

Rec programs aren't just kids' stuff

Adults: Softball, tennis, badminton, aerobics — even drama — draw older as well as younger participants.

By JEFF SEIDEL
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

For nearly 50 years, the members of the Loch Raven Badminton Club have assembled to play the game they love. These days, the club has about 100 members.

"We have everything from beginners to very skilled players," said Joel Smith, the club's president and a member of about 25 years. "Our members come back year after year to keep playing."

The club shows that the county's recreation programs aren't just for kids.

Officials with the county's Department of Recreation and Parks don't keep numbers on how many of the more than 300,000 who signed up for its programs last year are adults. But they know that programs such as softball, tennis and drama attract large numbers of adults, especially softball.

More than 16,000 adults played in county softball leagues last year, said Keene Gooding, chief of community programs for the department. He said that 28 recreation councils offer the leagues in many forms, some organized by age, some co-ed.

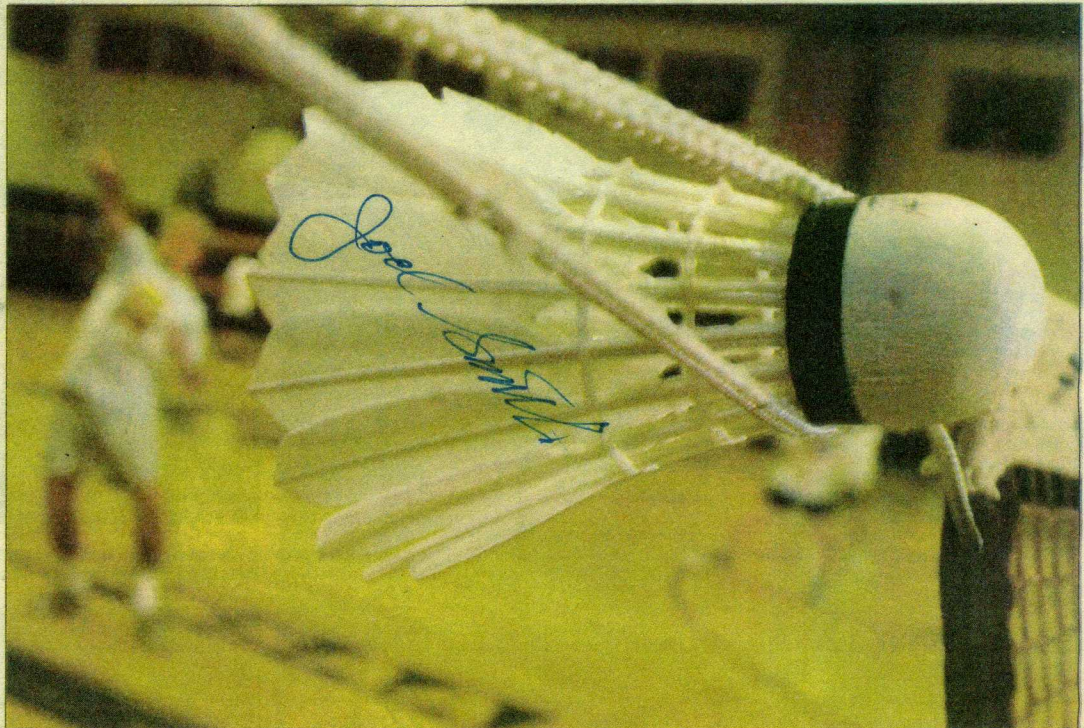
"Softball has been pretty steady for many years," Gooding said.

Tennis also is popular with adults. Gooding said a partnership between the department and the Baltimore Tennis Patrons organization helped build interest in the sport in recent years.

Adult tennis programs were down to about three or four a few years ago, but the partnership has paid off, with department officials expecting about 23 programs in the county this year.

Year-round aerobics and fitness programs have also grown in popularity. Gooding said 36 recreation councils, including many in the Towson area, offer fitness programs. Performing arts are also popular, with more than 22,000 participants.

At Loch Raven High, the badminton club plays Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday nights. The club also will often play in the summer, depending upon how



Members of the Loch Raven Badminton Club meet up to three nights a week for matches.

STEVE RUARK : PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE SUN

many members are interested in getting together. The games often take place at Baltimore Lutheran School during the summer, around the corner from Loch Raven.

About three dozen players usually turn out. The club most often plays doubles because it lets four people on the court and helps take advantage of the available space. But as time goes by each night and as people leave, some singles matches are played.

The club has grown so much that it now has about 100 adults. In addition, club members are trying to draw the interest of children, and they have recruited 20 youngsters ages 8 to 18 to play with them.

Smith, the club president, began playing backyard badminton as a teen-ager and had heard of a club in the Loch Raven area. He joined it in the late 1970s and never left.

He's 69, and has been slowed in recent months by knee and spinal surgery. But he still gets out on the court.

"It's a great sport, and it's a shame that it doesn't get more publicity," he said.



Club member Alec Wilson of Phoenix hits a shuttlecock during a game at Loch Raven High. About three dozen players generally turn out for the games, held three nights a week.