

# Wiedmer: UTC student Breeden, Baseball Miracles bring joy to the world

---

August 27th, 2015 | by [Mark Wiedmer](#) | in Sports - Columns | Read Time: 3 mins. |

---

Caroline Breeden didn't grow up much of a baseball fan. Nor did the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga senior education major play its sister sport, softball, during her high school years.

But she did date someone in the Washington Nationals organization a year or two ago. And because her father's work with the Drug Enforcement Administration led to her living in Africa for 10 years, she was only too happy to help the fledgling nonprofit Baseball Miracles when it called her in South Africa last summer to help organize a clinic there.

"John Tumminia, who co-founded Baseball Miracles, was at a game where my ex-boyfriend was playing, and John was telling him about trying to go to Africa to put on a clinic for kids," recalled Breeden. "So my ex-boyfriend told John that I was working at an orphanage there. One thing led to another, and I was able to help set up the clinic at the orphanage where I worked. John calls me his 'internal advisor' now."

Anyone on baseball's inside knows of Tumminia, who's been a top scout for the Chicago White Sox for 30 years. He's in a hall of fame for scouts, and his daughter Tyler — reportedly named for Ty Cobb — oversees the operations of five minor league teams through Goldklang Group, a sports entertainment consulting and management firm. She also happens to be married to former Boston Red Sox general manager Ben Cherington.

So when Tumminia's stated mission for Baseball Miracles is to bring together baseball and softball coaches to, according to [baseballmiracles.org](#), "Teach boys and girls with economic and environmental disadvantages throughout the world. We strive to reach out especially to the youth who have never played the game. At no cost, we provide instruction, gloves, bats, hats, shirts and memories," that ideal carries extra weight.

Tumminia has lived the game, taught the game and loved the game most of his life. Baseball Miracles gives him a chance to reach and teach a whole new group of young folks who might never have otherwise picked up a ball, glove or bat.

"All the equipment we get is donated, much of it from major league teams," said the 22-year-old Breeden. "Every kid who comes to one of the clinics leaves with a ball and a glove. When we can, we also give money to the school or orphanage to help them buy more equipment."

Even as the game struggles in the United States to attract inner-city youth — a recent University of Nebraska study found that black athletes make up only 2.6 percent of Division I baseball players and that African-Americans in the major leagues have dropped from 19 percent in 1986 to 8 percent in 2014 — Major League Baseball has players from five

continents and at least 20 countries.

To help that international interest along, Tumminia — with a little logistical help from Breeden — will put on a clinic in Kenya on Oct. 16-21 and one in Honduras on Nov. 11-14.

"I was able to schedule the Kenya clinic during UTC's fall break," noted Breeden with a gentle laugh. "So I'll be able to go."

So far, Tumminia's team has been to the Dominican Republic, South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, Ireland and Bethesda Children's Home orphanage in Hammanskraal, South Africa. The Bread and Water Foundation has often assisted. Close to 1,000 children have now been touched by the group's generosity.

"I'm so happy I've done this," said Breeden, who estimates she devotes as many as 20 hours a week, free of charge, to helping Baseball Miracles with travel plans, fundraising and such. "It's been such an eye-opening experience."

The most eye-opening experience for the children lucky enough to have Baseball Miracles visit may be the personalized baseball cards the organization gives every kid who attends a clinic.

"For a lot of them," noted Breeden, "it's the first time they've seen a picture of themselves."

Then there's the guilty pleasure of watching them try their very first bit of Big League Chew bubble gum.

"Just the smiles on their faces," she said.

In spring 2014, Tumminia told MLB.com he'd been disappointed at how hard the group had been forced to work to secure donations. That was before Baseball Miracles was granted nonprofit status early in 2015, however.

Nevertheless, they still need much help, and anyone wishing to make a donation of money or equipment can do so at their website.

No wonder Tumminia says of Breeden: "She has a lot to do with how the wheel turns."

As the season turned to summer, Breeden returned to the South African orphanage.

"It had been almost 10 months since we put on the clinic," she said. "But all those kids were still playing. They seemed so happy."

You don't need to have grown up appreciating the game of baseball to appreciate the universal power of happy.

*Contact Mark Wiedmer at [mwiedmer@timesfreepress.com](mailto:mwiedmer@timesfreepress.com)*