

REBUILDING AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL IN OKLAHOMA

A Documented Research Case Study in Community-Based Sports, Volunteer Leadership, Institutional Capacity, and Oklahoma's Changing Baseball Economy

Research subject: Kenneth R. Crawford's 2022-2023 involvement in Oklahoma American Legion Baseball and the attempted development of youth baseball and softball programming.

Source base: corrected oral-history transcript; contemporaneous texts/emails read into the transcript; the photographed May 10, 2023 Department of Oklahoma letter; and limited independent American Legion sources for external context.

Research date: September 30, 2026

CORE RESEARCH QUESTION

Why did a historically community-supported baseball organization struggle to reestablish and expand in Oklahoma even when the available record shows interest from coaches, players, local posts, and communities?

Research posture. The removal of Crawford is treated as one event inside a larger organizational experiment, not as the entire case study. Claims about motive, causation, Red Dirt baseball, Pryor, or institutional resistance are separated from documented facts unless independently corroborated.

Executive Summary

The source record supports a case study substantially broader than a personnel chronology. In late 2022 and early 2023, Crawford and Oklahoma American Legion Baseball Director Billy Lowe discussed a multi-community effort to expand or revive Legion Baseball and explore younger-age baseball and softball programming. The transcript records work on websites, age divisions, geographic/post-based eligibility, registration infrastructure, post recruitment, tribal outreach, and possible tournament structures.

Contemporaneous messages read into the transcript show prospective interest in multiple Oklahoma communities. They also document operational friction: limited organizational capacity, uncertainty over schedules and meetings, software-development costs, national/state approval dependencies, and the challenge of fitting a volunteer/community model into Oklahoma's existing youth and high-school baseball ecosystem.

The documentary turning point occurred on April 29, 2023, when - according to the May 10, 2023 Department of Oklahoma letter - the Department Executive Committee voted to remove Crawford as Assistant Baseball Commissioner. The letter directed him to cease representing the program, delete programs he had created or merged with it, and return promotional materials. It expressly stated that the action did not affect his American Legion membership or Gill-Mattox Post 16 membership.

The current record does not establish why the DEC took that action, whether the Pryor episode caused or contributed to it, or whether any particular Oklahoma baseball organization or coaching group opposed the initiative. The strongest supported conclusion is narrower: a substantial development effort was underway, there was documented local interest, organizational constraints were evident, and the effort was terminated at the state-governance level before the proposed youth/community model matured.

Independent American Legion registration data provides context: the Legion's 2021 registry listed only one Oklahoma team. The 2024 registry listed eight Oklahoma teams - six senior and two junior. These figures support the proposition that Oklahoma participation was small during the period, but they do not explain why.

The institutional question is larger than a personnel dispute: can a legacy community-based sports model be rebuilt inside a modern youth-sports economy shaped by travel structures, private tournaments, paid services, and fragmented local incentives?

1. Methodology and Evidence Standard

Evidence level	Treatment	Examples
Primary documentary record	Highest weight when authenticity/date are established.	May 10, 2023 Department letter; original emails/texts if preserved.
Contemporaneous communications	Strong evidence of what participants said/did at the time; not automatic proof of underlying claims.	Billy Lowe texts; Tim Lawson email; Casey LaValley inquiry; Playbook 365 discussion.
Oral-history recollection	First-person evidence; dates, motives and causal claims require corroboration.	Program origins, Pryor episode, meetings, perceived barriers.
Interpretation / open question	Not presented as fact until independently verified.	Why Legion declined; Red Dirt incentives; reason for DEC action; any Pryor-removal link.

2. Origins and Proposed Community Model

Crawford recalls being approached during his final period at the Brian Crawford Memorial Sports Complex at Seminole State College about American Legion Baseball and the possibility of youth baseball and softball. He describes Oklahoma as one of a limited number of states exploring younger-age programming as a feeder into the traditional Legion structure. That national-pilot detail remains a verification item.

The concept appealed to Crawford because eligibility could be organized around local American Legion posts and geography. In his account, that offered community identity similar in principle to boundary-based systems he associated with Little League and rural community structures such as OK Kids.

Crawford describes building a broader digital concept across several states: league structures, schedules, district/regional advancement, age divisions, and a World Series-style endpoint. Archived webpages, screenshots, source files, or web archives should be added as exhibits to establish the exact scope.

3. Evidence of Active Program Development

Date / period	Activity reflected in transcript
Nov. 24-29, 2022	Participating states, post-based eligibility, age classifications, and coach contacts including Gary Vandy and Brad Gore.
Dec. 3-5, 2022	Interest reported from Durant, Hartshorne, Wilburton, Tishomingo, Madill; leads involving Pawhuska, El Reno and Guymon; Playbook 365/post outreach.
Dec. 2022	Tribal outreach, Legion approval/letterhead, younger-veteran recruitment, softball development, and planning for a winter meeting table in Shawnee.
Jan. 2023	Oklahoma American Legion winter meeting at the Grand Casino in Shawnee; Crawford sought a role in discussing Oklahoma youth-sports challenges.
Jan. 31, 2023	Pryor Post 182 Commander Tim Lawson sought help registering U13 and U19 teams and requested pricing/instructions.
Feb.-Apr. 2023	Additional contacts involving Tishomingo, Lawton, Pauls Valley and Lone Grove.
Apr. 28, 2023	Casey LaValley inquiry regarding high-school boys around Holdenville/Seminole who wanted Legion Baseball but lacked a sponsoring post.

4. Infrastructure: Playbook 365 and Geographic Eligibility

Crawford discussed having individual players default to the closest participating post and using software to operationalize recruiting/boundary rules. The Playbook 365 discussion, as read into the transcript, suggests that a custom national implementation could require substantial development resources and a formal institutional commitment before a one-off system would be built.

This reveals a structural issue central to the case: a community-based model requires registration technology, eligibility rules, post participation, risk-management compliance, administrators, scheduling, tournament infrastructure, and a clear chain of authority. The initiative was attempting to solve several of these simultaneously.

5. Community Sponsorship vs. the Modern Baseball Economy

Crawford's oral history contrasts the traditional Legion concept - local post sponsorship, volunteers, uniforms/travel support, geographic identity and postseason representation - with fee-based summer baseball structures. This contrast is analytically important, but portions of it are presently a research hypothesis, not a documented finding.

Crawford attributes part of Legion Baseball's Oklahoma decline to the growth of Red Dirt baseball and to incentives surrounding high-school coaches and summer participation. Those propositions require independent evidence: organizational history, fee schedules, OSSAA rules, coach contracts/policies, interviews, and participation data.

6. Pryor: An Unresolved Episode

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS: Oklahoma's transition from volunteer/community sponsorship toward coach-directed, fee-based and tournament-based summer baseball may have reduced the institutional space

in which American Legion Baseball once operated.

Crawford's son Bryce was playing college baseball at ECU when a rained-out series was moved to Pryor. Crawford recalls seeing opportunity in the local facilities and contacting the Pryor American Legion post and local baseball stakeholders about youth and Legion programming.

He later recalls that the Pryor post commander accused him of causing difficulties with the city, high-school coaches and youth coaches. Crawford says he asked to participate in a call to identify the concerns but that the call never occurred. The transcript also mentions a separate public controversy involving the commander. The present record does not establish a causal relationship between that controversy, Crawford's outreach, or the later Department action.

Research rule: Pryor remains an unresolved episode. No motive should be assigned to the commander, local coaches, the City of Pryor, or Department leadership without additional documentary evidence.

7. Documentary Turning Point: April 28 - May 15, 2023

Date	Event	Evidence
Apr. 28, 2023	Casey LaValley inquiry concerning high-school boys around Holdenville/Seminole seeking Legion Baseball and difficulty securing post sponsorship.	Contemporaneous
Apr. 29, 2023	May 10 Department letter states that the Department Executive Committee voted to remove Crawford as Assistant Baseball Commissioner.	Primary document
May 10, 2023	William M. Teel letter communicates the action; directs Crawford to cease representing the program, delete programs created/merged with it, return promotional materials; warns of possible trademark-related legal action; states Legion/Post 16 membership is unaffected.	Primary document
May 15, 2023	Crawford messages Bill Teel that he had sought guidance without returned calls/emails and challenges the removal from what he viewed as a struggling volunteer program.	Contemporaneous

The April 28 inquiry and April 29 vote are chronologically adjacent. The current evidence does not establish that one caused the other.

8. What the Record Establishes - and What It Does Not

Status	Proposition
Established	Crawford was working with Billy Lowe on American Legion Baseball/softball development by late 2022.
Established	Contemporaneous communications show interest or prospective participation in multiple Oklahoma communities.
Established	The initiative included website/registration work, post-based geographic concepts, age-group development and outreach.
Established	Pryor Post 182 sought information for U13 and U19 teams on Jan. 31, 2023.
Established	A Holdenville/Seminole-area inquiry was active on Apr. 28, 2023.
Established	The Department letter says the DEC voted Apr. 29, 2023 to remove Crawford as Assistant Baseball Commissioner.
Established	The May 10 letter did not terminate Crawford's American Legion or Gill-Mattox Post 16 membership.
Not established	The reason or motive for the DEC vote.
Not established	That the Pryor dispute caused the DEC action.
Not established	That Red Dirt baseball or particular high-school coaches caused Legion's decline or opposed Crawford's initiative.
Not established	That the Apr. 28 inquiry caused or influenced the Apr. 29 vote.

Status	Proposition
Needs verification	The exact national status of youth baseball/softball pilots and the claim that Oklahoma was one of eight states.

9. Independent Context: Oklahoma Participation

The American Legion's public team registry lists Oklahoma with one registered team in 2021. The 2024 Oklahoma registry lists six senior teams and two junior teams. Nationally, more than 2,500 teams had registered by the end of May 2021 despite pandemic-related disruption. These sources establish that Oklahoma's registered participation was very small relative to the national program during the period surrounding this case.

These counts should be used carefully. Registration totals measure teams in the Legion system; they do not identify the causes of Oklahoma's low participation and do not prove any claim about competing organizations.

10. Institutional Analysis

Finding 1 - The problem was larger than recruiting. The communications show interest, but interest had to be converted into post sponsorship, compliant teams, registration, insurance/background requirements, schedules, facilities and tournament pathways.

Finding 2 - Technology exposed governance dependencies. The Playbook 365 discussion shows that a scalable geographic model required organizational commitment beyond one state volunteer or administrator.

Finding 3 - Community identity was the proposed differentiator. The initiative was not merely another tournament product. It was a post-based community pathway intended to connect younger players to a longstanding national baseball structure.

Finding 4 - State-level governance ended Crawford's role before the experiment matured. This is documented. Why the governance decision was made is not documented in the materials presently assembled.

Finding 5 - The experience became a bridge in Crawford's later research. In his oral history, he connects the closing of the Legion opportunity with increased curiosity about Little League's community/draft structure. This is appropriately treated as first-person intellectual chronology.

11. Relationship to the Broader Oklahoma Business Plan Research

This case study should sit between the Brian Crawford Memorial/Seminole operational history and the later Little League research. It captures a transitional period in which Crawford was no longer only operating events or facilities; he was attempting to design a statewide/community sports structure and asking why legacy community organizations struggled to compete in Oklahoma.

The American Legion experience becomes an early field test of themes that later recur throughout the Baseball Heaven research: geographic identity, community ownership, volunteer capacity, public/private incentives, facility access, governance, transparency, and the economic structure surrounding youth sports.

12. Research Gaps and Next Evidence to Acquire

- A. Original May 10, 2023 letter scan as Exhibit 1, plus envelope/email metadata if available.
- B. Original Billy Lowe text exports/screenshots for Nov. 2022-May 2023 rather than relying only on the oral reading.
- C. Tim Lawson Jan. 31, 2023 email and Casey LaValley Apr. 28, 2023 email in original form.
- D. Archived American Legion youth baseball/softball webpages, URLs, screenshots and Playbook 365 configuration materials.

- E.** Department Executive Committee minutes, agenda, motion, supporting materials, or correspondence concerning the Apr. 29 vote.
- F.** National American Legion documentation concerning youth baseball/softball pilot states and age-group authorization.
- G.** Oklahoma American Legion team counts by year, ideally 2000-2026, to measure decline/recovery rather than infer it.
- H.** Independent documentation of Red Dirt history, fee structure, coach participation and OSSAA summer rules before drawing causal conclusions.
- I.** Pryor records/interviews sufficient to reconstruct the local dispute without speculation.

13. Research Conclusion

The evidence assembled so far supports a documented institutional case study, not merely a timestamped personal history. Crawford's role placed him inside an attempted rebuilding effort at a moment when Oklahoma Legion participation was small. The record shows active outreach, local interest, experimentation with community/post geography, and efforts to create scalable digital infrastructure.

The record also shows that the initiative depended on institutions larger than any one organizer: posts had to sponsor teams; state and national leadership had to authorize structures; technology required resources; and local baseball ecosystems had their own incentives and relationships.

The April 29, 2023 DEC action ended Crawford's official Assistant Baseball Commissioner role before the proposed model matured. The evidence presently available establishes the action but not its motive. That unresolved distinction should remain explicit.

The enduring research question is therefore not simply why one volunteer was removed. It is why a community-based baseball institution that once had a meaningful place in Oklahoma became difficult to rebuild - and what that experience can teach communities seeking sustainable, locally rooted youth-sports opportunities today.

Source and Exhibit Roadmap

Source	Use in this case study	Status
Corrected oral-history transcript	Narrative chronology; reads contemporaneous texts/emails; identifies research questions.	In hand
May 10, 2023 Department of Oklahoma letter	Primary evidence of Apr. 29 DEC vote, removal directives, and membership distinction.	Photograph in hand
American Legion 2021 team registry	External context: Oklahoma listed with 1 registered team.	Verified public source
American Legion 2024 Oklahoma registry	External context: 6 senior + 2 junior Oklahoma teams.	Verified public source
American Legion 2021 Annual Report	External national context: more than 2,500 teams registered by end of May 2021.	Verified public source
Original text/email exports	Needed to elevate quoted communications from transcript-derived evidence to direct exhibits.	To collect
Apr. 29 DEC minutes/materials	Needed to determine stated basis, motion, discussion, and decision process.	To collect

Independent public sources consulted: The American Legion team registry for 2021; Oklahoma team registry for 2024; The American Legion 2021 Annual Report. These sources are used only for participation/context claims and not to infer motives or causes.

Correction note: The January 11, 2024 transcript reference is Buck Thomas Park and concerns Crawford's RFP submission to the City of Moore, Oklahoma. It is not treated as an American Legion Baseball project or evidence that the Legion initiative continued into 2024.