

Wayne Henninger '92 Hits Home Run as Little League Communications Executive

Wayne Henninger '92 emphasizes the importance of Little League in his life. "I played Little League, my dad played Little League, and now my son plays Little League," he says.

His personal history has come in handy as Henninger managed communications for Little League International as both a consultant and its senior communications executive. In the latter role, he managed an eight-person staff who champion Little League's message of being a community-oriented organization. Using the Little League website, newsletters and media coverage, the team sends that message to 7,000 leagues in over 80 countries.

"We constantly beat the drum of fun, friends and community," Henninger says. "And we do a lot more than just offer up baseball."

As both consultant and communications executive, his greatest challenge has been informing parents of the benefits that Little League offers over other activities available to children.

"Little League is often the first page of a person's lifelong scrapbook. I can remember riding my bike to practice, the taste of boiled hotdogs with mustard and onion, the sound of tires crunching gravel as kids were being dropped off, and those things have nothing to do with what happens on the baseball field. I also remember my teammates, the rainouts and sitting in the dugout hoping that it would stop, my first catch in left field. My challenge is to communicate all of that to parents."

Henninger solved Little League's 74-year-old problem: the lack of a direct line of communication to its most influential constituents: parents. He launched The Parent Connection, a monthly newsletter that reaches 1 million readers.

The organization also runs the Urban Initiative Program, which develops programs in major cities to give disadvantaged youth an opportunity to enjoy the game. Then there's Henninger's favorite aspect about the Little League World Series: the Challenger Division, which gives intellectually and physically challenged children the opportunity to play baseball.

"We give kids that may have been dealt a little of a diminished hand an opportunity to enjoy sport, friends and community," he says.

Henninger knows firsthand the community that sport builds. He was recruited to play basketball for Wilkes, and a campus visit convinced him that the small class sizes, reputable instructors and good communications program was right for him.

He wanted to become an ESPN Sports Center anchor, so he concentrated on telecommunications and public relations. Then an internship with the Detroit Pistons shifted his television focus to sports communications. The Pistons hired him after he graduated.

In 1998, Henninger launched his own sports-focused public relations firm, Wave Public Relations, in Washington, D.C. Clients included the Senior Olympics, Major League Lacrosse and the Pistons. He also wrote for *Sports Business Journal* and *ESPN Magazine*.

He later sold his firm and became a consultant, with Little League International as a client.

When a vacancy opened at Little League, Henninger agreed to temporarily fill the position, which lasted three years. As of Aug. 1 of this year,

he's come full circle, leaving his position to become a public relations consultant once again. And once again, Little League International is his client.

— By Francisco Tutella MA '15

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Wayne Henninger '92, seen at the Little League field in Williamsport, promotes the value of Little League baseball as its communications executive and a consultant.

