



SOUTHBRIDGE LITTLE LEAGUE



Board of Directors plan photo meeting

Parental input is encouraged

SOUTHBRIDGE — Those who ordered and paid for individual player and team photographs this year are well aware that the goods have not yet been supplied. What they may not be aware of are the steps the league has taken and has available to get the merchandise many have paid for.

The Southbridge Little League Board of Directors will hold a special meeting of the membership on Wednesday, October 28 at 7 p.m. in the community room of the Southbridge Police Department. All are invited and encouraged to attend.

The 2009 Board of Directors voted on
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Restructuring of divisions set for 2010

Double-A division added, coach pitch teams cut in half

SOUTHBRIDGE — Now is the time for some changes.

In 2010, the Southbridge Little League will have a restructured set of divisions with the intent of providing better baseball and learning opportunities for its players.

In the past, the league has fielded teams in seven different divisions, largely based on age groups: Tee Ball, Minor Division, Triple-A (AAA) Division, Major Division, Junior League, Senior League, and Big League. When the kids take the field this spring, there will be an eighth division: the Double-A Division (AA).

This additional division will largely

effect the Minor Division, commonly referred to as “Coach Pitch.”

Going forward, the plan is to offer Tee Ball for those players that are league age 5-years-old, and some league age 6-years-old that have not previously played. The Minor Division will consist of the bulk of the players league age 6, and some of the league age 7s, while the new AA division will allow players that are league ages 7 and 8 to begin learning how to pitch and play the position of catcher.

In past seasons, players did not take the pitcher’s mound or learn the basics of playing catcher until they were in

TURN TO DIVISIONS, PAGE 2

Get your child’s registration out of the way by signing ‘em up Nov. 21

SOUTHBRIDGE — If you want to avoid those busy player registration dates in January, or think signing up your little slugger would be a good gift for the rapidly approaching holidays, you can get your son or daughter’s registration for the 2010 baseball season out of the way next month.

On Saturday, November 21, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., the Southbridge Little League will hold its first player registration date for the upcoming 2010 season. It will be the only player registration date before we ring in the new year.

A number of parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, big brothers and sisters, godparents, and others have purchased Southbridge Little League gift certificates as stocking stuffers for the little leaguer in their life. Those gift certificates can be used towards a player’s registration fee, Southbridge Little League apparel, or even the food and drink at the league’s concession stand over at Henry Street Field.

Don’t miss this early opportunity to get your little leaguer’s registration out of the way on Nov. 21 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.



Players will learn to pitch, catch sooner

DIVISIONS

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the AAA division, which in most cases would not happen until a player was league age 8, or even league age 9.

The hope is that earlier exposure to the positions will help breed better pitching and catching within the league down the road. It will also help those players who may have otherwise spent multiple seasons in Tee Ball and/or the coach pitch divisions, where they may not be properly challenged based on their personal skill sets.

The AA division will serve as the feeder league for the AAA division, which will primarily consist of some high-level league age 8-year-olds, all of the league age 9-year-olds, and a number of league age 10-year-olds.

Previously, the AAA division was fed by the Minor division, which led to stark differences in ability from top to bottom.

Nobody wants a player to quit because he or she is completely overmatched or overwhelmed when they make the jump from one division to another, which was a frustration for some moving from the Minor division to AAA.

At the same time, there have been players that became bored or frustrated with the lack of ability of their teammates who may have come up from the coach pitch age group.

In theory, the creation of the AA division helps bridge those gaps and prevent such problems, while also providing more opportunities to every single player in the Tee Ball, Minor, AA, and AAA divisions.

The move should mean more playing time, more meaningful playing time, more instruction, and a better balanced field of competitive play.

The restructuring of the

divisions does provide some logistical problems to be overcome in the coming months. While the additional division does not, in theory add more teams to the league as a whole, it does add the number of teams that need a field with a pitcher's mound. The numbers projected indicate that would mean four more teams needing to play games at Henry Street, where last year five AAA teams used one field and five Major teams used the other. Finding practice and game times for up to 14 teams on those two fields will be difficult without a good deal of creativity and flexibility. Possibilities include some AAA games being played on the Major division field, the introduction of Sunday afternoon games, or both.

Another option is the utilization of a portable pitcher's mound, which the league purchased two years ago during field renovations on the Major field at Henry Street. The portable mound, which was purchased thanks to the generosity of United Lens, could transform the small diamond at West Street Field into a suitable field of play for the AA division.

Still yet another option is to use the smaller diamond at West Street as it is, without a mound, as the kids learn the very basic fundamentals of the proper mechanics, motions, and deliveries for a pitcher. While unorthodox, many claim throwing off a flat surface puts less pressure on the arm than throwing off a mound. Marty Schupak's book *Youth Baseball Drills* notes: "Going through the pitching motion on a flat surface is a great way for pitchers to concentrate on technique." You may also notice big leaguers coming back from injuries often throw from a flat surface before graduating to a mound.

Board of Directors set registration rates for upcoming 2010 season

SOUTHBRIDGE — Though the full schedule of registration dates have not yet been announced, the Southbridge Little League has made public its rate structure for the upcoming 2010 season.

Most of the division rates will stay right where they were last year, and a couple will see a reduction in cost.

The rates will begin at \$40 to play Tee Ball or Minor Division and escalate by age group until they reach \$115 for the Junior and Senior Leagues, and \$125 for the Big League.

An informal study conducted last year showed that the Southbridge Little League had registration rates below the average rates charged by the other leagues within District 5 from Tee Ball through the Major division. We were just a couple dollars above the average when it came to the Junior and Senior Leagues.

Players here get a real bang for their buck in that the registration rates are low in comparison to our peers, we are possibly the only league in the district that allows our players to keep their full uniforms every year, and we're one of a handful that do not charge extra money for any player to take part in the annual All Star tournaments. As such, we struggle to make ends meet each year, but recognize times are tough in households everywhere and dollars can be better spent.

As has been past practice, the league will also offer discounts for those parents/guardians who sign up multiple children. There is a family cap so that no family will have to pay more than \$200 for their kids to play baseball, regardless of their age and what division they play in. There is also a \$10 discount for every child registered from one family, up until the cap is hit. If you have a Tee Ball player and a AAA player, the discount will drop your fee from \$100 to \$90.

We certainly recognize that, in this economy, every penny counts for your family and ours.

Division	Fee
Tee Ball	\$40
Minor Division	\$40
AA Division	\$50
AAA Division	\$60
Major Division	\$65
Junior League	\$115
Senior League	\$115
Big League	\$125

Photographer has not come through with pictures or refunds

PICTURES

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February 12 to select Tom O'Connell of Legends Sports Photography as the league's official player and team photographer for the 2009 season.

This decision, which had just one vote in opposition, was made after O'Connell and another photography outfit, Sportography Inc., made presentations to the Board of Directors. A third vendor, Village Photo in Southbridge, was not in attendance to make a sales pitch, but had submitted a packet of information.

Village Photo did the photographs for the league during the 2008 season. Another company out of Connecticut did the league's photographs for several years prior.

None of the three vendors were asked to give in-person presentations, however, both Sportography and Legends Sports Photography specifically requested time with the Board to make their respective pitches, and were granted the opportunity.

After listening to the presentations and going over the information from all three photographers, the Board opted to use O'Connell and Legends Sports Photography. As the minutes from that meeting reflect: "Legends has much more opportunities for our League, package prices are more competitive and flexible."

O'Connell and his crew made several trips to both Henry Street Field and West Street Field to take individual player

League has investigated numerous options

photographs as well as team pictures during the season. Though there were times that miscommunication appeared to be a problem, nobody noticed any red flags with the O'Connell and his photographers.

In June, a number of parents began asking where were the pictures they had ordered and paid for. A cause for alarm as photographers will often times have delays in getting out the photographs and merchandise for a league with 300 players in it.

As the month of June progressed, Southbridge Little League President Shaun Moriarty was assured by the photographer that all of the merchandise would be on its way to the parents' first glance, it was not a and families of the players within a week or two.

The summer wore on and still no pictures had been received by any of the parents. O'Connell continually assured Moriarty and other members of the Board of Directors that he was almost done and the pictures would be out soon, often times claiming they'd be in the mail "by the end of the week." Many weeks later, the parents are still waiting for the photographs they paid for.

Many of the parents inquiring about the status of the photographs have been given contact information for O'Connell and have made phone calls and sent e-mails demanding a refund, their

goods, or both. In recent months, there have been few e-mails sent back or phone calls returned.

The Board of Directors discussed what to do next and it was decided the best course of action would be to consult an attorney and see what legal options were present. A local attorney was contacted, but the league was told it would have to consult a Connecticut-based attorney because O'Connell and his business are based out of that state.

After looking into a few attorneys and firms in northeastern Connecticut, the league was able to find a firm in Putnam, Connecticut that agreed to help out the league.

Attorney Davis drew up a letter demanding all goods and/or a full refund by September 8, or litigation would be pursued. O'Connell contacted the attorney on September 8, the deadline date, and insisted he needed just a little while longer to comply. The attorney granted a one-week extension, setting a new deadline of September 15 for all of the goods and/or all of the refunded money to be provided. O'Connell did not meet the September 15 deadline and has not been heard from since.

Attorney Davis and the associates at the firm she works for discussed various options the league could pursue, aside from litigation, and a few ideas were offered and followed up on, but with

no positive results.

Ultimately, what was originally thought to be a very nice and polite guy who offered a fine opportunity for the league and its parents turned into what appeared to be an inept and inadequate photographer, and then perhaps a con-artist who has apparently taken the Southbridge Little League, 300 kids, with their parents and families, for a ride.

Through some research conducted by a member of the Board of Directors, it appears there are at least four tax liens against one or more men named Tom O'Connell in the immediate vicinity of Putnam and Danielson, Connecticut.

While Attorney Davis worked pro bono on the case in terms of drafting a letter and some other work, a standard hourly rate would be put into effect if the league opts to pursue legal action through the Connecticut court system. While the potential costs of court fees and attorney fees are not a pleasant thought for a small non-profit organization, neither is the feeling of walking away empty-handed.

Attorney Davis is confident that the league would be able to win a judgment in court, but is also confident that there is a very good chance that any damages awarded may never actually be seen if O'Connell can prove an inability to pay.

With all of the information presented, the 2010 Board of Directors has to make a choice on what course of action to take, but wants parental input before that decision is made.

The special membership meeting at the Southbridge Police Department community room at 7 p.m. on October 26 is your chance to offer input.

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