

# One-horse race

## Owensboro outruns the competition and takes SI Sportstown Award for Kentucky

By Andrew Schulman

As the nation turns its eyes to the Bluegrass State for the Kentucky Derby on the first Saturday in May, Kentuckians can look to the city of Owensboro as the state's top locale for community sports and recreation.

That's because Kentucky's third largest city has earned the title of *Sports Illustrated* Sportstown.

With its dedicated staff and volunteers — and a cadre of community partners — the Owensboro Parks and Recreation Department helps oversee the city's efforts.

"Sports are a huge focus here in Owensboro and we try appeal to everyone at all stages of life — from tee-ball to adult softball and activities for seniors," said Cyndi Sturgeon, the Department's director. "It's our goal to help our residents have a positive, lifelong relationship with sports."

For many, that relationship starts in pre-school, with development programs in soccer, basketball, baseball, as well as a t-ball league, and instructional programs in cheerleading, tennis, golf, tae-kwon do, baseball, softball, volleyball, ice-skating, swimming, tumbling and fishing.

Teens, adults and seniors all have a multitude of options as well, including volleyball, golf, tennis, softball, volleyball, ice-skating, soccer, football, baseball and basketball. The Department also hosts special events for each age group throughout the year, from bowling and ice skating nights for teens to a 5K run for adults and golf tournaments for seniors.

Sturgeon and her team also manage the city's recreation facilities and make sure they're all in tip-top shape. Owensboro's center of sports is, *quite literally*, the Owensboro SportsCenter, a multipurpose complex that features an ice arena, outdoor pool and a 5,000-seat arena. The city is also home to a softball complex, a soccer complex, two sand volleyball courts, two indoor volleyball courts, a football complex, a recreation center, nine baseball diamonds, 25 tennis courts, 12 basketball courts, and a nine-hole golf course. And city officials are currently examining plans for a new multipurpose recreation complex, which would help meet the current and future demand for facility use.

Its fervent community and excellent facilities have also helped Owensboro become a regular stop for several national baseball and softball tournaments — hosting four different baseball and softball national championships in 2003 alone.

"Hosting these national events has helped put Owensboro on the map," said Kerry Bodenheimer, the Department's youth supervisor. "We're able to attract top teams from around the country and give our local teams a chance to take part as well. It's really a win-win for everyone."

In Owensboro's case, it's actually a win-win-win, as these tournaments have also helped the community economically: In 2003, these events contributed more than \$15 million to the city's economy.

With all of these horses in its stable, and a bright future ahead, it's easy to see how Owensboro has won this "derby" and taken home the title of SI Sportstown.