



Sycamore Youth Baseball Travel Program Change FAQ's

Updated: 6/11/2024

Please note: the information provided below is intended to provide as much clarity as possible around our decision to change the travel program structure. We are not offering this detailed information as an opportunity to be refuted, but welcome any additional questions you may have.

Frequently Asked Questions

1) What exactly is changing?

We will be retiring the Gladiators part-time travel baseball program at the end of this season and instead be offering part-time travel under two 8U Titans teams where talent will be evenly spread between the two teams (players will still participate in the Futures rec league) and two full-time travel teams at each age level from 9U-14U, with a black and yellow team where the black team will roster the highest evaluated kids at that age level and the yellow team will roster the next highest evaluated kids. Please see our detailed program handbook for more information.

2) What were the primary factors considered when determining to change the travel program structure?

Player and Coach Development

Kids participating only in the rec league often were not given opportunities to play meaningful positions to help them improve their skills as these positions were being filled with Gladiators players. Rec league players were facing competition where they were overmatched or in many instances put in situations where they were not comfortable, creating potential safety issues. Gladiators players would practice with their Gladiators team for 4 ½ months without game situation feedback to measure development.

Gladiators players did not have the time and availability to practice with other players at their skill level or better to push them in their development. Having two different sets of coaches during the same season has led to confusion and conflicting coaching advice on proper mechanics for pitching, catching, hitting, and fielding. Almost every coach within the Gladiators program was coaching at least one other rec league team, limiting their time to focus on developing these kids. We will be able to provide more consistent coaching and development in a more collaborative environment.

Time Commitment

Full-time travel baseball schedules can be easily manageable or unbearing. One of our main goals is to provide a travel baseball schedule that is manageable and thus, our Titans programs build in time commitment as players get older.

At all levels, players start practices in January, typically only once a week, and then move to practices twice a week beginning in February. League games start in April and most of the time only one league game is played per week with a league schedule of 14-16 games. Of those 14-16 games, half of them are played at the Airport Road fields in Sycamore on Wednesday nights. The other half are played in nearby communities that are typically within an hour drive time.

Based on the age level, Titans players participate in anywhere from 4 tournaments to 8 tournaments that are all played on weekends. Of these tournaments, only 1 or 2 may require some type of overnight commitment.

The total number of games played ranges from about 30 at 9U to 46 at the 13U/14U levels. The total number of practices during the season is typically around 46.

Gladiators players were expected to practice once or twice a week starting in January or February with their Gladiators team, then begin practicing with their rec league team the first week of April and ultimately continue practicing and start playing games and tournaments with both teams beginning in May. There have been multiple times this year where Gladiators players have been either practicing or playing games 6-7 times during a week. This is too much baseball and families have let us know that.

The total number of games played by 9U-12U Gladiators players between their Gladiators team and rec league team was about 30. For 13U/14U, the total number of games was closer to 35. The total number of practices Gladiators players attended during the season was at or around 54.

The issue with the Gladiators schedule is the majority of the time is spent playing for two different teams in a 6-8 week window where all 30-35 of those games are played and 75% of the practices take place.

If we can provide a less intense schedule, with a similar number of games or even more at the higher levels, it is easier for families and players to manage.

Travel Baseball Landscape

The part-time/in-house travel landscape has migrated to a single A classification under full-time travel baseball. The teams our Gladiators teams have faced in the tournaments played this year have already played 15-20 games together as a team. Currently, the only games our Gladiators teams play together are tournament games and they are not competing at the same level as these other teams without the game reps together. Additionally, finding tournaments that only allow part-time/in-house teams is nearly impossible.

Keeping Kids Playing Competitively in Sycamore

We have experienced many players leaving to play for other programs due to the lack of opportunity to play competitively within our current structure. We strongly encourage extremely skilled players to seek out opportunities with other programs as we recognize our current program or even future program may not provide the resources for development at the highest levels. However, for many kids leaving to play in other programs, we feel this is leading to detrimental situations where they are no longer playing with their friends and families are incurring significant travel costs and player fees for programs operating to make money. Forcing kids to participate in the rec league in order to participate in the Gladiators program also led to people looking for other opportunities.

3) Why are these changes being made now, especially with evaluations for next year's travel teams only 6 weeks away?

We discussed this topic in November and December, but ultimately decided to see how this season would play out. Based on immediate feedback received from many parents and coaches in the Gladiators program, including conversations directly about their willingness to continue under the current structure, the majority expressed that they wanted change and many stated they would indeed look for something else, such as Wasco's travel programs or Athlete's HQ. After the 2022-2023 Gladiators season and evaluations for 2023-2024, there are at least 17 kids we are aware of who left the Gladiators program to play full-time travel baseball elsewhere. This may not sound like a lot, but these are kids primarily playing in our older age groups, where we have a very limited number of participants already. Based on the feedback received for this year, we estimate another 20-25 kids would likely leave had this change not been made. Please see question 4 on how these numbers fit within our organizational structure.

4) What is going to happen with the rec league after this change?

First and foremost, we are committed to keeping the rec league in place and fully functioning. Will it look different? Yes, but only for players who are older than 9. No changes will be made to our rookies and futures leagues. There will be a decline in total participants in the rec league, but really only the Majors and Ponee levels will be truly impacted. These two leagues have already incorporated Dekalb, Maple Park, Elburn, Sugar Grove, and Kaneland over the past several years to make the leagues work. The players participating in only the rec league will see many more opportunities to play more high impact positions and will be more frequently competing with other players of similar skill levels. For any levels where a second full-time travel team does not get put together, we are exploring bringing back the old end of season All-Star program, similar to the 8U program that still exists. Please see the document labeled "By the Numbers."

5) What is changing with Titans?

Cohesive Approach to Player and Coach Development

The plan is to integrate collaborative practice time between the two full-time travel teams. This won't happen for every practice session, but when the opportunity arises, such as time at the Chessick center, there can be more collaborative development and scrimmage time to push players on both the Black and Yellow teams to get better. It will also allow for coaches to learn from different practice strategies and integrate more effective development tools and practice plans.

Cost

We will be creating a base player fee for each age level that will be slightly lower than the previous season's Titans fees based on stripping out extra uniform costs and leveraging larger bulk quantity discounts for equipment and technology. The fees will be slightly higher than what Gladiators/rec league players paid this past year to participate in both. The coaches of each team will then collaborate to determine if they want to add in extra uniforms, outside training, or tournaments, etc. that may increase the total cost to the team and then decide if the additional costs would be paid through player fees or through fundraising/sponsorship efforts. There will be a maximum player fee at each level and any additional costs to be covered must come from fundraising/sponsorship. Please see the 2024-25 Travel Program Cost Analysis for a breakdown of player fees.

Facilities

We will be undertaking a significant renovation project at our Page Street facility, focused on creating more room to accommodate older kids, enhancing the equipment available, replacing the current flooring with turf and replacing damaged wall panels. The cost for this will be covered primarily through tournament revenue from our Spring Swing and Dingers for Dad tournaments we hosted this year. We will be making an additional two year lease commitment in August for the Page Street facility.

We will also be seeking to get more practice time at the Chessick Center at NIU. This is a great indoor space that can accommodate scrimmage games all the way up to our 14U programs. It also provides a space to do full infield and outfield work as well as live batting practice. This space is an extremely cost-efficient solution for indoor practices.

We will continue to explore finding a new primary indoor practice facility with more space than Page Street can offer. The biggest challenges in this search are the cost and location as we have found some potential locations that would be an upgrade, but the spaces just weren't quite right for us at the moment.

6) What is changing with the evaluation process?

Our intent is to have a more thorough evaluation process that continues to include a skill based/drill focus, but also a simulated game to gain a better understanding of player competencies and abilities in a live game situation. We will also be staggering our tryouts as follows:

13U and 14U: Monday, July 15th, 5:30 - 8:30 pm, fields 1, 2, 3, and 4

9U and 10U: Tuesday, July 16th, 5:30 - 8:30 pm, fields 2, 3, 5 and 6

11U and 12U: Wednesday, July 17th, 5:30 - 8:30 pm, fields 2, 3, and 4

8U: Thursday, July 18th, 5:30 - 8:00 pm, fields 5, 6, 7 and 8

Due to the late notice of these changes, any individual is welcome to attend a try out on another night at the date, time and location as provided above, but would ask that this only be done as an exception. We want to be able to evaluate as many players directly against their peers as possible. We will also be providing a make up date the following week on Monday, July 22nd from 5:30 - 8:30 on fields 1, 2, 3 and 4. We will have teams selected and offers sent no later than end of day Wednesday, July 24th.