

# Edisons Entertainment Center banquet kicks off American Legion Great Lakes Regional

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer  
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**EDWARDSVILLE** – By the time this week ends, a total of 64 **American Legion baseball teams** will be whittled down to eight, and those eight teams will be heading to Shelby, N.C., for the American Legion World Series that takes place next week.

Eight of those teams – representing Danville, Ill.; Madison, Wis.; Beloit, Wis.; Bay City, Mich.; Shelbyville, Ky.; Rockport, Ind.; Pickerington, Ohio; and the Metro East Bears, the local entry, were honored at a banquet Tuesday night at Edison's Entertainment Complex to celebrate the start of the American Legion Great Lakes Regional baseball tournament. Games get under way beginning at 10 a.m. today at SIU-Edwardsville's Roy Lee Field and run through Sunday afternoon, with the winner advancing into the Legion World Series.

Speakers at the banquet honored the tournament's participants, including Edwardsville Mayor Hal Patton; Matt McSparin of Edison's; Derrick Ater, the American Legion's tournament director; Col. Anthony Mitchell of the St. Louis U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and St. Louis Cardinals Director of Player Personnel Matt Slater, who delivered the keynote address.

“I can tell you what physical tools it takes, what type of swing, what type of pitching mechanics you need (to reach the major leagues), but I thought it was more important to talk about the other half of the evaluation that we do,” Slater said in his address, “and that half is called makeup.

“Makeup is what you have inside, and it's what makes players separate themselves, because as you all move up and you continue on with your careers – obviously, everyone in here is talented, you've made it to the final 64 and of the eight teams here, one of you will go to Shelby – all of you have some sort of talent, so to separate yourselves, you're going to have to have some inner desire.”

Slater described what the Cardinals look for in prospects – what separates a potential Cardinal player from everyone else – and described to the tournament's participants what set several players currently in the Cardinals organization, including some currently on the Cardinal roster, apart from others.

Ater discussed what the Legion's legacy is since it was founded in 1919, in the immediate aftermath of World War I, and its role in the development of amateur baseball since it began to sponsor the sport in 1925. “The first youth activity which they decided (those who started the Legion) would be to do something for the youth who didn't have fathers who returned from (World War I),” Ater said. “They founded American Legion baseball in 1925 and the American Legion national tournament started in 1926.

“We have all of that history, but the goal is not to have competitive baseball...the design was to invoke in that youth a strong sense of purpose, citizenship, teamwork, work ethic and respect for those whom they compete against. The hope was – and the hope

continues – that by doing that, by providing this venue – great baseball and great communities – that we would someday grow beyond those wars.”

The tournament is being sponsored by the City of Edwardsville, Roberts Ford, Anderson Hospital, Confluence Business Advisors, Edison's, Riverbender.com and EdGlenToday.com, Scott Credit Union, the Holiday Inn Express and Suites of Edwardsville, Quality Buick-GMC-Cadillac, Cassens Dodge-Jeep-Ram, Logo It, Grand Rental Station and St. Peters Hardware and Rental.

More information and updates are available at [www.legionbb.com](http://www.legionbb.com); Sunday's final will be live-streamed at riverbender.com beginning at 1 p.m. Tuesday's banquet was also live-streamed at riverbender.com, and videos of the event are now available at [www.riverbender.com/video](http://www.riverbender.com/video)

Several promotions will be offered during the weekend; TheBANK of Edwardsville will present Family Fun Night at 7 p.m. Friday as part of Friday night's contests as well as honor military personnel and first responders with Scott Air Force Base Night at the tournament, where half-off tickets with ID or badges will be offered to Friday night's contests. The Southwestern Illinois Baseball League will also be honored Friday night with a pregame ceremony at 7 p.m.; all SWIBL players in uniform will be honored in the ceremony and offered free admission to the week's games with a paid adult admission.

Scott Credit Union will offer free admission to SCU Kids Club members for Saturday's games beginning at 4 p.m. on Scott Credit Union Kids Day at the tournament.

Admission for the games is \$5 for a single game or session; \$10 for a one-day pass for each day; and \$30 for an all-access pass to the tournament. Here is the full schedule for the double-elimination tournament: