

FAQs Regarding RLL Changes for the 2010 Baseball Season

What Changes Are You Making In RLL For 2010?

Starting with the 2010 season, we will adjust the upper levels of RLL baseball to include just two divisions, Majors and Minors. No Majors Orange or Majors Black and no AAA. We will also return to the evaluation and assignment procedures we used up until a few years ago with players evaluated by RLL managers (not by Frozen Ropes or Baseball Plus) and then chosen for teams by those managers in a draft.

Neither softball nor baseball among children ages 5-8 will be affected by these changes; for them, the 5T, 6C, A and AA divisions will remain the same with each successive year of age usually leading to a new level of play.

However, for children ages 9-12, this is a change. Minors will include players 9-11; Majors will include players 10-12. Assignments will be made on the relative skills levels of the players with the exception of 12 year olds, who by Little League rules must be allowed to play Majors.

Why are you making these changes?

We believe these changes will provide for a better baseball experience for everyone. We want children to learn the skills of baseball and have a good time doing it. We believe the best way to do that is to work harder at putting children of similar skills levels together to play. We also believe we should guide our coaches and managers to instruct players on a schedule of skills that will ensure that their advancement from one division to the next actually means something.

But Does This Mean That Some 11-Year Olds May Not Be Playing In The Majors?

Yes, it does, just as some 11 year olds played in Majors Orange, not Majors Black, in years past. With the new configuration, these players will play in Minors.

But isn't that like returning to AAA?

No, our Minors division will have a significantly higher level of play than AAA had these past few years since it will be composed of 9, 10 and 11 year olds. It will

include some players who are moving up from AA for the first time, many who played in AAA last year, and some who played in Majors Orange last year as well. The combination will mean that these teams possess seasoned pitchers as well as “rookie” pitchers; players who are ready to adjust to a faster game as well as some who already have. The baseball, we are convinced, will be improved over where it was in years past. That means more fun and more learning.

But Who Gets to Play in Majors, then?

The Majors division will be made up of those who played in Majors last year and are returning and those who are evaluated at a level where they are drafted to play in Majors. The number of 10 year olds in Majors will be limited to no more than two per team, meaning that the vast majority of 10 year olds will be playing in Minors. But other than that restriction and the aforementioned stipulation that all 12 year olds are eligible to play in Majors (unless they request to play in Minors), the breakdown will be driven completely by the draft.

But RLL Has Been Around For Fifty Years, Why Change Now?

In fact, we are going back to the system that RLL has followed throughout most of its history. Until we created the Majors Orange division in 2007, the divisions were more or less aligned the way that we propose to do it now. Majors Orange was a noble attempt to create a more competitive league for 10 year old players (and a few 11 year olds), who were thought to be beyond AAA and yet not ready for Majors or if they were ready for Majors, not likely to get the kind of playing time there that they deserved if they played there. We felt it was a good idea at the time. However, we discovered that there were some unintended consequences in the establishment of Majors Orange.

A key part of the way that AAA functioned in the past was that it included both 9 year olds entering from AA and 10 year olds who were repeating AAA for a second year. The 10 year olds were inevitably the more experienced pitchers, fielders and hitters and they acted as mentors to the 9 year olds. When blended together the two age groups (including many 11 year olds as well) made for strong teams, good competition and a great environment for skill development.

Majors Orange, however, eliminated the older and more experienced players from the AAA division. This meant that the quality of play deteriorated at the AAA level. Once the relative skill level of AAA was reduced, those who played there did not develop their skills as expected. In turn, as the players advanced on to

Orange, the quality of play in that division suffered as well. What we ended up with were two divisions that were weak in their level of play and doing little to enhance or advance players towards a Majors experience. We feel confident that this new arrangement will reverse the decline.

But Aren't You Placing Too Great An Emphasis Upon Skill Level? I Just Want To See My Child Have Fun.

It is when a child lacks fundamental skills, watches the skills he/she has deteriorate or simply not advance, or feels out of his competitive comfort zone that he/she does not have fun. Think of your own experience in sports. Don't you have the most fun at sports where you have reached a desirable skill level and playing with those at approximately the same skill level as you? It is part of the RLL mission to teach baseball and softball, as stated in the first article of our constitution and we feel that this is the best way to achieve that. In short, our goal is to make the baseball experience enjoyable and instructional at all levels of Little League. To do that, we want to create an atmosphere that encourages and enhances learning, and allows us to see our children learn more, become better baseball and softball players, and in turn have more fun.

But My Child Wants To Play With His/Her Friends. What If He/She Is Not Able To And He/She Is Disappointed?

The two top divisions will be populated by drafts. That means that the managers will watch the players try out, examine reports from last year on their performance, and then choose teams accordingly. No matter which division your child ends up in, Majors or Minors, it is highly likely that he/she will be among plenty of children who are his/her age and grade level. That is part of the beauty of this system. If we promote each year based on age level, not skill level, then anyone who does not advance feels as though they are "with the little kids." But now there will be plenty of players between 9-11 in both the Minors and the Majors.

Okay But What If My Child Is One Of The 11 Year Olds Who Was Expecting to Graduate From Orange To The Majors And Is Now Going Into Something New Called The "Minors"? What Do I Tell My Child?

You can tell your child that there will be many other 11 year olds with him/her and that he/she will have the opportunity for more playing time and success playing at the Minors level than he/she would have had at the Majors level. Instead of being the 10th, 11th or 12th player on the team, he/she will likely be in the front tier, acting, as we say above, as a kind of “mentor” to those below him.

Okay, I’m Ready To Try It. Where Do I Sign My Child Up?

Early registration opens on December 1, 2009, Please go to the RLL home page and click on “register online”. Don’t be shy about asking us questions or voicing your opinion. Our player agent, Charlie Pieterse, can be reached through the contacts page on our website and either he or Renee Sinnott, our administrative assistant, will answer you promptly. Most of all, we hope you have a great season!