

IOWA ASA: ASSOCIATION PROFILE

Iowa ASA Commissioner Tom Topping has represented ASA in a leadership position since 1993; eight years as Assistant Chief Deputy Commissioner and as State Commissioner since 2001. However it was 1983 when Topping first got involved with ASA as an umpire of which his best memory of umpiring came when he made history umpiring the inaugural World Cup of Softball in 2005. Topping is married to Lisa and they have two sons. Although Iowa is one of the smallest states in population, they have emerged as a top Association. Topping shares reasons on why he feels his organization is so successful.

B&S: What sets Iowa ASA apart from other Associations?

TT: "I would say we still have a quite a few divisions of play and classes within those divisions that is a little unusual for a smaller state with just 3 million people. We host over 35 state tournaments in Men's Class A, B, & C Fast Pitch, Men's B, C, D and E Slow Pitch, Women's C & D Slow Pitch, Co-Ed Slow B and C Pitch, Men's Major, Class A and B 16" Slow Pitch, Men's Major, Class A and B 14" Slow Pitch, Men's Masters Fast Pitch and Slow Pitch and Youth 8U Coach Pitch, 10U A, B, C, 12U A, B, C, 14U A, B and 16U and 18U. Iowa is one if not the only state that has high school state sponsored softball during the summer, so our greatest participation is in the 10 and 12 year old divisions of play, as many of the others are playing high school ball. We also have a nice number of teams that travel and play in national tournaments, with over 75 teams participating in 2009."

B&S: What is your biggest asset as an association?

TT: "With any non-profit it is of course the quality of people who make up our volunteer staff and relationships with our local parks and recreation departments. We are fortunate to have many good "softball minded" people that have played the game or are very good administrators and ambassadors of the game. We also have a very unique relationship with the Iowa Parks and Recreation Association in which we share office space, office staff and equipment and it has worked very well for over 40 years. We have an outstanding administrative assistant in Cathy Shutts, who does a super job keeping everyone organized. We used to have one Executive Director for both Associations, but now have separate Executive Directors for each (Iowa ASA and Iowa Park and Recreation Assoc.)"

B&S: I was on your website and saw that you host surveys. How do you use this to benefit your organization? Have you changed anything due to the surveys?

TT: "We try to do a few each year and survey our teams following each tournament for their input. Whether it is seeking input for rule changes or how we can do things better, surveys seem create a simple and fun avenue for players and coaches to let us know what they think (and see how others feel about the same subject). There have been several rule proposals we have written as requested by players and we always try to listen and change things where we are able."

B&S: Any best practices you would like to share?

TT: We have quite a few things that we try to offer that I don't know are all that unique, but these are a few of the things we do.

- Sell softballs at a reduced rate to parks and recreation departments and receive a product rebate for total sales the following year.
- Sell used softballs on eBay
- Online tournament surveys for coach feedback and evaluations following tournaments.



Adult teams chose their own All-Tournament Teams and each team gets a certain number of selections based on their finish in the tournament. Certificates mailed to coaches and teams posted online with tournament stats.

Update all tournament brackets while the tournament is in progress and post final team stats following the tournament along with team award and action photo galleries. Fund Scholarship to college student majoring in parks and recreation field, exhibit booth and co-sponsor conferences and workshops for state park and recreation association. Bid state tournaments out much like national tournaments. Umpire merchandise discount for new umpires. Provide bat testing for tournament and league play. Bring in National Umpire Staff Member as clinician for state clinics. Sell Umpire Merchandise to Umpires and Instructional Videos for Teams. Offer mailings to teams running invitational tournaments. Teams send approved of sanctioned tournaments mailing postage paid and our staff adheres labels and sends out. Tournament is also posted online on our invitational page.