

Top 10 with Gus Skibbe

This year's NWLA Tournament is full of new changes. We all know Chris Gallaway is out, and with him went many of the bells, whistles, and jumbotrons. But what can never die is the basic purity of the sport we love and the brotherhood that has been built through this event. Every year it seems as if I get more and more excited for this tournament. It is an event that is talked about all year long and to be less than a week away is making me giddier by the day. So I have decided I would write about my excitement and present to you a top ten list of reasons to be excited for the 2017 NWLA Tournament:

1. Tournament being held in Morenci, MI

At Soccer First, in Ohio, soccer players were continually walking by the wiffle fields wondering what the hell was going on. Not one soul in Ohio knew about the NWLA tournament. After 5 years of the NWLA tournament in Ohio, this change in setting is key to the development of the tournament. What I love about this change is how the city of Morenci is accepting us with open arms. The support from the community is going to be coming out in full force. It will be fun to play some pure wiffleball without focusing too much on the glamour. I can't wait to meet some of the fans and see them cheer on all the wiffler's throughout the weekend.

2. Best competition to date

The talent from the 16 teams this year I believe is the best to date. Pitching is at an all-time high, with teams bringing not just 1 or 2 great pitchers, but some with 3 or 4 studs. Regionals were the most competitive they have ever been with new wiffle faces and teams qualifying. All the new tournament teams have a shot to make some noise this year. Leagues are finally bringing their best players and players are returning that we haven't seen in a while. Brett Bigler, Michael Harley, and Jimmy Cole are just a few big names returning to the tournament. This tournament will truly test the depth and resolve of even the toughest teams out there.

3. Wiffle friends

Yes, everyone goes to the NWLA tournament to win. But, that should not be the only reason. Get out there and talk with people not from your league! For all the new people coming this year, don't be afraid to talk with other teams. To come back each year and see the wiffle friends I have made over the years is something I always look forward to. I never in my wildest dreams thought I would talk to wifflers from the around the country almost on a daily basis. I have made close friends that I will continue to talk to long after I retire, or this tournament ends.

4. Underdogs

Each year, there always has been an underdog to make a run. In 2014, Mequon who was pre-ranked by many at 14/15/16, made a deep push to get 5th place honors (almost 3rd). In 2015, newbie to the tournament, HFWB rolled to a 3rd place finish. Finally, last year in 2016, our SWBL squad ended up going to the championship game and finishing 2nd, becoming just the fourth team to fight for a championship. Will there be an underdog in 2017? BWACS, WILL, MNWA, RPWL, BWBL?! It's always fun to watch and find out!

5. Friday Night Festivities

This year the Morenci community will be playing in a slow pitch wiffleball tournament hosted by the NWLA on the Thursday before the big weekend. What is even more exciting is that the championship game will be played on Friday night before the all-star game. To involve the community in this way is something that the NWLA tournament has never seen. The HR Derby is always exciting to see people smash the ball and it will be fun to see if anyone can stop the Tyler Flakne train. The all-star game will be a special one for the SWBL as we get to be on the coaching staff and we are excited for the banter and competition with Justin Tomkin's team. But more important than all of that, the friendships with players, the drinking of whiskey, and the indulgence of cigars is what I look forward to most.

6. Cabin/Hotel/Time with the team

While yes, I love getting to see all of my wiffle friends who I don't see all year long, an important part of this trip is bonding with teammates. The SWBL is taking 7 players to Morenci in 2017. What I love about this group of guys coming is that all of us have grown up together. We have played elementary, middle and high school sports with one another, and 4 of these guys were even groomsmen in my wedding. So when the question was asked by commissioner Skibbe if he should reserve two hotel rooms or one, the obvious and unanimous answer by all of us was, one. Thursday night, the SWBL will also be staying in a cabin with no air conditioning...should be interesting. I am excited for all the memories we will make throughout the weekend. Enjoy your time with your teammates and get to know them more than just a wiffleball teammate!

7. New Champion Crowned...?

I want to see a new champion this year. Yes, I expect to see WSEM, OCWA, and TBW in the top 5, but seriously... someone new has got to take the crown! Every other team besides the ones named above want to see a new champion this year, maybe even they want to see someone else take it too. I said this would probably be the most competitive year, so let's make it happen!

8. New faces in Wiffle

This year brings many new faces to the National scene. WILL and RPWL are brand new leagues and will bring another wave of youthful energy to the event, but veteran teams are also bringing new faces to, to try and help their chances for success. Luke Thompson, or Mippey5, from HRL is famous for his wiffle parody video, and it's exciting to finally see him out here on the big stage. AWAA isn't really a "new team" but they do have some "new players". And of course all the faces of Morenci will be exciting to meet and greet as well. It's always fun to meet people who enjoy the sport just as much as we do.

9. Apparel

It is always fun to see the new jerseys roll out on Saturday. Some teams keep it the same, but most try to one up themselves every single year. You better believe Trent will have his notebook and pen out as he takes notes of the apparel throughout the weekend, so be ready to be criticized.

10. Memories

Each year brings new memories that will last a lifetime. Hopefully the memory of an SWBL championship or at least a new league will be at the top of everyone's list or will the same old leagues we see win every year suffice for another year. One thing is for certain, this event is something that everyone who attends looks forward to every year. Let's make the most of it and have another great weekend of competition and community. In just a few short days the first pitch will be thrown and we will be off to the races! See everyone soon!