

Chapter 3 Got My Team – Now What?

Once these teams are assembled you will receive a team roster and contact list along with blank medical release forms for each player. **You must have ALL players' parents complete these forms and you must keep the medical release forms with your team at all times in the event a player gets hurt and needs medical attention.** Emergency services cannot assist a child without them.

When you get your team roster, you're ready to start contacting your players!

Hello? I'd Like to Introduce Myself...

When you begin calling your team members, it might be helpful to have a "cue" card in front of you, along with the team roster before you make your calls. **Be prepared for parents to ask a variety of questions.** They are excited and interested and want to know everything right away -- What color socks and belt do they need? What color pants? What do they wear at practice? **First year players come with first year parents. Be prepared to tell them where they can purchase pants and equipment.** See the Coaches Resources section for information.

It is important to be patient with the parents. We are all proud of our kids. It is very easy and common for parents to want to "talk up" their kid's ability and desires. It is also common for them to "talk out" their fears and/or previous bad experiences. Just remind them that you are looking out for their child's best interests and you will do all you can to assist them in getting comfortable with the new experience.

Giving the parents an opportunity to briefly express themselves to you is a great way to make an important first impression. Anything you can do to convey an organized and caring attitude will go a long way towards a positive season regardless of wins and losses.

Use this first phone call as a tool to get "inside" information that you may want to know about your team. Have a short list of questions that you may want to ask. For example: What position has your child played in previous seasons? Keep in mind, the practice field will tell you all you need to know; however, the inquiry about a child's previous team experience, alternate sport interests and/or outside interests are a welcome sign that you care. All parents want their kids to have a great experience. **Having an organized and inviting disposition is the best "bad parent experience" repellent you can employ.**

Remember, you have just become each parent's only means of communication with regard to expectations and valued information. **This is a great opportunity to confirm the information you have been given on your roster.** You can double-check email addresses, or inquire about the neighborhood they live in, which may be a great way to help parents plan car pools.

Ask to speak to the child. Introduce yourself. Let them know that you are genuinely excited for their presence and participation. They will appreciate the gesture. Most kids have an initial sense of anxiety about being accepted and you can alleviate that anxiety by showing excitement about their presence on the team. It is a proven way to begin building trust with each child. **Seasoned managers all know that trust is a crucial element to building a positive experience.**

You may want to use the first call as a means to convey information that you feel is important to the team. In your parent letter or email you will cover the need for snack shack volunteers, or scorekeepers, etc. but you can certainly use this opportunity to let your parents know you are counting on them and hoping they can help out as a volunteer. **The league will give you a Snack Shack assignment in your manager's packet, as well as score keeper and umpire clinics – please share this ASAP with your parents.**

If a parent on your roster has checked off “coach” or “assistant coach” you may want to find out their availability and sincerity of interest. It is a good idea to meet and evaluate coaches at the first couple of practices before making a commitment to use someone you don't know very well. Being honest up front will make this process a lot more tolerable and it will give you the time you need to find a good fit for your personal compatibility needs. **In any event, anyone who intends on coaching at games or practice is required to fill out all of the volunteer applications required by the league.** If they do not have their applications on file with the league, you will not be allowed to let them participate.

Finally, let them know that you will be emailing them a “parent letter” that will give them outlined details of how you intend on running the team, what you expect of the players, what you expect of the parents and what they can expect of you. Be sure to verify the best means of communication with them and be sure to advise them the best way they can communicate with you.

If you find yourself “trapped” in a diatribe of conversation over specific details, make them aware that the Parent Letter will cover all of their concerns and remind them (politely) that you have 12 more teammates to call.

The Parent Letter

A parent letter is one of the most valued tools you can use to communicate the details of your expectations of the players, parents and what they can expect of you.

Take the time and craft a letter that introduces yourself and what you want them to know about you as a person. This is a great time to remind them that you are **a parent volunteering your time.** Let them know what your expectations are with regard to attendance, effort, playing time, position assignments and competitive philosophy.

This is a great opportunity to lay down ground rules with regard to appropriate times to ask you questions and how. For example, you may want to let them know that during games you are not available to discuss playing time, batting orders, position assignments or anything of that nature. You may want to ask them to give you a 24 hour “cool down” period following games so you can digest the results and evaluations of the game before you can be approached with concerns.

You can let them know that you value their child's experience; however, it is in the context of the team's best interest. (Not to be confused with win at all cost) **In the minor divisions and below, the league approaches the season as instructional. It is all of our jobs to do the best we can with regard to player development and giving a fair distribution of playing time.**

If you plan on using practice attendance and effort as a barometer for playing time or starting games, your parent letter should articulate your plan. As the season progresses, you may find some parents inherently lose sight of your goals. With a solid parent letter, you can kindly refer them back to the letter.

There is a great website: www.qcbaseball.com. This site is a coaching resource center, free of charge. The site has a downloadable parent letter that you are given permission to use if you decide it fits your style and intentions. At the very least, you can use the letter as a model to build your own personal letter.

The best news is your letter can be recycled and/or retooled season after season.

In the brief amount of time it will take you to articulate this information in a letter form, you will be saving yourself a lot of trouble once the season begins. In addition, your parents will again be impressed with your ability to communicate.

In addition, copies of the **Parent Code of Conduct** are included with this handbook and can act as a tool to remind the parents that this great game of baseball is just that – a game – and that all of our behavior should reflect that. With code of conduct commitments from our managers, coaches and parents, we all work together using Little League as a vehicle to teach sportsmanship, in a fun yet competitive environment.

Finally, think like a parent. What do parents want? They want to know what to expect. When you run your team without communicating intentions or boundaries, you are enabling the perceptions of parents, good or bad. **When collecting input for this project, numerous managers recommended the parent letter as a key document that nurtures a positive environment.**

A Manager's Checklist

1. Get player roster from player agent
2. Call parents and players
 - a. Introduce yourself to both
 - b. Confirm their personal contact information and preference of communication
 - c. Share any information you have in regards to practice times
 - d. Baseball players need gray pants; softball players need black pants
 - e. **As manager, you will need to collect the shirt sizes for your players by the league's deadline as posted on the website.**
3. Got coaches/assistant coaches yet?
4. Status of paperwork
 - a. Have you completed your volunteer application paperwork?
 - b. Have you read and signed your manager code of conduct?
 - c. Have your coaches read and signed the code of conduct as well?
 - d. Did you pay your \$1 fee to join as a Little League member? (necessary for managers)
 - e. Do you have a signed medical release for all players (blanks are included in this handbook)? This must accompany you at ALL practices and games.
 - f. All parents must sign a Parent Code of Conduct (included in this handbook)
 - g. Your coaches must have completed their volunteer application paperwork.
5. Equipment
 - a. An equipment bag is made available to each manager, which includes this manager's handbook. A deposit is needed and held until the return of both the bag and this handbook. These are available at the manager's meetings.
6. Preparing for practices
 - a. Have you scheduled your practice times through your player agent or another designated league official?
 - b. If you have practices scheduled for Waterford or Eastwood communities, each player must have a completed liability waiver form on file. These can be downloaded from the EOLL web site, www.eoll.org, and must be completed PRIOR to practices on those fields. It's best to have these ready for signatures when parents attend the first practice. Please keep those with you during all practices at those facilities.
7. Write your parent letter
 - a. Introduce yourself and tell them about you
 - b. Let them know your expectations in regards to attendance, effort, playing time, position assignments and competitive philosophy.
 - c. Lay down ground rules
 - d. Great website for an example parent letter, www.qcbaseball.com. Use it as is or make it your own style.
8. Things to be thinking about...
 - a. You'll need a team parent (this could be a mom OR dad).
 - b. You'll need scorekeepers
 - c. Umpires
 - d. Will you have post game snacks and drinks?
 - e. Communicating your teams snack shack dates/times and recruiting volunteers

A Few More "Team Keeping" Items... Practice Fields

You will need to secure a practice field and time. In the spring season it's a little more challenging because baseball and/or softball games are being played every night of the week (with the exception of Sunday) at the Bithlo complex. As our league continues to grow, it may require you to be creative. There are batting cages at the Bithlo complex that you can take advantage of and there are wide open grass fields in several of our surrounding communities.

Avalon Park is a neighborhood with baseball fields. Contact the HOA representatives to get in touch with the person in charge of scheduling. The Eastwood, Waterford Lakes, and Wedgefield communities have baseball fields that are scheduled by East Orange Little League and those fields will be assigned at the manager's meeting.

There will be fields available for practice on Sundays at Bithlo. In order to secure one of those fields you will need to contact the league and make a request. One of the benefits of taking on the manager role is the ability to choose the practice times and days around your schedule.

Manager Meetings and Trainings

You will be required to attend a few mandatory meetings to maintain your manager status. The league has coach training sessions, equipment pick up, a safety meeting, uniform distribution, and game schedule distribution as meeting agenda items. The league makes every effort to value everyone's time. The meetings and training sessions are vital to the infrastructure of our league. Most meetings are held prior to the season opener and multiple topics are combined to make the most out of the time you are asked to donate. In the big picture, the Little League experience requires each manager to be a special member of the community. Any time children are involved, extra preparations must be taken to insure each manager is fully aware of their responsibilities.

When you pick up your equipment, be prepared to leave a \$75 deposit check with the equipment manager. The league holds your check without depositing it and will return the check at the end of the season when you return your equipment and manager handbook.

Volunteer Support

When you receive your roster, you will notice that each parent has checked off duties for which they may be willing to volunteer. This information will be very valuable to the quality of your season. **You will need to identify at least two other parents to be assistant coaches. You will need a parent to volunteer for the role of scorekeeper.**

You will be assigned one or two "Snack Shack" shifts, each approximately three hours long. You will need to recruit three (3) parents or volunteers age 13 or older to work these shifts. As you can see, our entire league is run by volunteers. As the manager, you are responsible for assigning, delegating or recruiting the parents of your club to fill these roles.

With a positive, organized approach you will find that a majority of parents are more than willing to step up and assist you. Please be confident that every effort is placed into avoiding scheduling your team's snack shack duty during your team's games.

Another option parents can offer to volunteer for is Team Parent (mom or dad). This is almost always a parent that has previous little league experience. A team parent can assist you with any items you feel you need help. For example, you can ask your team parent to take ownership of uniforms, post game snacks, end of the season party etc., etc.

Uniforms

Each player is provided a team jersey and hat/visor for softball. Pants, socks and belts are the players' responsibility. **All baseball players are required to wear gray baseball pants, while all softball players must wear black pants. The pants may NOT have colored piping on the seams or pinstripes.** Most local sports stores have these in stock.

Managers will be responsible for getting uniform shirt sizes for each player on their team and reporting it to the uniform coordinator by the mandatory date provided on the league's website. If the manager fails to submit the team's uniform sizes by the deadline, the uniform sizes will be based on size averages for the age group of players.

There are also numerous website stores available to parents. www.baseballexpress.com is an enormous online store that has everything you could ever dream of needing for baseball and/or softball.

With regard to socks and belts, as manager, you will choose the colors of these items. A lot of veteran managers have suggested purchasing all of the socks and belts together and collecting the money from individuals once they arrive. This insures that each child has the correct apparel. It is always a good idea to get this information out to your parents immediately and get these items ordered and purchased.

Safety

You will receive blank medical release forms to be completed for each player on your team. **It is critical that you have these forms with you at all times.** In the event that a child is hurt during practice or a game and needs medical attention, these forms are required before any medical treatment can be given. Keeping them in this manager handbook or another team folder is a great idea.

On opening day, Board of Directors will be visiting each team manager prior to your game to insure all players have a signed medical waiver. Players without a completed medical waiver will be unable to play until one is completed and entered in the manager's handbook.

You can also add to this notebook contact information, practice/game schedules, practice plans or anything you find relevant to your team. **You will be issued a medical kit with your equipment bag. This kit must be with you at all practices and games as well. Any injury, no matter how significant must be reported and documented by the league.** Injury report forms are included in this handbook, or you can pick them up from the Snack Shack at the Bithlo complex. You will learn about all of your safety requirements at the Team Safety meeting.