

TIPS FOR RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL LITTLE LEAGUE® CHALLENGER DIVISION

Recruiting Players

Visit with the Special Education Department of your local school district

Contacting your local Special Education Department is a great first step to recruiting new players for the Challenger Division. Many departments will be willing to let you briefly present the ins and outs of the Challenger Division to the special education instructors in the district. The Challenger Division can be described as “adaptive baseball” for children with special needs. It can also be emphasized that the Challenger Division gives every child the opportunity to participate in baseball regardless of ability or limitations. It is important for the school district officials to understand the purpose and nature of the Challenger Division before asking them to promote the program.

Once you have had the opportunity to meet with school officials, ask them if they would be willing to send home information about your Challenger Division, as well as information about sign-ups in newsletters that are sent home to parents. This will provide the league with an effective and inexpensive way to reach your target audience.

Advertise in the Community

Community advertising is another effective way to spread the word about your Challenger Division. Challenger Division flyers are available to be downloaded on <http://www.LittleLeague.org>. These posters can be customized to contain your league’s contact information as well as registration dates and locations. Most community businesses such as grocery stores, community centers, post offices, doctor’s offices, etc. will allow you to hang the flyers at no cost.

Additionally, you may want to consider reaching out to your local media, especially if you are getting ready to offer the Challenger Division for the first time. Many newspapers, radio stations, and even local TV media will be interested in picking up a story about your league’s new offering and the positive impact that the Challenger Division can have on the community. You can reach out to the local media through a press release, or even a phone call.

League Support

Elect a Vice President of the Challenger Division to serve on your league’s board

The Vice President of the Challenger Division acts as a liaison between the board and those involved in the Challenger Division. This individual should also be actively involved in recruitment and promotion of the program.

Remember to allow for practice and game time when making your league's schedule

Many leagues designate a time slot every week for Challenger games. For example, some leagues may play Challenger games every Saturday or Sunday afternoon between other league games. Each league must provide for a minimum of two games per team per season.

Adopt a special registration form for the Challenger Division

Create a special registration form for the Challenger Division that includes a place for the player to register as well as list any necessary accommodations. This will help the league to best balance Challenger teams based on ability. The registration form can also include a place for the player to list if they will need a buddy and, if so, who they would prefer to have for a buddy or if they would prefer to have the league select a buddy for them.

Managers, Coaches, and Buddies

Select managers and coaches who are supportive and not overly competitive

The Challenger Division is a non-competitive program so it is important that managers and coaches understand that their primary responsibility is to make sure the players have fun, while learning and playing the game of baseball. While managers and coaches do not need prior experience working with children with disabilities, it is important that those selected exhibit patience, good sportsmanship, and have a caring personality towards the players.

Involve other interested players in the local league as buddies in the Challenger Division

Allowing other players in the league to act as buddies allows Challenger participants to enjoy social interaction and develop friendships with other participants in the league. It also provides a valuable experience to the players who volunteer as buddies. It is important for buddies to be patient, show good sportsmanship, and not be interested in showcasing their own athletic abilities.

Game Play

Be flexible, but set local guidelines

It is important to understand that flexibility is required within the Challenger Division in order to adapt the game to the needs of all participants. However, it is also important that the game maintains structure and does not become disorganized. Setting local rules can help keep games organized. Local rules some leagues may choose to add include:

- Requiring a player to hit off of a tee after missing a set number of pitches
- Allowing more than 9 players in the field (provided it does not create a safety hazard)
- Not allowing any player to sit out for more than one inning at a time

- All players stay on base even if they are out

Set a time limit on games

If the players stay on the field for too long, they will often lose interest in the game. Many leagues set a time limit of 90 minutes per game

Designate a volunteer “umpire” for each game

The main duty of the umpire in a Challenger game should be to maintain a safe playing environment around home plate and to assist players with the tee at home plate. The umpire should be able to positively interact with the kids while they are batting.