jefferson City.



Photo courtesy Steve Ole Olson

221 Boys and Girls Teams to Compete in Seven Age Groups

Tournament, from 1

teenagers. They've been known to eat. And other youngsters who travel to watch the event probably won't be on a hunger strike.

"Where are those kids going? They're not eating peanut butter sandwiches," noted Susan Wade, the SCVB's public relations manager. "Places kids like to go, I have a feeling they're going to be busy."

The tournament promises a bonanza to fans, too.

"The Missouri State Cup is the first step in potentially representing soccer on a national stage," said Steve Olson, who runs the web site SGFsoccer.com, a source for detailed information on the sport in southwest Missouri. "Whether it's AAU basketball or a national softball tournament, you have to take that first step to qualify. ... State Cup is the ultimate tournament because it is a formal qualifying mechanism for going to nationals."

In the absence of an economic impact study, the SCVB calculates that when visitors stay overnight, \$100 per day is spent on each person. So, when 10,000 people stay for six nights, the computer spits out the \$6 million estimate.

But that total doesn't include money spent on the last day of the tournament, when titles in nine age groups will be decided. And depending on how many visitors are adults — more money tends to be spent on them — and how many are children, the \$6 million figure could balloon.

"We'd rather be underestimating than overestimating," Wade said.

Spending the night means spending money. There are other big draws in Springfield — Ozark Empire Fair, minor league baseball, Missouri State basketball — but few, if any, of those in attendance stay overnight.

"Another key point is that these teams will play one game per day," Ellsworth said. "So if you have one game per day, you will go out and do things in the city. A lot of time they will be in town will be spent at our city businesses."

Check-in is June 9 and play starts the next day. There will be 221 teams competing in boys and girls divisions in age groups under 13 through under 19. Cities that will be represented include Springfield, Kansas City, St. Louis, Columbia, Joplin and Rolla.

With teams in each division competing for only one spot in the regional tournament, high-caliber play on the field will translate into excitement in the stands.

"These are kids who have said this is their sport of choice. The competitive level is higher," Olson said. "It is the way

All-Star Game on June 22

The 2nd Annual Southwest Soccer All-Star Game will be held on **June 22** at Cooper Soccer Complex.

There will be boys and girls games with top 2006 high school graduates. A youth clinic with the all-stars will be held at 4:30 p.m., followed by the girls game at 6 and the boys at 8.

Tickets, \$5 for adults and \$2 for ages 13 and under, are available by calling the Springfield Soccer Club at 832-1552. For group packages, visit Ole at SGFsoccer.com. For more information, call the club.

How to Get There

Fans may have to take alternate routes to reach the sites for the Missouri Youth Soccer State Cup.

Matches will be held at and near the Cooper Sports Complex, 2300-2700 E. Pythian St. During the June 9-15 tournament, Pythian will be blocked off for pedestrian safety from the driveway of the Cooper Tennis Complex, 2331 E. Pythian St., to Patterson Avenue.

Here are the sites and how to reach them from Glenstone Avenue:

- **South Fields.** 2334 E. Pythian St., behind Lake Country Soccerdome. East on Chestnut Expressway to Patterson. Turn left.

- **North Fields.** Next to Killian Softball Complex, 2141 E. Pythian St. East on Chestnut to Pythian. Turn left.

- **Cooper Fields.** At Cooper Sports Complex. East on Chestnut to Patterson. Turn left. At Pythian, turn right.

- **East Fields.** East on Chestnut to Cedarbrook Avenue. Turn left. Go past Pythian and fields are on the right.

Championship matches will be held **June 13-15** at the Cooper and South Fields (there are no finals in girls under 18 and under 19 because the champion is the team with the highest point total based on wins, losses, and ties). Here is the schedule:

- **June 13** — 12:30 p.m., under 19 boys, Cooper.

- **June 14** — 10 a.m., under 17 girls, Cooper; 12:30 p.m., under 16 girls, Cooper.

- **June 15** — 10 a.m., under 15 boys and under 16 boys, Cooper; 10 a.m., under 13 boys and under 15 girls, South; 12:30 p.m., under 17 boys and under 18 boys, Cooper; 12:30, under 13 girls and under 14 girls, South; 3, under 14 boys, South.

you stamp yourself in the pecking order of soccer."

Ellsworth predicts quality games nothing short of sensational.

"If you want to see great soccer, come out this week," she said. "You'll get an excellent view of how exciting soccer can be."

They shoot! They score!

If you've got an idea you would like considered for the *Community Free Press* Sports section, e-mail:

acarlson@cfpmidweek.com

Game Broadcasts Stir Excitement

Generals, from 11

This season will mark the first season the Generals are part of the Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas League (MINK). The MINK League is a wood bat, college summer league that gives teams a chance to play against high caliber teams from the Midwest. Aton said the Generals should fare well in their new league.

"We have beaten a lot of the teams in the league in the past," he said. "As long as our pitching is there we will be competitive. We have had more pitching in the past but we are going the other way this season. We are going to score a lot of runs this year."

This season will also be the first year fans can hear Generals' games without going to the park.

Seven games will be broadcast on Websportsradio.com, starting with the June 3 game at Price Cutter Park.

Steve Casson, co-founder of Websportsradio.com, said he was excited about getting the chance to broadcast the games.

"I have covered baseball in the past and we love doing this," Casson said. "A lot of the teams in this area need more coverage and that is what we are here to do."

Casson also said his company will transmit the games on a frequency inside the stadium so people watching the games can listen in.

Aton said these broadcasts would help his team in two ways.

"First it will give us the opportunity to have some exposure," Aton said. "It will get word of us all over. Also it will give players from other states a chance to listen and that can really help in recruiting."

Aton said he expects good things from his team this year, but the organization is still in need of volunteers.

"Our entire staff is volunteers," Aton said. "We are need of people who are knowledgeable with field maintenance and other duties. It's an all volunteer thing."

He said anyone interested in volunteering should contact him at Extra Innings Indoor Baseball and Softball Training Center.

Ozark Generals 2006 Home Schedule

June			
2	Brunswick Longhorns	7:00	
3	Brunswick Longhorns	4:00	
4	Mid-MO Crawdads	1:00	
4	Mid-MO Crawdads	3:30	
6	Parkville Sluggers	7:00	
7	Parkville Sluggers	7:00	
9	Oklahoma Cubs	7:00 a.m.	
10	Oklahoma Cubs	1:00	
13	Nevada Griffons	7:00	
14	Mid-MO Crawdads	7:00	
20	Price Cutter Red Bulls	7:00	
22	Joplin Slashers	7:00	
23	Blue Springs Grays	7:00	
24	Clarinda A's	7:00	
25	Clarinda A's	1:00	
27	Blue Springs	7:00	

July			
7	Topeka Golden Giants	5:00	
7	Topeka Golden Giants	7:30	
8	Oklahoma A's	7:00 a.m.	
9	Beatrice Bruins	1:00	
9	Beatrice Bruins	3:30	
12	Chillicothe Mudcats	7:00	
13	Chillicothe Mudcats	7:00	

All games played at Price Cutter Park

Admission: \$5

Parking: Free

Ozark Generals 2006 WebSportsRadio.com Schedule

June			
3	Brunswick Longhorns	4:00	Home
7	Parkville Sluggers	7:00	Home
10	Oklahoma Cubs	1:00	Home
14	Mid-MO Crawdads	7:05	Home
24	Clarinda A's	7:00	Home
July			
5	Joplin Slashers	7:00	Away
19	Nevada Griffons	7:00	Away

Broadcasts start 10 minutes before game time
Games can be heard at www.websportsradio.com