

Great Lakes American Legion Baseball Regional another feather in area's cap

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – Edwarsville's opportunity to host this week's **American Legion Great Lakes Regional baseball tournament** is another feather in the cap for the region's sporting reputation, feels local tournament director Dennis Sharp.

Sharp, who is the general manager of the Metro East Bears senior Legion team (an amalgamation of Alton Post 126 and Edwarsville Post 199's baseball programs), believes the tournament being held in Edwarsville this year (last year's tournament was

held in Alton at Gordon Moore Park/Lloyd Hopkins Field) will be another big boost for the area on the heels of last week's USTA Edwardsville Futures tennis tournament.

“Edwardsville has embraced this wholeheartedly,” Sharp said. “Bringing this to the Edwardsville community just brought this (tournament) another step up. It's a happening place, a destination place for sure.

“They're (Edwardsville) an athletic town; they're big about sports. Their high school programs are always No. 1 if not No. 2 in the state, and to bring a national tournament to this community, they're very excited and have done a great job with it.”

Last week's Futures tournament brought an estimated \$250,000 in an economic boost to the Edwardsville/Glen Carbon area, and Sharp believes this week's tournament will bring at least that much, if not more, to the area. “Athletics does that for a community,” Sharp said, “and to bring this to a national stage now is really exciting.”

The Legion playoff system has reduced some 5,000 teams nationwide to the 64 teams playing in eight regional tournaments this week to send the eight winners to next week's American Legion Baseball World Series in Shelby, N.C.; Sharp believes that the cream of the crop in Legion baseball has risen to the top.

“I'm in love with the playoff system of American Legion baseball,” Sharp said. “From what I have gone through just with the junior team recently (Sharp managed Alton's junior team to a second-place finish in last week's state American Legion junior tournament in Decatur) at the state tournament, and to come in and do the next two levels, which would be the Regional and advancing a team to the World Series – you know, these kids are remarkable athletes, but yet, it takes a remarkable person to be able to go out there for five weeks of this sort of grind – not only physically, but more mentally.

“They might want to check out, but their companions – their buddies – are in kind of brothers in arms kind of deal. They're pushing forward to try to be one of the best eight teams to advance.”

Tournament play was scheduled to begin this morning, with the final set for 1 p.m. Sunday; a second game would be played at 4 p.m. if necessary. The game will be broadcast on WSIE-FM (88.7) and streamed live at riverbender.com