

New Paducah Chiefs to play ball next year

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Baseball was a primary topic at Monday night's McCracken Fiscal Court meeting, but it wasn't for World Series predictions.

Rather, Brooks Stadium Commission representatives briefed the county's governing body on their plan to launch a wooden bat baseball team made up of college players in June 2016.

The team will be named the Paducah Chiefs, after the local minor league team that disbanded in the 1950s.

Greg McKeel, general manager of the amateur team, said the stadium commission has been working on the idea for a new Paducah team about four years.

"We've been looking at it, evaluating, rolling the numbers, looking at what response is when you go to Hopkinsville, Fulton, Madisonville, and see what the crowds are, and what people think about it," McKeel said.

"What we have found out is that it was highly respectable in all of the communities," Commission President Frank "Doc" Hideg added.

The Chiefs will play a 40-game schedule - 20 home games at Brooks Stadium and 20 more on the road, all within a few hours drive - in June and July. The Chiefs will play in the Ohio Valley League, a league that's been established for at least 10 years with teams in Hopkinsville, Madisonville, Owensboro, Fulton and Dubois County, Indiana.

"It's kind of following the roots of the Kitty League, which was in this area a long time ago," McKeel said. "Those teams, other than Dubois County, were in that and they're using the same names they used at the time they were in the Kitty League, so we're going back to the Paducah Chiefs."

"It's a little bit of a throwback â | it's really going full circle."

Stadium commissioners asked the fiscal court for a one-time \$10,000 contribution, the league entry fee. The money would be used to "help us get the team on the field as well as to the field," Hideg said.

The county didn't make a decision on the funding request Monday, but will vote on it Nov. 9, the fiscal court's next meeting. However, it's likely the request will be approved.

Judge-Executive Bob Leeper and fiscal court members Jerry Beyer and Scott Wathen voiced support for the idea following Monday night's meeting. Commissioner Bill Bartleman, who was out of town at a conference, has also said he supports the new team.

"From an economic development standpoint, we have not used any economic development funds in this budget cycle as of yet," Beyer said. "It seems to me, hopefully, that we can take it from that line item. I'm enthused about it, about the people who are going to be visiting our community. I certainly would support it."

"Something that would be good family gatherings, I'm all for that," Wathen said.

Mary Hammond, Paducah Convention & Visitor's Bureau executive director, told fiscal court members she, too, supports the new team. She said the infrastructure for the team is in place, and it would add to local quality of life.

"How could we say no to it?" Hammond said.

"It's a win-win for all of us. I know that tourism backs it. We've had nothing but successes with the Brooks Stadium Commission, and we've had all types of different projects. This is one that would carry over year after year after year. We're right there with it, we're right there with the team, and we back this. We hope you will as well."

Stadium commission members said they've also received a commitment from the city of Paducah, and will play the upcoming season whether the county allocates funds or not. Brooks Stadium, Hideg said, will also host the Ohio Valley League's all-star game next season.

"We're committed, we're signed," Hideg said. He added, "We're really hoping the county will support us. It's make it a lot easier on us."

Brooks Stadium has a capacity of 1,500 people. General admission tickets will cost \$5.

"We want to be optimistic, but the realization is, when we start out, we're hoping for 200 to 300 people, average per game," McKeel said. "Obviously, we'd like to have more than that, but being realistic, we feel like that's a starting point."