What do Little League Parents want?
Session Objectives

• Provide background and insights on the changing landscape of parenting styles

• Review parents attitudes towards the Little League program and their impact on youth sports decision making

• Discuss implications for D.A.s to guiding leagues on engaging parents in local communities
What’s happening with today’s parents?
Session background

• Formal research study on parenting styles and their attitudes/behaviors towards Little League in 2011
  • The factors that influence decision making when it comes to youth sports participation

• Continued focus on efforts to educate, inform and reach in-season parents with Little League “content”
  • Procedural and Operational changes, Marketing and Communication efforts

• 2017 Parents Survey – latest effort to benchmark parent’s thoughts and feelings on the Little League program
What’s happening with today’s parents?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XgFloyOhGs
What’s happening with today’s parents?

The Generations

Gen Z
Born after 1997
Age in 2017: 20 and younger

The Baby Boom Generation
Born: 1946 to 1964
Age in 2017: 53-71

The Millennial Generation
Born: 1981 to 1997
Age in 2017: 20-36

The Silent Generation
Born: 1928 to 1945
Age in 2017: 72-89

Generation X
Born: 1965 to 1980
Age in 2017: 37-52

The Greatest Generation
Born: Before 1928
Age in 2017: 90-102

• Generations are shifting. Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z now represent the largest segments of the population.

• “Generation Y,” 83 million strong in the U.S. alone. By 2025, they will make up 75% of the workforce.*

*Information from Pew Research Center

Amy Morin, 06/20/2017, Forget Helicopter Parenting: Millennials are Into Drones, https://www.verywell.com/forget-helicopter-parents-millennials-are-into-drones-1095054
Chart http://robhoskins.onehope.net/do-you-speak-generation-z/
What’s happening with today’s parents?

• Millennials are becoming parents ("Parennials")**
  • 40% of Millennials are already parents and in the next 10-15 years, 80% of them will be parents***
  • 82% of babies born each year are born to millennial mothers
  • There are now 10.8 million households with children born to millennial parents**

• The definition of the traditional family has changed
  • Millennials aren’t rushing to get married; having kids first
  • Millennials are living with their parents longer
  • Pew Report stats that just 46% of kids in 2016 were living with two married parents in their first marriage*

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*6 Ways Millennials are Raising Kids Differently Than Any Generation Before Them, Business Insider
***Amy Morin, 06/20/2017, Forget Helicopter Parenting: Millennials are Into Drones, https://www.verywell.com/forget-helicopter-parenting-millennials-are-into-drones-1095054
What’s happening with today’s parents?

• Millennial parents turn to the internet – not just family and friends – for parenting advice*
  • Google chat rooms, social media / apps for advice
  • “Google is the new grandparent, the new neighbor, the new nanny”**
  • Millennial moms feel more confident in their parenting as a result*
  • The lines of information sources are blurred; affects decision-making in real time (e.g. social media feed)**

• Every minute of their children’s lives is documented (including their LL games)
  • 81% of millennial parents have shared a photo of their kids on social media (compared to 70% of Gen X)**
  • Millennials are still the most likely to use Facebook on a regular basis at 87% ....some more passively (reading vs. posting) than older generations*
What’s happening with today’s parents?

• Generation Z (born after 1997):
  • The youngest generation and the offspring of Millennials and younger Gen Xers
  • All of the current players in the Little League program

• Gen Z is growing up tech-supervised at every turn of their life via technology.**
  • Generation Z’s success is a deeply personal endeavor that is dependent on individual hard work and achievement*
  • Equality issues are most important to Generation Z

• Gen Z is using social media to shape their identity
  • Snapchat is very quickly becoming the new texting*

** Amy Morin, 06/20/2017, Forget Helicopter Parenting: Millennials are Into Drones
Z Graphic: [http://www.brittonmdg.com/assets/uploads/blog/3773786e1e4f0051f3a2f21ab29cd3f1.jpg](http://www.brittonmdg.com/assets/uploads/blog/3773786e1e4f0051f3a2f21ab29cd3f1.jpg)
What’s happening with today’s parents?

• The costs of attending college continue to escalate.
  • Parents look at youth sports as an investment in their child’s future.
  • The average cost of tuition for four year college is escalating:
  • Students leaving college strapped with debt. Moving back home.

• Millennial parents are more likely to struggle financially.
  • Childcare and education costs have increased 18% of the total cost of raising a child
  • An 18-to-34 year old makes about $2,000 less today then would have in 1980.*

*6 Ways Millennials are Raising Kids Differently Than Any Generation Before Them, Business Insider
**Libby Kane, 4/30/2015, Nerd Wallet/College Board  http://www.businessinsider.com/projected-tuition-costs-are-terrifying-2015-4
What’s happening with today’s parents?

• Parenting styles have changed; protective in nature
  • Parents are more involved than ever in their child’s success and failure;
  • Transition from “Helicopter Parenting” (Gen X) to “Drone Parenting” (millennials)***
  • 86% of Millennials are trying to or will try to avoid being a "helicopter parent" according to research by Ypulse*

• Parents continue to be concerned with general safety issues – from physical safety / injury prevention to protection against sexual predators, child abduction and other crimes

*YPulse Research
**Aspen Institute / Sports Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), State of Play Report, 2017
***Graphic and stats: Dr. George Sachs, The Drone Parent: A Helicopter Parent on Steriods: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-sachs-psyd/are-you-a-helicopter-pare_b_8528080.html#
What’s happening with today’s parents?

• Parents continue to be starved for time
  • Families are overscheduled; Parents are 24/7 connected employees
  • 23.2% of Millennials are “stay-at-home parents”, more than past generations (compared to 16% of Gen-X and 22% of Baby Boomers)* but the majority of today’s parents tend to be dual working households
  • Two thirds of parents of current players are employed full-time**
  • 90% parents with children on a team attend at least one of their kid’s games a week.***

• Youth sports participation is often driven by convenience, especially when juggling multiple activities

* http://www.mothermag.com/millennial-parents/
** 2015 Little League Parents Committee Survey
What’s happening with today’s parents?

- Other activities (outside of sports) compete for kids time including screen time:
  - Research shows that 82% of 8- to 11-year-olds now have tablets and 59% have smartphones*;
  - Among 5- to 7-year-olds, 77% have tablets and 10% have smartphones.*

- Large investments being made in video gaming competitions by sports teams, leagues and owners who see the need to engage differently with today’s youth:
  - Video games provide much of what children want out of sport (action, freedom, inclusive competition, social connection, customization) and lack of parent involvement**

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*Infographic: Trying to Understand Gen Z, Tara Hunt, Linkedin.com
*Aspen Institute, State of Play, 2017. Reynolds and Burke, “Forward Thinking.”
What’s happening in youth sports?
What’s happening with today’s parents?

• In 2016, 36.9% of kids ages 6 to 12 played a sport (organized or unorganized) on a regular basis (level of organized play)
  • “Children are playing fewer sports, (and there is a perception that the) less talented are left behind in recreational leagues with poor coaching, uneven play and the message that they aren’t good enough.”**
  • One in three kids or teens is overweight or obese*

• Sports that continue to gain popularity, earning more airtime and sparking more interest among youth participation.
  • Rugby, Lacrosse, Water polo, Rowing

• Seventy percent (70%) of kids quit sports by age 13***
  • Main factors: Burnout, Injury, Anxiety
  • Quitting at a young age impacts lifelong attitudes towards physical activity

*Aspen Institute / Sports Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), State of Play Report, 2017

“Confidence fuels youth participation. Kids who quit sports often do so due to lack of playing time, which can be a result of lack of confidence.”*
What’s happening with today’s parents?

• Youth sports participation has become a substantial expense for parents.
  • Participation in sport is often tied to income levels yet parents will often choose sports participation over other priorities.
  • 34.6% of children ages 6 to 12 who participated in sport at least once per year were from households with less than $25,000* compared to 68.4% in households with income over $100,000
  • In 2016, 29.9 percent of kids from homes in the lowest income bracket ($25,000 or less) were physically inactive.
    • Only 11.5 percent of children in the wealthiest households ($100,000 or more) were physically inactive.*
• Parents will “means” tend to flee to travel teams providing perceived advancement*.
What’s happening with today’s parents?

• Multi-sport participation (and the idea of Sports Sampling*) is declining in favor of specialization
  • Awareness and access to various sports opportunities plays into tween/teen participation decision making
  • Exposure in elementary schools through organized PE class to core sports continues to be limited

• Professional sports organizations are implementing programming for schools and local recreation departments (MLB Play Ball, NFL Play 60, NHL Hockey is for Everyone, Youth on Course) to encourage sports sampling and casual Play

*Aspen Institute / Sports Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), State of Play Report, 2017
What’s happening with today’s parents?

• Parents want their kids to have fun and get exercise. The illusion of ‘sweat’.
  • The illusion of activity is particularly important especially at a young age.
  • With fewer children choosing to play sports at all**, obesity and poor health concerns remain top of mind for young parents.

• The decline of casual play / pick up games impacts a child’s interest in sport
  • Sixty one percent of young parents agree, “kids need more unstructured playtime.”***
  • A Gallup poll found children ages 2 to 10 spend significantly less time engaged in free play than they do in front of screens (18 to 21 hours a week).*

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What’s happening with today’s parents?

• Baseball is a game of failure by nature.
  • Doesn’t always mesh with the parenting styles of today.
  • Research has shown that formal participation in baseball peaks at the age of 7.

• Baseball by nature is more expensive – equipment required, facilities needed.
  • League fees to parents are all over the place ($35 to $350+) due to geography and limited
    fundraising activities (fundraising buyout model)

• “Pace of play” continues to be topic of focus for various sports. Driven by
  professional sports desire to appeal to younger generation of fans who access content
  in new ways.

“For kids to stay physically active in sports, they need to know it’s OK to fail and get the chance to keep playing.” **

*2015 Little League Parents Committee Survey / 2017 Little League Parents Survey
**Aspen Institute / Sports Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), State of Play Report, 2017
What’s happening with today’s parents?

• The experience for the child continues to be heavily defined by the coach.
  • Research aggregated by the President’s Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition shows that good coaches also lower kids’ anxiety levels and lift their self-esteem. They help boys and girls enjoy the sport.*
  • Only 31% of coaches say they received specialized training on skills and tactics*

• One study found that only 5 percent of kids who played for trained coaches quit the sport the next year.*
  • The attrition rate was 26 percent otherwise*

2017 Parents survey
2017 little league® parents survey

• Methodology:
  • Online survey consisting of 37 questions that measured feedback in several areas including general behavior and attitudes, participatory satisfaction, league operations, and communications preferences.
  • Sample: 228,154 selected parents selected at random from 2017 player registration data in age groups ranging from Tee Ball to Majors
  • Response rate of 5.5% (12,502 parents submitted responses)
  • Respondents by Gender: 59.8% Female/41.1% Male
  • Respondents by Region: East - 31.0%; West – 27.5%; Central – 19.1%; Southeast – 15.2%; Southwest – 7.2%
  • Timing: June 20 – July 5

• Presentation of learnings will follow this format:
  • Specific Finding from Survey
  • D.A. Learning(s)
Background Information / demographics

• Findings:
  • 94% of parents have 1 to 2 children playing in Little League
  • Only 6% have more than 2 children participating
  • 76.5% of parents registered their children online
  • Average Little League Parent Age: 42

• D.A. Learning:
  • Scheduling among families must be considered
  • Online and web-based registration should be a priority for all leagues looking to attract players
Survey results
Attitudes and Behaviors
Attitudes & Behaviors: Why Youth Play

• Top reasons youth play Little League:
  • To have fun
  • To learn to be a part of a team
  • To get physically active
  • To build confidence

• Least important reasons youth play Little League:
  • They feel they are talented at the sport
  • The competitive opportunities
  • They are a fan of the sport

• D.A. Learning: Creating an environment that focuses on fun, teamwork, and personal development will foster increased participation/retention
Attitudes & Behaviors: Coach Experience

Coach Experience vs. Likelihood to Return

- The graph shows the relationship between coach experience and the likelihood to return, with experience increasing from 0 to 10.
- The likelihood to return increases from 0.00% to 100.00% as coach experience increases.
- The trend indicates a positive correlation between coach experience and the likelihood to return.
Attitudes & Behaviors: Coach Experience

• **D.A. Learnings**
  - There is a strong correlation between the experience a child has with their coach and the likelihood of a player to return the following season
  - Poor coaching is a perceived negative of many recreational leagues
  - Proper coach selection and training is essential to the health of a local Little League program
  - An annual evaluation of parent/player satisfaction with coaches will assist with player retention
survey results

Participation
Participation: Multi-sport Participation by Age

- Percent of Little Leaguers participating in another sport by age:
  - 7 and Younger: 55.6%
  - 8-10: 65.0%
  - 11-12: 66.7%
  - 13 and older: 58.0%

- Top other sports by age
  - 7 and Younger: Soccer, Basketball, Football
  - 8-10: Basketball, Soccer, Football
  - 11-12: Basketball, Soccer, Football
  - 13 and older: Basketball, Football, Soccer
Participation: Multi-sport Participation by Age

• D.A. Learnings
  • Participation in multiple sports increases through age 12.
  • There are opportunities for cross-promotion with sports that do not have overlapping seasons (e.g. basketball and football).
  • Leagues should explore ways to best accommodate players participation in other sports during the Little League season.
Participation: Playing in non-Little League Baseball and Softball Programs

• Overall 23.7% of Little Leaguers play in another baseball or softball program.

• Participation in other youth baseball and softball programs is heavily weighted towards travel and competitive opportunities.

• Only 1.9% of Little Leaguers participate in another program that offers regular season play (e.g. Cal Ripken, PONY, etc.)

• Most participation is focused on travel teams and travel focused organizations (USSSA, ASA, etc.)
Participation: Travel Ball Involvement by Age

Travel Ball Participation by Age

- 7 and younger: 4.90%
- 8-10: 11.80%
- 11-12: 23.10%
- 13 and older: 22.40%
Participation: Playing in non-Little League Baseball and Softball Programs

• D.A. Learnings:
  • Players will generally play in only one community-based, regular season league.
  • Many players are choosing to play both travel ball and Little League.
  • Focus on promoting what Little League can offer that is not available through travel programs (playing with friends, community-based teams, training and development opportunities, etc.)
Participation: Casual Play

• 87.8% of children participated casually in baseball or softball (e.g. backyard, whiffle ball, at recess, etc.) during the past year.

• **D.A. Learnings:**
  • Organizing events such as a MLB® Play Ball Day or other casual activity is a good way to introduce new players to the game and provide added value for existing participants.
  • Work with leagues to offer practice and development opportunities that are division specific rather than team specific
  • Use casual play opportunities to get participants involved in your league at a low cost
Participation: Parity

Were You Satisfied with the Parity Amongst Teams in Your League?

25.40%

74.60%

• **D.A. Learnings:**
  - Share team selection methods with parents prior to the draft.
  - Reinforce the importance of following an approved draft method with local leagues.
  - There is a perception among parents that community based programs have unbalanced teams.
Participation: Registration Fees

- **D.A. Learnings:**
  - 70% of parents are paying $150 or less in registration fees.
  - There is not a strong correlation between registration fees and player retention.
  - Lower income players may never try the sport if fees are prohibitive.
  - Transparency is important, parents need to see where the money is going.
Participation: Desired League Improvements

• Top improvements parents would like to see their league make:
  • Hold more practices (34.5% of parents)
  • Facility improvements (29.7%)
  • Better communication from the board (29.3%)
  • Better coaching (22.9%)

• Resources Available:
  • Grow the Game Grant
  • Facilities Survey
  • Other grants/opportunities
Participation: Desired League Improvements

- **D.A. Learnings:**
  - Practice opportunities are important to parents; they care about more than games and tournaments.
  - Facility upkeep/condition plays a role in a parent’s perception of the local Little League program.
  - Make sure leagues have a plan in place to communicate all relevant information to parents.
  - Coaching is important to parents as well as players.
Participation: Player Retention

Will your child participate in Little League next year?

- **D.A. Learnings:**
  - There is an opportunity to grow participation through increased player retention.
  - Focusing on areas of concern for parents should result in increased player retention.
survey results

Volunteerism
Volunteerism: Current Volunteer Involvement

• Currently 50.9% of parents are volunteering within their local league.

• Most common volunteer roles:
  • Manager/Coach
  • Concession Worker
  • Team Parent
  • Practice Coach
  • Board Member
Volunteerism: Involvement in League Operations

• Parent involvement in league functions:
  • 39.4% understand how the league uses registration fees
  • 39.0% of parents participate in fundraisers
  • 26.7% of parents attend league meetings or other non-game functions

• 53.9% of parents volunteer outside of Little League.

• D.A. Learnings:
  • *Offer segmented/one-time volunteer opportunities to involve those attending league functions, but not volunteering*
  • *Break down barriers to volunteering*
  • *Avoid charging volunteer buyout fees; look for ways to get parents involved*
survey results
Communications Preferences
How Parents Want to Receive Information

How parents want to receive information about Little League:

Top ways parents receive their information:
1. Social media
2. Mobile apps
3. Email/e-newsletters
4. Television
Parents and social media

• 83 percent of parents use social media; 81 percent use social media daily

• Social media outlet usage by parents:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Other
What Topics are parents Interested in?

• Many parents are engaged and want to be informed on the Little League experience.

  • Most Interested In:
    1. How to develop skills at home
    2. Coaching drills and practice plans
    3. Little League rules

  • Least Interested In:
    1. Volunteer opportunities
    2. How to get more involved in Little League
    3. Boundary, eligibility information
But, do parents use Little League’s Resources?

59%  Have never accessed
     Little League’s parent resources

13%  Access Little League’s parent resources weekly
How we’re Helping local leagues
Communications Preferences

• **D.A. Learning: Districts should have a communications presence to help reach parents**
  • Utilizing district websites, social media accounts, and emails to share information from your local leagues and news and resources from Little League International helps amplify important messages

• **D.A. Learning: Electronic communications is a must for your leagues**
  • Encourage leagues to utilize their websites, email, mobile apps, and social media (especially Facebook) to keep their parents informed and educated
Remember:
Kids just want to have fun
Resources
available Resources

• The Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) and the DevZone training and development – [www.PositiveCoach.org](http://www.PositiveCoach.org)

• Aspen Institute and Project Play Resources [www.ProjectPlay.us](http://www.ProjectPlay.us)

• The [American Development Model](http://www.projectplay.us/developmentmodel) (a targeted effort between the USOC and governing bodies of sport) emphasizes the importance of kids having fun in sport while also participating in multi-sport activities before the age of 12.

• Guidelines for Supportive Parents from Rutgers University Youth Sports Research Center
  [http://www.youthsports.rutgers.edu/publications/guidelines-for-supportive-parents](http://www.youthsports.rutgers.edu/publications/guidelines-for-supportive-parents)
Sources

All research starts from 2011 proprietary research study for Little League Baseball, conducted by Customer Share Group / Market Data Corporation and 2015 and 2017 Little League Parent Surveys unless noted otherwise. Sources are also detailed here:


9. Major League Baseball and Play Ball.org

10. Morris, Amy. 00/20/2017, Forget Helicopter Parenting: Millennials are Into Drones, [https://www.verve.com/millennialhelicopterparents-millenialsareinto-drones/]


13. Kane, Lilyb. 4/30/2015, Need Wallet: College Board, This chart of projected tuition costs will give anyone saving for college the chills. [http://www.businessinsider.com/projectedtuition-costs-are-terrifying-2015-4]


