

Stakes high for future sports inventor, promoter

OK, sports fans — for the block in the middle answer this two-part question.

First, what are "Super Softball Smash" and "The Purest Of All?"

And, second, who invented them?

Tick. Tick. Tick.

Fans? Buzzer. Sorry, Wink. "Super Softball Smash" and "The Purest Of All" are part of the Wide World of Individual Champions, a business that promotes what its founder calls "individualized sports." Ladies and gentlemen, meet Tommy Meeks, their inventor.

Meeks, a 1973 graduate of Auburn High School who might now be better known as a touring member in the Rockford Rams' rendition of "Musical Quarterbacks," is trying to make a name for himself with what he believes may be a new form of professional sport, individualized sport, in the future. No kidding.

It all began in 1978 at Eastern Illinois University when Meeks and his roommate argued for hours over who was the best athlete in a particular team sport. This, coupled with a Robin Hood movie Meeks watched on television, prompted the proverbial light bulb to flash over Meeks' head.

"It all sounds kind of dreamish, but that's the way it all started," Meeks said.

That, simply, is to break the team sports into individualized aspects. A more precise and fair game of one-on-one. "We try to get them to take their minds back into the Robin Hood era where there were no team sports. Every man for himself," Meeks said. No kidding.

So Meeks, who wants someday to become a professional events and entertainment promoter, put his ideas into action. He packaged these games into a proposition and, in June of last year, presented it to officials of a major Midwest beer distributor, noting that the softball competition would be held in the Robin Hood, ahem, "old style" tradition.

"That," Meeks said, "caught their eye."

Well, to make a long story short, about a month later an official of the beer distributor liked the idea so much that he encouraged Meeks to try it, even suggesting that, if successful, Meeks' proposition could serve as a vehicle for a nationwide campaign. No kidding.

So stand back, fans. Meeks, under the co-sponsorship of C. Jack's, is ready to launch



Dave Albee

Part 1 of his individualized sports package on Sept. 10 at Park Place, beginning at 9 a.m. It's called Super Softball Smash, which, to the naked eye, may resemble a softball home-run-hitting contest, except, under Meeks' patent, determines who's the most consistent hitter, not necessarily the strongest.

That, Meeks hopes, will reveal a true hitter and appeal to the competitive nature of all athletes.

Super Softball Smash works like this: Each batter brings with him a bat and a pitcher of his own choice. With umpires behind the plate, the pitcher tosses pitches to the batter, who has six swings, which Meeks contends to be the average number of swings a player takes in one softball game.

Then after each fair ball hit — even over

the fence — the distance the ball traveled in the air — even on one-hoppers back to the mound — will be tallied. The batter with the best cumulative distance wins.

So the batter who hits the longest home run may not be the best batter if, say, he or she fouls off a pitch or two or if he or she takes a couple of called strikes by the umpire.

Meeks has hired umpires, who will determine regulation arc for the contest and he's seeking judges to measure and tabulate results. Meeks' concern now is numbers. He figures to break even he needs about 250 batters to pay a \$10 entry fee each for the Sept. 10 showdown.

That sounds like a lot, but Meeks figures he can draw well from a city that has over 500 teams to take part in a contest that is offering as its top prize a trip for two to Las Vegas for three nights and two days.

Entry forms are available at Park Place, Tom Harmer in Colonial Village and Champion's Gym in Loves Park or by calling Meeks at 815/963-2610 in the evening. Early entrants will be able to designate their approximate batting time.

For Meeks, who has put months of effort

into the contest, it's not the money that matters. It's the idea behind it. It's his chance to introduce his individualized sports like Super Softball Smash and The Purest Of All, a game where each contestant takes 16 jump shots from on or outside a 25-foot line. Contestants are judged on points made and graded on the "cleanliness" of the basket. No bank shots, please. Grades are given like such: A for a clean swish or "bottom of the netter," B for no rim, C for one bounce on the rim, etc.

But, Super Softball Smash on Sept. 10 is Meeks' ticket to the big time. It's not the show, however, that Meeks seeks. It's the concept. His concept.

"It's the idea to bring back the competitive nature of sport," he said. "It's like a future sport more or less."

Now, it's a matter of batter's preference or, er, style.

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Dave Albee's column appears Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays in *The Register Star*.