
BYA PRIDE

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Baseball and Softball

by Dr. Jeanne Courbis

Recently, I conducted an in-depth interview with Muhammad Small, the commissioner of baseball and softball at the Brentwood Youth Activities organization. A lot of information was shared, and I am happy to provide the following summary of our conversation with the readership of BYA PRIDE.

Immediately prior to the 2007 season, the BYA Administration actively recruited Muhammad Small to be commissioner of baseball and softball. After some deliberation, Small accepted the post and began to design a three-year initiative. One of the first things that he did was implement a pitch count. This was done for the safety and well-being of the young players so that the children would not damage their developing elbows, biceps, and shoulders by overuse causing arm stress and fatigue. As this was a new policy at the BYA, some coaches were hesitant and even resisted -- but this did not dissuade the new commissioner from enforcing this directive. Such again is the case for 2009, as the commissioner is trying to bring the program up to par with national standards by graduating the 9-10 year-old division to 65 foot base paths, and the 11-12 year-old division to 70 foot base paths. Another major item on his drawing board is for the Brentwood High School athletic department to provide guidance and clinics for the athletes of BYA – starting with varsity baseball coach Jay Spahn’s keynote address for Opening Day ceremonies.

In advancing the program Small has started a 13-15 Junior Division for baseball. Thus far there have been 40 registrants, which is almost enough for three teams.

During his inaugural year, different issues and challenges arose for Small to solve. This is no easy task because the BYA Department of Baseball & Softball is clearly the largest operation within the organization by a 3-to-1 ratio to any other sport or activity. Coaches and parents were appreciative of having a visible, accessible, and approachable person-in-charge. Small analyzed many problems with the existing Supplemental Rules that he inherited, and after the season he e-conferenced with his Baseball & Softball Committee to revise the antiquated manual. Inclusive in the revised rules are glimpses of Small’s vision for the future of BYA baseball and softball. As some coaches have learned, the commissioner does not always subscribe to the status quo simply because “this is how we always did it.” He will genuinely counsel with others and implement changes – either gradual or immediate – as they are needed.

Some of his creativity was revealed when circumstances postponed the 2007 All-Star Games and Small combined them with the Annual Trophy Presentations at the conclusion of the season. The combined event was billed as a BYA Family Day, in which personnel from football, cheerleading, and basketball as well as local politicians from the community were invited to partake in the food and merriment. The children participated in skills competitions, and the first annual awards were presented for MVP and Umpire of the Year per division (voted by the coaches), and Assistant Coach & Coach of the Year for the entire program (decided by the commissioner). The highlight of the day was the inaugural Coaches Softball Tournament, in which the Major Division Coaches emerged as champions with Coach Rich Gonzalez (of the 11-12 champion Pirates) taking Tournament MVP honors.

Entering his sophomore season, Small informed all of his coaches that he wants to establish a "program" which has each age-group advancing its players in knowledge and application of the game. He asked Rich Gonzalez to devise a basic lesson plan, which lays out what the players at every age level should be learning. This is going to require that coaches attend clinics so that they can teach the children the finer aspects of the sport. As such, David Otero volunteered to prepare a Coach's Package that will inform the coaches as to what is expected of them, and what support is available to them. Also on the agenda for this season, Kail McLean is planning a few fundraising ventures to purchase several items for the improvement of the baseball and softball program, in particular, and the overall BYA, in general. Some of the items needed are a digital announcement sign, scoreboards, and the installation of adequate lighting on the Clubhouse, Ambulance, and Gil Hodges Fields within two years. Officials from the Town of Islip and Keyspan have been contacted about this endeavor. The procurement of the scoreboard, the lights, and other projects are going to take the participation and cooperation of all the coaches and parents.

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In advancing the program Small has started a 13-15 Junior Division for baseball. Thus far there have been 40 registrants, which is almost enough for three teams. The potential exists for at least five teams next year since there are twenty-five 13 year olds, eleven 14 year olds, and currently thirty-three 12 year olds in the 11-12 Major Division, who should be moving up next year – and with word of mouth after a year of existence – it promises to be even larger for 2009. The formation of this age group is one of the major features in Small's three-year plan because it is important to provide an organized activity for our adolescents. The commissioner has also spoken to a few people about hosting summer camps for baseball and softball as well as tournaments at the BYA Complex in which towns from throughout Long Island can participate. Working with Small, anyone can see that he is administratively organized and gives importance to keeping people well-informed, however, he will shy away from accolades and be the first to credit his staff. Shortly after taking the helm of the Baseball & Softball Department last season he asked yours truly to be secretary. Then, he appointed division coordinators: Ricardo Melendez (5-6 tee ball), Carmelo Gonzalez (7-8 rookie), Eric Perdomo (9-10 minor), Jerry Morales (11-12 major), Kail McLean (13-15 junior), Rich Gonzalez (16-18 senior), David Otero (girls softball), and Keishan Pierce (adult softball). The committee is completed by Ray Martinez (chief umpire), DJ DeJesus (head groundskeeper), and Tim Parker (player agent). Small actively sought specific individuals to be in his Cabinet due to their diligence and dedication, competence and concern. Throughout the off-season and during registration, the three divisions the commissioner gave his special attention to were the 13-15 Juniors and both softball units -- and he is most grateful to their respective coordinators, Kail McLean and David Otero, for their tireless efforts pertaining to their assignments as well as the entire Baseball and Softball Department.

Enrollment for the Baseball & Softball program Department has increased since last season. Six of the seven divisions have more registrants than last year. Perhaps these are some immediate dividends from the commissioner's visionary outlook for the program that he is cultivating. There are also immediate plans to form an adult softball division which would serve as a fund-raiser for the children's program. Below is a chart which gives, by division: (a). the commissioner's goal for this season, (b). the current number of enrollees, (c). the 2007 registrants, and (d). the amount of teams from last year to this year.



The commissioner's primary goal for his second year was to break the 500 registrant barrier, which was accomplished **without** the numbers from the newly-formed Junior Division. His secondary goal was to have a specific enrollment amount per division, which would amount to 575 players – inclusive of obtaining 100 girls for softball. This was attained in 5 of 8 age levels. Small's tertiary goal was, accounting for attrition, to have at least 85% return registrants from the previous year. As you will see more hard work is necessary to achieve this last goal. Almost 100 players did not return due to moving out of the town or other reasons, but the program has acquired 200-plus brand-new players to surpass last year's total count by the century mark. For 2009, Small is pondering if he should set the benchmark for 600 players. Nevertheless, in two years (2010) Small expects the program to have divisions in 16-18 baseball and 15-18 softball – after his three year plan runs its course – *and he is no longer the commissioner*. We are all looking forward to an exciting and wonderful season, and hope that all the children and parents enjoy themselves once again.

Division	Goal	2008	2007	Teams	Attrition
TB 5-6's	100	112	90	6 to 8	18 (21%)
BB 7-8's	100	122	104	8 to 9	33 (32%)
BB 9-10's	100	123	96	8 to 10	14 (15%)
BB 11-12's	100	101	81	6 to 8	10 (12%)
BB 13-15's	50	41	n/a	0 to 3	n/a
BB 16-18's	25	2	n/a	0 to 0	n/a
SB 7-10's	50	46	23	2 to 4	5 (22%)
SB 11-15's	50	52	52	4 to 4	12 (23%)
BYA League	575*	597	446	34 to 46	92 (21%)

*Should reflect 550 since BB 16-18 was not formulated.

Basektball Concludes

Congratulations to our 2008 BYA Basektball Champions.

Age	Division	Team	Coach
7-8	Jr.Varsity	Knicks	Makisha Quilnlan
9-10	Varsity	Nets	Eric Perdomo
11-12	NCAA	Nets	Penny Maybanks
13-14	NBA	Knicks	Syd Barrington

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

BASEBALL OPENING DAY

PLACE: BYA CLUBHOUSE

DATE: APRIL 12TH 9 AM

MEMBERSHIP MEETING

PLACE: BYA CLUBHOUSE

DATE: APRIL 16TH 7 PM