

Hanes

ers... in a different way besides just at work."

One of the shortcomings of the league is that the schedule is not set, meaning that someone who leaves his job on the third shift does have time to rest prior to his game. That lack of time can translate into game performance; most of the Gunnin' Rebels team, which lost all six of its regular-season games, are third-shift workers.

But Blevins hopes to correct

that flaw in the future by having more teams sign up within the next year. Blevins said an expansion from four to six to eight teams means the games will not be played on one day, with the weekly schedule spread over the week. Since the league consists of permanent employees only, cutbacks on jobs and the increase of temporary workers at the sponsors' plants have restricted growth of the league.

Yet the league in its current

state has impressed its participants.

"I didn't think the league was going to be something just put together, but I've liked playing in it," said Gunnin' Rebels member Kenneth Williford, who heard about the league through Mims while at work. "I didn't the league would even have some of the things it has, like an Intercom system. So I was shook up how serious the players have taken this."

"To play in this environment,

you have to play hard, and our team does that," Jeffries said, whose team will be the top seed in the league's playoffs, which started yesterday. "My teammates and I played high school, college ball, so we feel we can show some of these younger players what we can do. But it's like a summer league, because we're not out here just to play. We're all here to win."

The players have extended a sort of informal brotherhood. Teams

that play in the first game usually hang around for the second matchup, partly to scout their next opponent, but also to participate as fans. Several players have said morale has increased among workers and the friendship extends beyond the gym.

"When the second shift goes to work, nearly everybody at the plant knows who played and how many points they scored, because that's all we talk about," All-Stars guard

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Leroy Williams said, "it's great because work goes by a little faster because we're working and enjoy it a little more."

"It's great to see a group of black men come together and not have the situation be some sort of violent thing," Mims said. "I'm not trying to sound racist, but I think we need to have more of these things, something positive among ourselves."

Smith

school, just so he could learn how. When he resigned himself to the possibility he would never learn the sport, Smith went to work full time.

"I sometimes wish I could have started out earlier, but I think it worked out for the best," Smith said. "I might have burned out by now or I might have gotten lazy with it. Boxing is a very disciplined sport and if you're not interested in it, it can be boring."

Giles and Kennedy are not fooling themselves into thinking they have a polished boxer. Both trainers agreed Smith has a lot of learning ahead. As much as both trainer has impressed with his right hand, each has expressed a concern with his inability to throw effective combinations and finishing opponents. Giles has been reluctant to let him spar with others besides Ridenhour and Giles said Smith's experience with left-handers is minimal.

When Smith made his amateur debut, it was in the small town of

Sanford against a more experienced opponent. While Kennedy and Giles were apprehensive about a novice entering the ring against a seasoned fighter in his first fight, Smith stunned himself and his trainers with a first-round knockout.

In fact, Smith didn't know how to react.

"It was kind of unexpected. It wasn't like a series of punches that I set him up with or anything," Smith said. "I just hit him with a right hand. It wasn't hard but it was a quick punch and he fell in the middle of the ring."

Among other things, Smith found out that boxing is not the end-all for the sport. Conditioning for bouts sometimes months in advance is the norm. Smith reluctantly has had to let go of some of his favorite dishes and fried foods. Smith also runs for a stretch of about five miles four days of the week, then going to the center and train for two hours.

"Darran has caught on fast,"

Ridenhour said, who has been boxing since he was six. "He has really improved over the past few months, especially with his hand speed. Plus, he's a fast learner."

Giles said the most impressive thing about Smith is that he is still a baby to the sport while eagerly grasping the fundamentals. If anything, the long wait has given him an advantage over some of his contemporaries. At his rate of progress, Giles said Smith could be ready for the Golden-Gloves' novice division in a year and could turn pro "within three years, if works on his aggressiveness."

While realizing his dreams as a boxer, Smith never has entertained the thoughts being exactly like his idol.

"I just wanted to learn the sport and see how far I can go with it. I can't see myself being a professional boxer because of my age," Smith said. "If, for instance, I wanted to box in Atlanta in '96, I would be

almost 25, so even if I wanted to do something, it would have to be soon."

But his trainers do not quite believe in saying no.

"Hey, (James) Bonecrusher

Smith (the former heavyweight champion) didn't become a boxer until he was 27, so not everyone is starts out at an early age," Kennedy said. "Darran just wants to have some fun and maybe be a role

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model to the people in his life that boxing is a positive thing."

"But if Darran told me he wanted to box professionally, I'd believe him," Giles said. "The sky's the limit for him."

BCA

The BCA considered other outlets, including boycotts of postgame news conferences, disrupting traffic at the Final Four and disrupting the start of first-round NCAA Tournament games.

"I think some of white coaches are definitely expected to participate," Washington said. "We don't

expect 100 percent participation, but you don't need 100 percent participation to be effective."

"At this point in time, right now, every coach I've talked to said we're going to do it."

The BCA is one of many groups unhappy within the NCAA. Small black schools are talking

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about forming their own association. Women sports are talking about gender equity. Big football schools are talking about forming their own coalition.

And amidst all this tension is another group of significant members talk of a radical plan revamp the entire NCAA structure.

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