



# Where ALL Kids Are Stars!

Arlington Little League  
P.O. Box 3755  
Arlington, VA 22203  
703-351-5111  
[info@arlingtonlittleleague.org](mailto:info@arlingtonlittleleague.org)

Friday, September 18, 2009

To Past, Present, and Future Arlington Little League Families –

We are writing to provide you with information and our opinions before tomorrow's community forum on the consolidation of Arlington youth baseball. Arlington Little League parents, players, and volunteers must make their voices heard! The new Consolidation Panel needs to hear about your experience with Arlington baseball.

This letter is divided into the following sections:

- 1 – Introduction
- 2 – Overview
- 3 – Why is Arlington Little League best for our young athletes?
- 4 – Why is this process flawed?

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Our purpose is not to tell you what to say or what to believe. It is not our intent to convince you that Arlington Little League is without room for improvement. We have no delusions of perfection, but are nonetheless pleased with the product we produce for Arlington citizens. We are proud of the work we have done over the past 24 years, and we are confident that we stand up in comparison to other programs in our region. Agree or disagree, we ask you to do no more than speak your mind tomorrow. Without your voice, a decision about future baseball opportunities for all Arlington youth will be made behind closed doors by a select few.

Many of you have asked about what this panel might consider the main issues. Or, you have told us that you'd like to attend, but aren't sure what to say. If any of the following ideas speak to you, or jump out as important, please do attend and express your beliefs.

## **2. OVERVIEW**

Arlington youth baseball was, originally, a county run program, much like youth basketball. In the mid-1980s, coaches started their own baseball organization. After one season with this "Bambino" Babe Ruth league, coaches dissatisfied with the distribution of wealth and talent founded Arlington Little League. Many of the volunteers who worked to start this new organization remain with Arlington Little League today.

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Some speak of a rocky relationship between the two co-existing leagues, yet in my time as Arlington Little League (ALL) President, my interaction with the leadership of Cal Ripken Babe Ruth (CRBR) has been nothing but cordial. There simply exists a difference of philosophy regarding the method of player distribution for older players in our leagues. ALL uses a draft to ensure competitive balance, while CRBR has used a neighborhood system to keep friends from school on the same team. Many claim that the CRBR system leads to manipulation of the team formation process, and that some teams therefore become exponentially better than their competition. Only those with experience in that program can speak to the validity of this claim.

Since 2004, when the Arlington County Sports Commission began discussions of merging the two youth baseball programs, Arlington Little League has been eager to participate. Having one youth baseball league in Arlington would be beneficial for all families and ballplayers. I personally attended every meeting organized by the Sports Commission. We have raised the possibility of merging in fall seasons, and at the lower levels of play where there is no difference in player distribution methods. These proposals were disregarded.

Despite Arlington Little League's willing and active participation, leaders of the newly formed Consolidation Panel have stated that "the leadership of the two leagues had their chance." They are pushing for a decision on our future as early as mid-October. This would be a forced merger, and a rushed one at that, which is a disastrous combination for our young athletes. If a merger is forced nonetheless, only one league is equipped to accommodate it.

### **WHY ARLINGTON LITTLE LEAGUE IS THAT LEAGUE**

**1. Inclusion.** The Arlington Little League Board of Directors is a body of 25 dedicated volunteers. Only two of these board members are newly elected for 2009-2010. 18 of these members are parents of children currently playing ALL baseball. Still more volunteers serve as coaches and committee members, but the mixture of parents and volunteers, new and returning, stays diverse.

The Cal Ripken Babe Ruth board is a body of six members. The consolidation panel is proposing a body of 13. Only Arlington Little League's current system would allow active volunteers to continue working, and also provide an opportunity to bring active CRBR volunteers into the fold. We are committed to giving parents a voice in the operation of our organization, and this would never be so important as after consolidation.

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**2. A Focus from the Top Down.** Our Board of Directors includes a Commissioner for each level of play. It is the Commissioner's job to assist coaches and report needs to the Board. Though we have always considered our highest level of play to be "where it all comes together," we maintain an active presence and involvement in the administration of lower level baseball.

**3. Challenger Baseball.** Unique to Arlington and rare in our region, Arlington Little League provides an opportunity for physically and mentally challenged youth to play ball. Our older players attend a Challenger game once per year to help players run the bases and make throws. While being an excellent program in its own right, we believe that it adds to the true family feeling of Arlington Little League.

**4. A Strong National Organization.** Arlington Little League represents two of 13 leagues in Virginia's District 4, which has its own administrator tasked with overseeing and assisting these local leagues. There are 16 districts in Virginia, which has a state coordinator, and one of these districts will send a team to the Southern Region tournament, which sends a team to the nationally televised Little League World Series in Williamsport each year. Additionally, Southern Region employs a director to provide insight and oversight to District Administrators and League Presidents alike.

***Oversight is not a vice!*** The strong presence of so many Little League International officials keeps local leagues running smoothly, and it keeps us all on equal footing. Because of mandatory local league procedures, there are never stacked teams in any Little League. There is only support from the local level up to Williamsport, complete with online training manuals and videos, and innovative safety rules that must be observed.

**5. Safety First.** Little League International has long been on the forefront of advances in player safety. These endeavors include:

- a) A Safety Officer for every league.
- b) Standards for lighting that must be checked by the Safety Officer.
- c) Breakaway Bases - Upon performing a study which showed that the majority of baseball injuries happen upon sliding into bases, Little League mandated use of bases that detach from the field when slid into.
- d) Little League does not allow on-deck batters, as very few fields are constructed to protect a player standing as little as ten feet from the batter.

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e) Perhaps most importantly, it is Little League that appointed a panel of doctors, professional pitchers, and other experts to study how many pitches a youngster could safely throw. They also determined the appropriate number of days of rest between outings to preserve the arms of young pitchers.

**6. Equitable Distribution of Talent.** A draft is the only way to ensure competitive balance in a youth baseball league. Further, only Little League can guarantee that a new league won't try a draft and then revert to a different method. Little League International simply wouldn't allow it.

A draft is comprised of many complicated tasks, beginning with evaluation days at least two weeks before the draft. These tasks must remain in the hands of those who have executed a draft for years. From start to finish, a draft requires an incredible amount of time, effort, and experience.

### WHY THIS PROCESS IS FLAWED

As previously stated, Arlington Little League has been eager to participate from the outset. We do not accept the statement that our organization "had its chance" to participate. This process was managed by the Sports Commission, a county-appointed group, from 2004 to 2008. When another youth baseball group in Arlington elected not to participate, the Commission spent its time attempting to convince its leaders otherwise.

In December of 2008, the county ceased Sports Commission meetings and told leaders of ALL and CRBR that a consolidation panel would begin meeting by the middle of March if the two leagues did not meet an agreement on their own. In these three months, the busiest portion of our off-season, we met and discussed steps we would be willing to take to move towards a consolidation of resources and efforts. These were quickly and summarily rejected.

The decision about the future of Arlington youth baseball should be in the hands of those who understand its workings, and who are committed to working for it in the future. Only a few panel members are currently involved in the administration of a 12-U baseball league. Will the entire panel remain assembled to provide assistance to a merged organization? Have they considered how to handle the varying talent levels of existing teams in the two leagues? Has there been discussion about the structure of an uppermost division that

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could contain up to 20 teams? Are all sides of every issue being addressed with an eye towards practicality in Arlington and fairness to the expectations and experience of current players and families?

I have been provided only a preliminary list of members of the Consolidation Panel, but based on that, I would say it's comprised of an impressive group of dedicated volunteers. They simply can't, in the timeframe allotted them, have been able to address all the questions that come up in discussing a combined organization. They should not have been asked to do their work without the participation of willing and experienced organization leaders.

Rushing a decision and the transition sets up our consolidated league for failure. It invites the arrival of AAU baseball in Arlington, something Arlington Little League has helped avoid by working to form its own travel teams in conjunction with the Little League season.

### **CONCLUSION**

It is doubtful that leaders of the panel could be convinced to delay or reorganize their work. In preparation for their decision, Arlington Little League's entire Board of Directors has stated its commitment to doing the work required by a newly formed baseball league for all of Arlington's children. Despite our issues with the process, we are excited about the possibilities. Our concerns rest with the knowledge that only Little League Baseball can guarantee that the principles that formed our league remain at the heart of its operation. If you agree that inclusion, safety, and competitive balance are integral to a merged baseball organization, we hope you'll come out in support of Arlington Little League.

Yours in baseball,

Adam P. Balutis  
President  
On behalf of the Board of Directors  
Arlington Little League

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