

# PHOENIX SPORTS CORNER REVIEW

## No Level Playing Field Here For Pop Warner Football

By Grant Daniels  
Special to the Phoenix

Pop Warner League football was designed for the recreation and enjoyment of American youth. But in Winston-Salem, the game is controlled by grown-ups to the point where Black youngsters are being dealt with unfairly.

The Northwest Midget Football League is the Pop Warner affiliate for Winston-Salem. The league has thrived thanks to lively competition for a few national championship banners that have been won by local teams.

What the league has accomplished deserves applause. But the way that the Black organizations have been gingerly prevented from playing for national titles is shameful.

In late November, the Winston-Salem Grayhounds' Pee Wees' team was chosen to play in the nationals after winning the Mid-South regional title game. The team was picked by the people at the Pop

Warner national headquarters in Philadelphia. The Grayhounds were picked based on their regional win, overall record and the grades of team members.

That's fine until you look at the selection process for the nationals. Teams are selected from eight regions around the country. But winning the regional game doesn't mean that your team will be selected, even if the win-loss record and team grades are good. The people at Pop Warner headquarters pick one team per region, and rotate those selections among four age groups every year.

Using Winston-Salem as an example, here's how it works. Teams in the Northwest Midget Football League are in the Mid-South region. Let's say a Winston team wins the Pee Wees' regional title and is chosen to play in the nationals. That means that the following year, provided the same Pee Wees' team wins at the

regionals, that team won't be selected because they played for the title the year before.

This is where the game turned messy for the Vikings' Junior Midgets' team in 1991. The Vikings, one of two predominantly-Black organizations in the league, have missed out on two consecutive opportunities to play for a national title.

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That's strange when you look at the record. When the Vikings prevailed at the regionals, it was their 26th straight win. This team hasn't lost a game in two years.

At the regionals, the Vikings won in impressive fashion, but were overlooked for the nationals. In 1990, the Vikings did get the bid, but reportedly didn't go because the Northwest Midget Football League declared that they couldn't raise sufficient funds to take the team to California where the nationals were played. To make matters worse, the league made that decision without giving the Vikings the chance to see if they could raise the necessary funds. Since they weren't able to go, the Grayhounds' Junior Pee Wees' team was chosen. That squad took the trip and came back

with the national title.

Stranger still, is the turn of events that took place at the regionals last November. The Vikings' Junior Midgets seemed to be the obvious choice for the nationals since everything else was in order. But instead, the Grayhounds' Pee Wees' team was picked. That team was the same group that won the national title in 1990 as Junior Pee Wees.

What's even more disturbing is that there's reason to believe that the national Pop Warner people had pretty much decided who would represent the Mid-South region before the regional games were even played. On the day of the regionals, a representative from Pop Warner headquarters called Winston-Salem league officials at 5 p.m. to tell them who would be going. That's not just for Winston-Salem. That's the process used for all regions.

Now that makes you wonder. How could such a decision be made so quickly? In most cases, the final game of the regional championships doesn't end until 4 p.m. or 4:30 p.m.

That sounds like a bad deal. It's not right for one organization to benefit at the expense of another. League by-laws have their place. But, there's a major difference between a by-law and doing what's right. It seems that being fair is an obsolete concept these days.

Perhaps some interested parties should approach the Northwest Midget Football League about its method of operating. If satisfaction can't be found, maybe it's time to look for another league to play in or form a separate league.

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