

The Strange, but True, History of the Game Of Wiffle® Ball on the Planet Earth

Featuring the bizarre connection between baseball, Indiana and plastic.

Timeline:

1846

According to the Baseball Hall of Fame, Alexander Cartwright writes rules for the sport and puts together the first organized team, the Knickerbockers. The first baseball game played under "Cartwright rules" takes place at the Elysian Fields in Hoboken, New Jersey on June 19. The Knickerbockers play the New York Nine. Cartwright writes the first baseball rules as exceptions to the British game of rounders, removing "hitting the runner with the ball to achieve an out."

1870

Plastic invented and patented by printer John W. Hyatt using celluloid softened by camphor and vegetable oils.

1876

The National League plays its first baseball game ever: Red Stockings 6; Athletics 5.

1892

Indiana resident, Benjamin Harrison is the first American President to attend a major-league baseball game.

1901

Mishawaka native "Fat" Freddie Fitzsimmons, All-Star knuckle-curveballer for the New York Giants and Brooklyn Dodgers, born in Mishawaka, July 28.

1909

Leo Baekeland produces the first completely synthetic plastic, Bakelite, from phenol and formaldehyde.

1953

The first perforated plastic "Wiffle® Balls" are produced and sold in Shelton, Conn., after David Mullany and his son cut holes, diamonds, and other shapes out of plastic balls, to create an imbalance. The ball that works best has eight oblong holes on the top half, and a solid bottom. The company is named The Wiffle® ball, Inc.



1957

The "serious use" of plastic -- i.e. the Wiffle® ball -- takes a hit, when Plastic Hall-of-Shame's Don Featherstone of Union Products invents the plastic Pink Flamingo for front lawns.

1962

Future bat-and-ball Home Run king Steve "OB" Obren is born.

1964

The game of Wiffle® ball becomes a pop culture phenomenon, now found in backyards, beaches, at picnics, in the streets and on playgrounds throughout America.



1965

Elaine Grau, mother of future World Wiffle® Ball Championship co-founder Larry Grau, snaps young Larry's picture with her Polaroid Swinger, while taking his first poke at a Wiffle® ball. Like the NBA's Jerry West, the photo of a Little Lar' later becomes the iconic logo of the tournament.



1970

The Beatles break up and John Lennon forms the Plastic Ono Band.

1974

Ward Baker Park opens on Mishawaka's Southeast side.

1976

The Obren Brothers -- Mark, Tim, Tom and Steve -- play their version of Wiffle® ball at Strike's Field on the corner of Homewood and Beiger streets in Mishawaka. Steve Obren hits 81 homers, smashing Roger Maris' single season bat-and-ball record. Future founders of the World Wiffle® Ball Championship, Jim Bottorff and Larry Grau also play.

1980

On June 12, Bottorff lays out a "new-look" Wiffle® ball field at (Bethel) College Park in Mishawaka, complete with Obren-inspired rules, six-foot high home run fences and new twists. Official rules and field dimensions are copyrighted, including the return of the pre-1846 baseball rule whereby it is legal to hit the runner with the ball to achieve an out. The exciting new game varies greatly in comparison to "fast-pitch" lineball tournaments held years later elsewhere in the country. On August 2, Bottorff, 19, and Grau, 19, hold the First Annual World Wiffle® Ball Championship at College Park. Eight park teams participate in the double-elimination tournament. Bottorff and Steve Obren of 'College Park I' take the first World Championship. Future Commissioner Rich Carrasco, 11, looks on. The park has two playing fields, dimensionally identical to the standardized fields in use worldwide today.

1981

Ten teams invaded College Park. Future Commissioner and Hall-of-Famer Scott Ermeti's 'Homeboys,' out of Baltimore, Maryland, manhandle 'College Park', 9-1, for the World Title, with future Commissioner Mark "Gator" Waumans hitting 11 home runs in 4 games.

1982

Ermeti discovers that mammoth Ward Baker Park is perfect for Wiffle® ball and converts it into what will someday become, at 20 fields, the World's Largest Wiffle® ball Complex. Ermeti and Waumans join the Commission. Four fields are utilized for the 10-team tournament. Bottorff and Graus' 'Blue Ribbon Babies' (Bloomington, Ind.) knock off the defending champion 'Homeboys' in the final.

1983

Barnaby's Pizza becomes the official Friday night watering hole of the World Wiffle® Ball Championship . Fourteen teams play on six fields. The defending champion 'Blue Ribbon Babies' hit an astounding 93 team home runs in seven games en route to their second world championship. The tournament is run independently by Bottorff and Grau, outside of the Mishawaka Park Department. A taped version of Marvin Gaye's "Star Spangled Banner," is played before the tournament, for years one of the most anticipated moments of a truly global World Wiffle® Ball Championship .



1984

The 'Blue Ribbon Babies' win a third straight title over Rose Park.

1985

Mike Schuster, with his arm in a cast, pitches Mishawaka's 'Laidig' to an upset victory over Baltimore, Maryland's 'Homeboys' for the World Championship.

1986

Adjacent to legendary ice cream stop, Bonnie Doons, the Eighth Man-Made Wonder of the World, the



Mishawaka underpass, is completed on South Union Street, providing not only access to the city's only hospital for emergency services, but a much-needed shortcut for Northside Mishawakans and Canadians to Ward Baker Park, at eight fields, the world's largest Wiffle®ball complex. The 'Homeboys' (Baltimore, MD) defeat Steve Obren's 'Dream Team II' (Mishawaka) in the World Final. Mark "Gator" Waumans is

nicknamed "the all-time mythical home run champ" for his consistent ability to beat the plastic.

1987

Bottorff's father, Dick, a Mishawaka native, personally deposits a tournament-used Wiffle®ball in Chengdu, China --- half-a-world away from Mishawaka. At the 8th Annual World Wiffle®Ball Championship, Mayor Robert Beutter dubs Mishawaka the "Center of the Universe" before throwing out the tournament's first pitch. 'Dud's Gang,' out of South Bend, Indiana, go undefeated by beating 'The Westsiders' (South Bend, IN) for the World Championship. Dave Reed hits well over 20 home runs to establish himself as the game's new "Prince of Plastic." Sports Illustrated writer Franz Lidz brings a team from New York City to the tournament. The media frenzy that accompanies Lidz' attendance ensures that the tournament receives heavy media attention in the years to come. For the first time, the Commission charges an entry fee. The amount - \$10.

1988

Indianapolis hosts the first World Wiffle®Ball Regional. In years to come, Seymour, Ind., Baltimore, Syracuse, N.Y., Los Angeles, Eugene, Ore., Skokie, Ill., and Barcelona, Spain follow suit. 'Dud's Gang' successfully defends in 1988, looking invincible in trouncing 'The All-Stars' (Osceola, IN) in the final. Twenty-four teams play on 12 fields.

1989

In the 10th Annual World Wiffle®Ball Championship, 'Dud's Gang' defeats 'The Sure Things' (Louisville, KY), in a three game series for their third title in a row.

1990

In commemoration of its 10th Anniversary, The World Wiffle®ball Commission names twelve players to its newly formed Hall-of-Fame. Charter members include Dan Reed, Dave Reed, Keith Hadary, Steve Obren, Jim Wiesjahn, Mike Schuster, Perry Baert, Mark Waumans, Scott Ermeti, founders Larry Grau and Jim Bottorff, and Player of the 80s, Dave Steinbilber. The tournament swells to 45 teams in 1990, adding regional tournaments in Baltimore, Maryland; Indianapolis and Seymour, Indiana. 'Uncle Buck's Boozers' win the Baltimore Regional, 'The Dittos' win in Indianapolis and 'Hammertime' wins the Seymour Regional. 'Dud's Gang' wades through the most formidable field in tournament history, winning their record fourth consecutive World Wiffle®Ball Championship.

1991

Ward Baker Park, already the world's largest Wiffle®ball complex, expands to 15 fields. 'Dud's Gang' stages a late comeback to defeat the 'Weasels' (Indianapolis) 14-12, to take its fifth consecutive World Wiffle®ball crown. Skip Wright of the 'Sure Things' is named to the Hall-of-Fame.



1992

'The Sure Things' win the 13th Annual World Wiffle®Ball Championship, defeating Mishawaka, Indiana's 'Buff Co.,' the first Mishawaka team to make it to the final game since 1985. 'Dud's Gang' is defeated by the 'Weasels' in the first game on Sunday. The game is a rematch of the 1991 World Final. The loss ends the reign of the five-time champs, who had never lost a Championship since their debut in 1987. Scott Shroyer of 'Dud's Gang' is named to the Hall-of-Fame. Ward Baker Park expands to 19 fields.

1993

'Dud's Gang' overpowers Jason Zolman's 'Louisiana Fur

Trappers' (South Bend, Ind.) to take their sixth World Championship.

1994

In April, Eugene, Oregon hosts the first Wiffle®ball Regional west of the Mississippi. Los Angeles follows six months later. The 'Weasels,' from Indianapolis, defeat 'Dud's Gang' for the world crown. Regional tournaments are played in Syracuse, NY; Seymour, IN; Los Angeles, CA; and Eugene, OR. A record 73 teams play in all tournaments with 53 playing in the finals in Mishawaka. The tournament entry fee is now \$90, including four guaranteed games and free t-shirts. Tony Swihart of the 1981 World Champion 'Homeboys' is named to the Hall-of-Fame posthumously.



1995

The 'Blue Ribbon Builders' (Granger, IN) defeat the Fun Bunch (Mishawaka, Indiana) 11-1, in the final game of tournament play. The 'Spitting Cobras' Terri Bertrang of Indianapolis, becomes the first female participant in the history of the World Wiffle®Ball Championship to hit an "outside the park" home run. The pitch is served up by future hall-of-famer Nate Hansen. Mark "Gator" Waumans puts the World Wiffle®Ball Championship live on the World Wide Web.

1996

The 'Blue Ribbon Builders,' successfully defend their 1995 crown defeating the 'Reservoir Dogs' (South Bend, Ind.).

1997

Mishawakan Ermeti carries Mishawaka's Wiffle®ball tradition to Barcelona, Spain, starting a regional Wiffle®ball tournament there with the help of Spaniard Adolfo Pons. Pons, who stumbles upon the Wiffle®ball web site, contacts Waumans by email in California, and to his surprise, finds that Commissioner Ermeti also lives in Barcelona. Los Angeles-based teams, 'CHUDS I, II and III,' run naked in the streets of Mishawaka after the World Championship's opening round. The 1997 tournament truly becomes international with teams from Spain and Australia making the trek to Mishawaka's Ward Baker Park. Teams from California, Missouri, Illinois, Michigan, Kentucky, Oregon and Georgia also participate.

The 'Blue Ribbon Builders' "three-peat," defeating 'Fisher Concrete' (Mishawaka, IN) for the World Championship.

1998

'The Sure Things' win their second, and the 19th Annual, World Wiffle®Ball Championship , defeating defending champion 'Blue Ribbon Builders' 12-11 in the championship. Jason Zolman of the 'Blue Ribbon Builders' and Andy Schoettle of Indianapolis' 'Weasels' become the 16th and 17th players named to the World Wiffle®Ball Hall-of Fame. Controversy arises for the first time in the history of the tournament when a team is caught loading its bats. Fans show up with signs on Sunday, which read, "No hits, no runs, no cork," "Cork, the other white meat" and "It's only 100 feet, for god's sake!"

1999

Park reconfiguration turns Mishawaka's Ward Baker Park into a 20-field Wiffle®ball complex. The 'Blue Ribbon Builders' (Granger, Indiana) reclaim the crown over Mishawaka's 'Chowder Box' during the 20th Annual World Wiffle®Ball Championship , winning their fourth world title in five years. Terry Snyder, Kerry Snyder, and Mike Weber, named to the Hall-of-Fame.

2000

The World Wiffle®Ball Championship celebrates its 20th Anniversary on July 29. Forty-eight teams travel from all over the world to play for the 21st Annual World Wiffle®ball Championship. The 'Looney Wiffers' (New Carlisle, IN) take the title, defeating Mike's Meatheads (Sullivan, IN).

2001

Hall-of-Famers Jason Zolman and Dave Reed are named Co-Players of the 1990s. 'The Sure Things' of Atlanta, Ga., sweep through a record 59 teams to the 22nd Annual World Wiffle®Ball Championship , beating 'Chowder Box' of Mishawaka, Indiana in the final game on Sunday for their third World Title. Steroid user Barry Bonds, hits 73 home runs, still falling eight dingers short of Steve Obren's bat-and-ball record of 81, hit in 1976.

2002

The 'Blue Ribbon Builders' take their fifth world title at Mishawaka's Rose Park, at 22 fields, the new world's largest Wiffle®ball complex. A record 63 teams compete. South Bend, Indiana's 'Killer Bees' finish second. The aging 'Homeboys' (ages 39-40) stun the Wiffle®ball world by reaching their 10th final four. The 'Montreal Frappeurs' become the first Canadian team to enter the tournament. Rockford, Michigan's 'Fat Bastards' become the first nationally known fast-pitch team to play in the World Wiffle®Ball Championship . The 'Fatties' finish fifth out of 63, and help bring peace and understanding to the Wiffle®ball world. Ken Humphrey becomes the twenty-first player named to the World Wiffle®ball Hall-of-Fame.

2003

Rich Carrasco becomes the twenty-second player named to the World Wiffle®ball Hall-of-Fame. The 'Blue Ribbon Builders' win their record-tying sixth World Championship over Munster, Indiana's 'Club Ripped.' The Opening Ceremonies' tape of Jim Nabors' singing "Back Home Again in Indiana" is misplaced. 73-year-old Dick Bottorff, father of Commissioner Jim Bottorff, steps in and belts out the tune, never missing a note. Another tournament tradition is born.

2004

South Bend, Indiana's 'Dud's Gang' is named the number one Wiffle®ball team of all-time as part of the World Wiffle®Ball Championship's Silver Anniversary. Other greats are: 2. Blue Ribbon Builders - South



Hall-of-Famer Steve Obren
& Co-Founder Larry Grau

Bend, Ind. 3. Sure Things Indianapolis/Louisville/Atlanta 4. Homeboys - Barcelona, Spain 5. Weasels – Indianapolis 6. Blue Ribbon Babies - Bloomington, Ind. 7. Looney Wiffles – New Carlisle, Ind. 8. Dream Team II - Mishawaka, Ind. 9. Mike’s Meatheads - North Vernon, Ind. and 10. Fight the Power - Annapolis, Md. The World Wiffle®Ball Championship holds its 25th annual tournament on July 31. The silver anniversary milestone again marks Mishawaka’s sports institution as the world’s oldest Wiffle®ball tournament. Dick Bottorff again sings “Back Home Again in Indiana,” this time changing the words from “along the Wabash” to “along the ole’ St. Joe.” Ben Downey is the 23rd (and second youngest) player named to the World Wiffle®ball Hall-of-Fame. Playing in his 30th tourney (including regional events), Mark “Gator” Waumans, the all-time mythical homerun champ, hits his 400th homerun. ‘Club Ripped’ of Munster, Indiana wins the 25th Annual World Wiffle®Ball Championship, defeating the ‘Funky Plastic Offspring.’ After 25 years, the directors of the oldest and largest Wiffle®ball tournament in the world

turn the event itself over to Rich Carrasco and the Children’s Campus of Mishawaka, Indiana’s Family and Children’s Center. Some of the organization’s highlights to date include:

- 1980 - The first World Wiffle®Ball Championship is held in Mishawaka, Indiana.
- 1987 - *Sports Illustrated* staff writer Franz Lidz plays in the 8th Annual tournament.
- 1990 - Hall of Fame established (see bottom of “History” page). Regional tournaments begin breaking out nationwide.
- 1994 - The first regional tournament is held west of the Mississippi, in Eugene, Oregon.
- 1998 - Barcelona, Spain hosts the first World Wiffle®Ball Championship–Europe.
- 2002 - The Championship hosts a record 63 teams at Mishawaka, Indiana’s Rose Park.
- 2004 - *ESPN the Magazine* features the tournament in its August 2 issue.
- 2004 - The tournament celebrates its 25th Anniversary.



2005

Commissioner Rich Carrasco successfully runs Wiffle®Ballin’ for Kids, a huge new charity tournament for the Children’s Campus of Mishawaka, Indiana’s Family and Children’s Center. The ‘Blue Ribbon Builders’ take a record seventh world championship.

2006

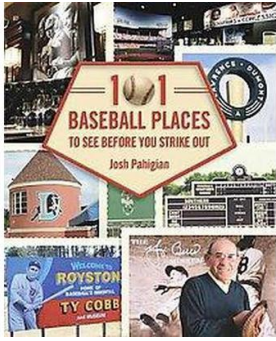
‘Club Ripped’ wins their second world title, defeating seven-time champion, the ‘Blue Ribbon Builders.’ Forty-nine teams compete in the charity event.

2007

The ‘Funky Plastic Offspring’ of Mishawaka take the 28th Annual World Wiffle®Ball Championship, rolling through the 50-team, two day tournament undefeated, knocking off Elkhart, Indiana’s ‘Whiff This.’ The ‘Offspring’ carry fifth man and captain Mike Schuster, 46, to his second world championship in twenty-three years (see 1985).

2008

John Arndt of New Carlisle, Ind., is the 24th player named to the World Wiffle®Ball Championship Hall-of-Fame. After 29 tournaments, co-founder Larry Grau hits a home run in his last at bat and promptly retires. Grau won three World Titles, ran the 1984 tournament and is a charter member of the Hall-of-Fame. Mishawaka’s ‘Balco Boys’ successfully run the gauntlet on Sunday, finishing the day by knocking off three former world champions in a row to take the 2008 World Championship. The Commission partners with the Skokie Park District (in Illinois) to form the National Wiffle®Ball Championship. The Chicagoland Wiffle®Ball Championship is held in September 2008, followed by the National



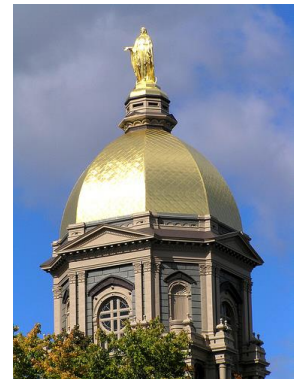
Championship tournament in the summer of 2009. Josh Pahigian's book "101 Baseball Places to See Before You Strike Out" is published by Lyons Press. The book, widely available at bookstores and online, features legendary Rose Park and the World Wiffle®Ball Championship at number 20, along with such places as the baseball hall-of-fame, the field of dreams, the green monster and Wrigleyville.

2009

2008 World Champs Balco Boys defeat two-time World Champion Club Ripped, 3-1 in the first National Wiffle®Ball Championship in Skokie, IL. The Commission names seven new players to its Hall-of-Fame. Inducted are game pioneers Mark Obren, Tim Obren, Tom Obren and players Chris Montgomery, Nathan Barcus, Mike Baniak and Nate Hansen. Finally shaking off the stigma of his famous serving up of the tournament's first female homer (see 1995), Hansen is also named the Player of the Decade for the 2000s. In honor of the tournament's 30th annual event, Marvin Gaye's version of the national anthem makes a comeback after a five-year hiatus. Led by its two new hall-of-famers, Club Ripped defeats NWL Stars of Lake Villa, IL to win their third World Wiffle®Ball Championship over more than 50 teams from around the world.

2010

Amongst the images of Joe Montana, Notre Dame's Golden Dome and Studebaker automobiles, the Barnes and Noble at Mishawaka's University Park Mall features a giant Wiffle®ball tourney image on its wall mural. The Balco Boys take both the National Wiffle®Ball Championship outside of Chicago and the World Wiffle®Ball Championship in Mishawaka, both for the second time. More than 55 teams play in the 31st Annual World Wiffle®Ball Championship, with teams representing 17 states including Texas, California, Georgia and Kansas.



2011

The Funky Plastic Offspring win their second World Championship, after also taking the National Title in Skokie, going 18-0 for the year.

2012

The Funky Plastic Offspring run their win streak to 25, while winning the National Wiffle®Ball Championship. Club Ripped takes their fourth World Championship in Mishawaka three weeks later, making them only the third team in the 33-year history of the tournament to win four or more world championships. Mishawaka's Children's Campus is purchased by another agency, and after eight years, turns the tournament back over to founder Jim Bottorff.

2013

The World Wiffle®Ball Championship moves just north of Chicago, leaving its home in Mishawaka after a grand 33-year run. In those years, thousands of players made the pilgrimage to Indiana's "Center of the Wiffle®Ball Universe" to test their skills, bond with wifflers worldwide and enjoy their favorite childhood pursuit. The Illinois tournament offers a return to pre-2005 rules and a tournament run by Bottorff, the event's original Mishawaka founder and director since 1980, in a partnership with the Skokie Park District. On June 30, the Funky Plastic Offspring win the 34th Annual World Wiffle®Ball Championship at Skokie's Channelside Park (from 2008-12 the home of the National Wiffleball Championship.) It is FPO's third title, with the team's Dan and Randy Schuster going into the Hall-of-Fame during the tournament's opening ceremonies. Also elected to the Hall: organizer Chad Miller, and players John Premetz and Joe Stratton.



2014

Funky Plastic Offspring take their fourth title over Maple City Magic of LaPorte, Ind., on the tournament's 35th Anniversary . Thirty-two teams from 16 states play at Channelside Park, braving two days of mud and rain on July 12-13. A Bob DeLeonardis home run puts him in a tie with Chris Montgomery as the oldest player to go yard, at age 54. [The tournament is featured on ESPN's SportsCenter on July 18.](#)

2015

South Bend, Indiana's Clutch Players end the decade-long dominance of the Big Three (Funky, Balco and Ripped) beating Funky Plastic Offspring in the final, 5-2. Thirty-seven teams from 15 states play at Channelside Park. Eric Wodrich of the Balco Boys and Joel Cyrier of Funky Plastic Offspring are inducted into the hall-of-fame. A Mike Schuster home run puts him in a tie with Bob DeLeonardis and Chris Montgomery as the oldest players to go yard, at age 54. Margaret & Katie Nagai sing a killer version of the tournament's first live rendition of the Star Spangled Banner. The Skokie tournament makes the second edition of "101 Baseball Places to See Before You Strike Out," featuring Channelside Park and the World Wiffle®Ball Championship at number 27.

2016

Forty-two teams from Florida, to New Mexico, to Minnesota, play at Skokie's Channelside Park. The 'Cult West Warriors' beat four-time world champs 'Funky Plastic Offspring' in the final, 4-3. Glenn Duddleson of South Bend, Indiana is inducted into the World Wiffle®Ball Championship Hall-of-Fame on the strength of his six world championships from 1987 to 1993.

2017

Organization is underway for the 38th Annual World Wiffle®Ball Championship in Skokie, Illinois on July 15-16, 2017. The tournament will celebrate its fifth anniversary at the Skokie Park District this year.