

Background

For many of us the pandemic has made 2020 and 2021 very hard years. At Sharpsburg Youth Baseball (SYB), we are proud to have stayed the course in the face of uncertainty after the county shut down all of its parks in March of 2020. We promptly regrouped and got the county's approval to reopen for SYB's first-ever Summer season. For many months we were the only league that provided a place for children to feel normal and play baseball. Our Summer and Fall seasons in 2020 were successful because of the dedication and creativity of many Board members who refused to throw in the towel and who found ways to be "different" from the other "Rec" leagues in the county and surrounding area.

Plan

As we move from a stellar season in the Spring of 2021, the time for more ingenuity is upon us. Even though player registrations have trended upward in recent seasons, SYB continues to experience adverse effects from the "Travel Ball" industry. Over the years SYB has lost players, coaches, and families to this constantly growing industry of organizations. The time is right to improve SYB's business model in such a way that the league becomes the most desired venue for talented players in and around Coweta County. To survive and succeed, we **must** create and maintain an array of quality products and services at competitive prices that entice players and their families into making SYB their permanent home for baseball. Therefore, we look to the Fall of 2021 to be the tipping point for bringing families back to our league by offering a full menu of challenging baseball opportunities for players at all skill levels.

This menu will allow many players to experience baseball at one of the following three levels: (1) Purely "Rec" baseball (American League); (2) Hybrid baseball (National League), which combines aspects of "Rec" and Travel baseball; or, (3) Purely "Travel" baseball. To support this new structure, SYB will use only even-numbered age groups, meaning that the menu for the Fall of 2021 would consist of the following options.

- 4U: Pre T-Ball
- 6U: T-Ball
- 8U: American League
- 8U: National League
- 10U: American League
- 10U: National League
- 12U American League
- 12U National League
- 14U League
- 18U League

The new Hybrid level will initially be offered for SYB age groups 8U, 10U, and 12U. SYB age groups 4U and 6U will continue to follow existing park rules and have up to 7 freezes per team.

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SYB age groups 14U and 18U will be permitted to freeze a full team, i.e., up to 13 players, with the understanding that non-frozen players in these age groups may be placed on teams, as necessary, to ensure that such players have a home to play baseball. In the event that such action is necessary, SYB will modify its substitution rules to ease the impact on affected age groups.

Rules Update

SYB park rules for any age group with American and National Leagues will be updated to include certain new standards, including, but possibly not limited to, the following:

- The American League will provide a less competitive recreational atmosphere that focuses on player and team fundamentals. Teams will be created through a combination of up to 5 frozen players and drafting of players through an organized league tryout. For SYB regular and post season games, these “Rec” teams will only play against other American League teams in their respective age groups. They generally will not play in tournaments outside of SYB nor incur additional expenses for parents during the regular and post seasons. After the league’s postseason tournament, they may, however, coalesce into a Board-approved All-Star team that represents SYB and incur additional expenses to be paid by SYB and/or players’ parents.
- The National League will provide more competitive opportunities for players with advanced skills. Teams will be created via 9 to 12 frozen players with limited or no drafting of players through an organized league tryout. Such a system allows coaches to build their entire team roster. For SYB regular and post season games, these “Hybrid” teams will compete only with other National League teams in their respective age groups. They may also play in tournaments outside the park that do not conflict with their SYB schedule of games, and additional expenses (uniforms, tournament fees, travel expenses, etc.) are generally incurred by players’ parents to support such activities.
- For each of these leagues, results of SYB regular and post season games, as well as overall standings, will be maintained on the SYB website. Should a National League team that is also affiliated with an outside travel organization wish to report game results to that organization, the coach of that team bears the responsibility for doing so. Teams in both leagues will generally play the same number of SYB regular season games and must abide by SYB substitution rules.
- Except for a Hybrid (National League) or Travel team that chooses to exceed the cap for its age group, the maximum number of players rostered on any SYB team will be capped at the maximum number of defenders allowed on the field for a given age group plus two (+2) players. For age groups 8U and below, this cap will be 12 players per team roster. For age groups 10U and above, this cap will be 11 players per team roster. Please note that any National League team that chooses to roster a number of players above the cap for its respective age group will still be required to abide by SYB’s substitution rules. Ideally, SYB will try to cap team rosters at “+1” because doing so not only makes adherence to SYB substitution rules easier on coaches but also allows for more teams in the league and provides more game time per player. Realistically, this decision cannot be made by the league until the exact number of coaches and players are known on draft day.

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- While the 8U American League will remain “Coach Pitch” only, the 8U National League will follow “Modified Player Pitch” rules; (3 pitches from a player and 3 pitches from a coach). Likewise, the 10U American League will continue to follow existing SYB rules, while the 10U National League will follow the current SYB rules for 12U teams, i.e., dropped third strike, Infield Fly Rule, playing off bases, stealing bases, picking off runners, and pitcher balks.
- The organized SYB tryouts will incorporate strict adherence to the following guidelines. Any player who does not attend tryouts will be placed into a blind draft. Any player who has not been frozen but wishes to play in the National League must participate in tryouts. Any player who does not participate in the league tryouts cannot be drafted or added to a National League team and must play in the American League. Only players who have signed up for the National League at registration are eligible to be drafted by a National League team. Once rosters for all National League teams have been filled, the remaining players will be available only for the American League draft. Any player who registers after the SYB registration deadline will be placed on the roster of an American League team that has not reached the cap. Please note that for fairness of competition SYB will strive to ensure that all teams in a given age group have the same number of players; however, unexpected circumstances may make this goal unachievable every season.
- **Coaching Seniority:** The following criteria will be used to prioritize which coaches shall fill the available slots in each age group each season: (1) Returning Head Coach/Team Manager; (2) Advancing Head Coach/Team Manager; (3) Returning First Assistant to the Head Coach; (4) Advancing First Assistant to the Head Coach/Team Manager; or, (5) Individual approved at the discretion of the Board.
- **National League Coaching Criteria:** To coach/manage a National League team, an individual must meet the following criteria: (1) Past or current Head Coach/Team Manager for one full year of Spring and Fall baseball at SYB; (2) Past of current First Assistant to the Head Coach/Team Manager for two full years of Spring and Fall baseball at SYB; (3) Past Head Coach/Team Manager of a 6U T-Ball or 8U Coach Pitch team for two full years of Spring and Fall baseball at SYB; or, (4) Individual approved at the discretion of the Board.
- **Credit for Coaching at SYB:** A Head Coach/Team Manager should name the First Assistant(s) during the online registration process, if possible. Only the Head Coach/Team Manager and the designated First Assistant(s) will receive SYB coaching credit for a given baseball season. SYB coaching credit will not be given to any person who does not receive the required coach’s certification in a timely manner. The SYB board will make a check of certifications at mid-season to verify completion.

The “Travel” level will be the third menu option for baseball players at SYB. Travel teams will follow the aforementioned freeze rules for the National League and will be expected to participate in a limited number of SYB-sanctioned games. SYB will accommodate as many Travel teams for age groups 6U and above as it can without adversely impacting the American and National levels. Travel teams will be given 90-minute practice slots in the same manner that American and National League teams get them with the goal of providing each Travel team one weekday and one weekend practice slot. The cost of field rentals and games for Travel teams will be determined by the Board prior to each season.