MOST LAWYERS HAVE THE REPUTATION of being an aggressive, competitive lot. Who, after all, wants to be represented by a professional who plays the game with grace and dignity, but doesn’t mind losing?

In what has become tradition at Washington University School of Law, sports competitions among classmates have emerged as social outlets that forge identity, camaraderie, and even comic relief.

Of course, that doesn’t mean they don’t try to capture the Geek Bowl or Section War titles each year. Because there is no equivalent to the Elias Sports Bureau at the law school, historical fact and statistics for the annual competitions are almost non-existent. Anecdotal evidence, however, indicates that intramural activity dates back at least to the early 1960s. Then in the 1970s, when beloved registrar Erna Arndt died, students also organized a basketball tournament to raise money for a scholarship in her name.
Two events, in particular, recently have captured the fancies of the law school, largely for their novelty and good-natured rivalry. The annual Geek Bowl flag football game is held in early October. The competition pits student representatives from the three prestigious law journals, the *Washington University Law Review*, *Washington University Journal of Law & Policy*, and *Washington University Global Studies Law Review*. Organized by the journals’ managing editors, the teams are co-ed, enthusiastic, and nearly as serious as the old “Cardiac Cardinals.”

Having completed its second year, Section Wars, which pits groups of students against each other in multiple sporting events, has achieved official status from the Student Bar Association. The brainchild of third-year student Jeryl Hayes, this competition is so-named for its organization of teams by first-year class sections. For academic year 2010–11, there were six sections, A–F. Students in these sections bond naturally, as they all have nearly the same classes, professors, and schedules. Hayes modeled the wars after an event she had experienced at her high school.

“My recurrent nightmare that first year of the law school competition was that after all the planning, maybe 10 people would show up,” recalls Hayes. “But it was actually very enthusiastically received. My hope is that it continues to be a tradition.”

Similarly, Meghan Jones, associate managing editor for the *Journal of Law & Policy*, notes: “The Geek Bowl is a great way to spend an early fall afternoon watching your friends and colleagues forget everything else and compete. It’s also an opportunity to get to know new members of the journals. It’s good-natured, but we also try to win. It’s how the game is played.”

For the record, the *Law Review* won the tournament this year, beating Jones’ team after previously knocking off the *Global Studies Law Review*. In fact, the *Law Review* has won two years straight. “But we won it all two years ago,” Jones quickly points out.

Amber Woodward, *Law Review* senior executive editor and social chair, adds: “We have a large football trophy and a secondary softball trophy with dates and winners going back to the 1970s. You can imagine that we didn’t want to lose these to another journal as we are quite accustomed to having them displayed in our office!”

Every year, Woodward says, each journal designs amusing T-shirts, which become jerseys for both events. Dean Kent Syverud receives a shirt from the different journals, as well, and he takes turns wearing them and cheering for each team.

*Law Review* team captain Mike Weinhold credits a stout defense, a few practiced trick plays, and a strong performance by the team’s female students as factors that carried the day in fall 2010. “The Geek Bowl is really a lot of fun,” he says. “The three journals take it way more seriously than you would expect, and I’m just glad that we could take home the title again.”

In Section Wars 2010, each section was assigned a color and instructed to designate a team captain to be a liaison in charge of organizing the team and T-shirt orders. Sections play flag football, softball, and kickball using standard co-ed IM rules.

Hayes also sees Section Wars as a way to encourage transfer students to get to know some of their classmates. While the returning second-years are automatically placed on teams based on their first-year sections, the transfers are “free agents” of sorts, and team captains vie to have them join their teams.

“Section Wars was a great opportunity to enjoy some fresh air and friendly competition,” agrees transfer student Stefan Knudsen. “It was a highlight of the fall semester.”