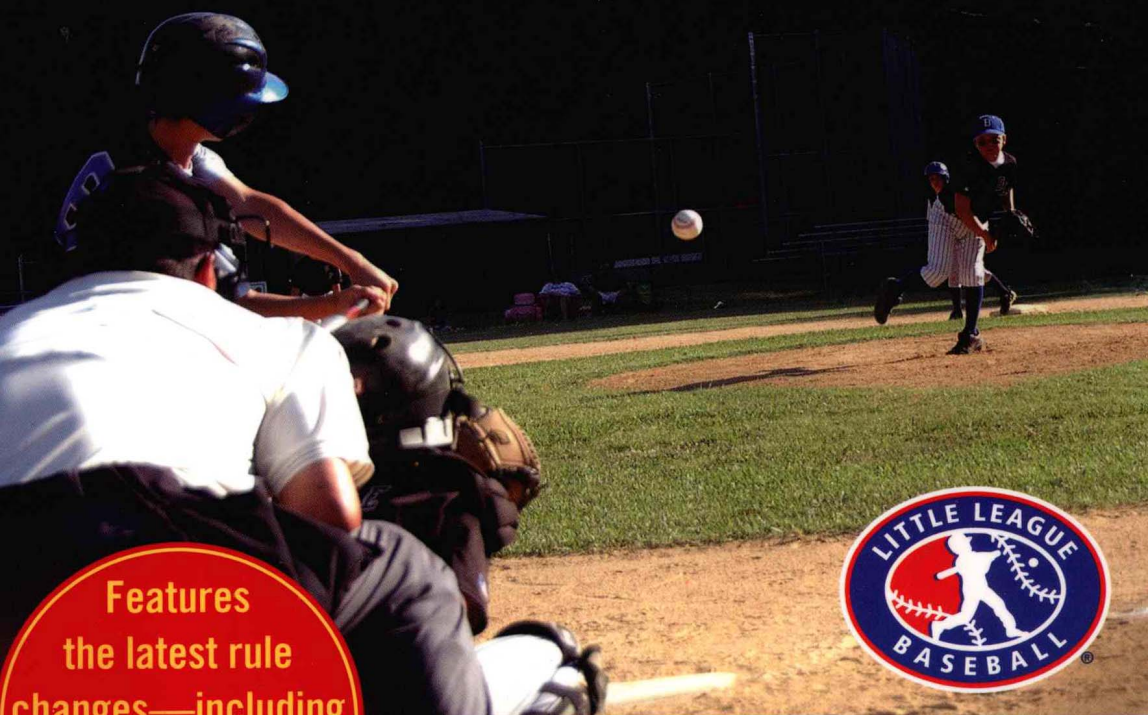


# MANAGING LITTLE LEAGUE® BASEBALL

A LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL® GUIDE



Features  
the latest rule  
changes—including  
new pitch count  
requirements

THIRD EDITION

**NED MCINTOSH**

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THIRD EDITION



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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Dedicated to my sons, Bob, Tom, and Jim, who  
gave me the opportunity to be a Little League  
father/coach, and the wonderful father-and-son  
relationships that inspired the writing of this book

# INTRODUCTION

It was 2 a.m., and I couldn't sleep. That wasn't too unusual on a night when my Little League team had won an important game. The exhilaration of winning and the reliving of the exciting moments of the game always produced a high that made sleep difficult. But tonight was somehow different; there was something else working on me—something unsettling—that was keeping me awake.

Maybe it was the natural letdown after the final week of our Little League season, a week that saw everything go our way: the championship of our league; the honor of having four of our boys chosen for the All-Star team, including my son Jim; and then the county championship tonight, won in an exciting, extra-inning, error-free ball game—Little League baseball at its best!

But those were all reasons to be up, not down, so why the unsettling feeling? Suddenly I realized what it was. After 15 years of coaching three sons in Little League baseball, I had just coached my youngest son in his last Little League game.

Not only had that father/coach-son/player relationship spanned three sons and 15 years; it had also covered three different leagues in

three different states, as my work moved me around the country. In that respect, my experience was somewhat unique, but I found that the situation of a father coaching his son's Little League team is much more common than unique in Little Leagues across the country. In our current 10-team league, 9 of the managers have sons on their respective teams, and the 10th has a daughter!

Frequently the only qualification required of a father to become a coach is having a son who wants to play baseball. "Your son won't be able to play," I remember being told when I took my middle son, Tom, to register, "unless we can find a dad to coach his team." Experience, playing or coaching, not required. I have met a few frustrated Billy Martins as Little League managers, but for the most part they were fathers, untrained and inexperienced in their coaching role, with only one thing in common: a son or daughter who wanted to play Little League baseball.

Not only does the new father/coach have to accept a quick study assignment in managing a Little League team, but in addition he has to accept a relationship with his child that will become very rewarding and satisfying at its best and very frustrating and counterproductive at its worst.

In my initial experience as a father/coach, I devoured every piece of literature published by Little League headquarters and found them helpful. I also found many books on teaching the mechanics of playing *adult* baseball: hitting, pitching, fielding, etc. But I found little to prepare me for the challenges peculiar to Little League, such as participating in a player draft, keeping 15 boys busy and having fun at the same time in practice, moving players out of a lineup and back in again in conformance with mandatory playing rules, dealing with problem parents, helping boys cope with their first taste of competitive pressure, and all of the other problems that are uniquely part of Little League. Nor could I find a book written *by* a father/coach *for* other father/coaches.

I had no experience or training for the father/coach assignment, so my oldest son, Bob, now married and a young lawyer, and my middle son, Tom, just entering college, suffered from my inexperience and my mistakes. But by the time Jim, the youngest, had played his three years

in Little League, I finally had my father/coach act together. Because most father/coaches don't have the opportunity to learn by trial and error with three sons, I wondered if my development of a philosophy, a practice routine, and a practical program for a dad to coach his child's team—spawned over 15 years and three sons—could help some other dads gain the best from their mutual Little League careers with their children.

So, at two o'clock in the morning, realizing that I would never again enjoy the pleasures, nor endure the frustrations, of coaching my son's Little League team, I found myself speculating as to whether I could help other father/coaches by sharing my experiences with them. Pretty heavy thinking for a nonwriter to contemplate at two in the morning, so I went back to bed, convinced that my urge to write a book, like my insomnia, would disappear by morning.

But it didn't. And three years later the book that was conceived that night was finally completed. In the ensuing years, my youngest son, Jim, moved up to Senior League to prove to us both that he could make it on his own, and I continued to manage a Little League team. It wasn't quite the same, without a son on my team for the first time in 15 years, but it gave me an opportunity to reflect on what a truly unique father and son or daughter relationship coaching your child's team can be, sharing in the hard work, the wins and the losses, that you and your boy or girl will always remember.

If you have the rare privilege offered to you to coach your son or daughter's Little League team, seize it, relish it, enjoy it. Life is too short, and he or she will be young too briefly for you to miss this rare opportunity to do something together.

## TWENTY YEARS LATER

It is now 20 years since *Managing Little League Baseball*, the first-ever book on coaching Little League baseball, was originally published, and five years since its last revision. In those five years many things have changed, all of which have made Little League baseball the most popular and most visible children's sport in the world. The televised coverage of the annual World Series of Little League in Williamsport,

Pennsylvania, during prime time has helped to generate the largest worldwide viewership of any sport.

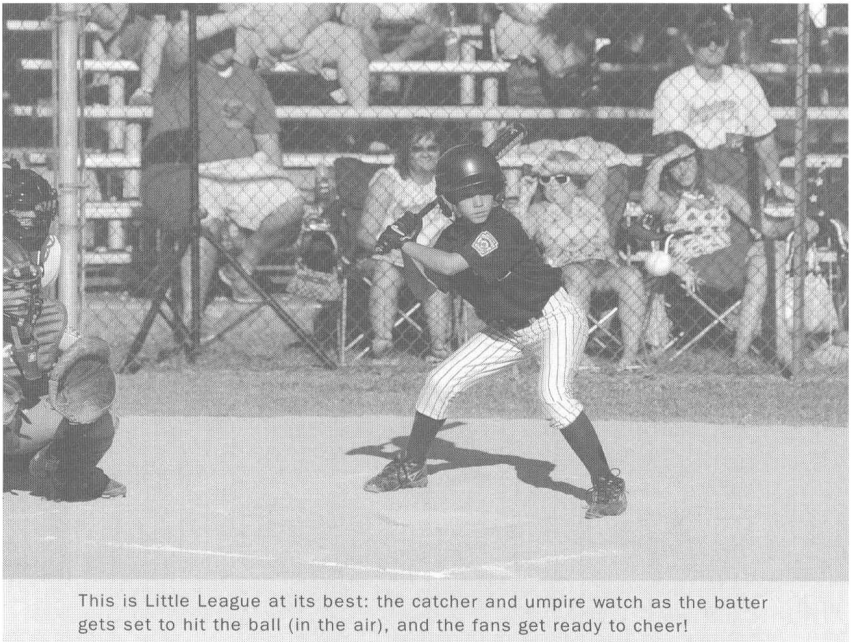
In my original Introduction, I lamented the fact that my son Jim was graduating out of Little League baseball and our relationship as father/coach—son was ending. Jim now lives in Austin, Texas, and has a five-year-old son, Ian, who was introduced to Little League Tee Ball in 2007. It explains why *Managing Little League Baseball* has sold over one million copies in the past 20 years, as new generations of players and parent/coaches are introduced to the wonderful world of Little League baseball. I was touched by a moment of irony when my grandson described how he hit a home run with the bases loaded in one of his Tee Ball games. I asked him what the score of the game was, and he answered, “Oh, we don’t keep score. We just have fun!” The irony was the fact that my underlying philosophy in the three books I have written on coaching Little League baseball (*Managing Little League Baseball*, *Little League Drills and Strategies*, and *Guide to Little League Tee Ball*) has been “Make it simple, and keep it fun.” Wouldn’t it be great if all the parents watching their children play in their first taste of competitive sports remembered that it should be a *fun* experience? In Chapter 10, “Handling Parents and Pressure,” I show a cartoon in which an umpire is talking to two Little League players, saying, “You two seem to understand the rules. Could you please have a talk with your parents?” Unfortunately the “Little League parent problem” still exists, as I explain in that chapter.

In the past 20 years, many rule changes have occurred, all designed for the benefit of the new generation of boys and girls that move into Little League each year. Since the second edition of my book was published, there have been more significant changes than in the previous 15 years; hence this third edition. In 2007 two major rule changes occurred, and as is always true when the rules change, it takes time for the coaches to make adjustments in their strategy. Perhaps the most significant rule change was the change in the pitching rules, which now limit a pitcher by number of pitches rather than number of innings pitched.

I remember the year 1948 in major-league baseball, when the upstart Boston Braves won the National League title on the arms of their



dominating pitchers, Warren Spahn and Johnny Sain. It inspired the famous line “Spahn and Sain and two days’ rain,” as Billy Southworth, their manager, arranged their pitching assignments in a way to maximize the number of times they could pitch in a given week. In their careers together with the Braves they combined to win 212 games. When I was managing my Little League teams over the years, I realized the importance of having two dominating pitchers, who properly scheduled could practically guarantee two wins a week. At that time, a pitcher was limited to six innings per week, regardless of the number of pitches he threw. So in my scheduling I had each pitcher pitch three innings of each of the two games. In Little League All-Star play, the pitching rules changed slightly, allowing a pitcher to pitch every other day, regardless of number of innings. The weakness of that rule became evident several years ago, when the pitcher of the winning team in the Little League World Series pitched 15 innings in one week. He was a monster of a boy,



This is Little League at its best: the catcher and umpire watch as the batter gets set to hit the ball (in the air), and the fans get ready to cheer!

towering over the other players, and had the stamina to do it, still throwing pitches over 80 mph in his 15th inning. But the rule makers recognized that the rules limiting pitchers to a specified number of pitches were in order, because even in the major leagues, number of pitches became a significant statistic in indicating to a manager that there is a point at which a pitcher can damage his arm by throwing too many pitches.

That Little League pitching rule change in 2007 had a dramatic effect in many areas. It meant a manager could not rely on only two strong pitchers, but had to groom at least four. That changed his strategy in the player draft, in the practice schedule in having to groom more pitchers, and in his game strategy in having to keep track of the number of pitches each pitcher threw and making pitching changes accordingly. The most valuable change resulting from the new rule is that it leveled the playing field, allowing more players the opportunity to pitch and not allowing one team to dominate with only two strong pitchers. More will be said concerning the new rules in the chapters on choosing your players, pitching, practice, and winning.

As mentioned previously, the updated Chapter 10, “Handling Parents and Pressure” merits your reading, citing some examples of how bad out-of-control Little League parents—and unfortunately coaches—can be. In that chapter I stress that good communication among managers, coaches, umpires, and parents is important for a local league to foster to diffuse the tendency of some parents to be less than objective in accepting the philosophy of “Make it simple, and keep it fun.” A model program of a good communications program for a league is outlined in Chapter 7 of my book *Little League Drills and Strategies*, entitled “Strategy for Working with Parents.”

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# **CHOOSING YOUR PLAYERS**

If you are new to Little League, a brief overview of the organization may be appropriate at this point. Little League Baseball, Incorporated, was started in 1939 and was granted a Congressional Charter of Federal Incorporation in 1964—the only sports organization that has ever been so honored by our government. If you become a Little League manager or coach, you will join an international group of managers and coaches that work with over 50,000 Little League teams and 100,000 Minor League teams, serving over 3 million children in 80 countries!

The local league is the governing body in any community, and it is chartered each year by Little League Baseball headquartered in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, where the World Series of Little League Baseball is held each August.

The president of a local league has the responsibility, with the guidance of a board of directors, to appoint the managers and coaches of all teams in his organization. If a league is fully structured within the Little League organization, it will include Little League Baseball teams for youngsters ages 9 through 12; Minor League “farm” teams for 8-year-olds and older players not selected for Little League teams; and Tee Ball teams

for beginning players as young as five years old. Tee Ball teams overlap in age consideration with Minor League teams, which in turn overlap with Little League teams. In this way, players are able to compete at their own ability level, rather than strictly on the basis of age.

At the higher level, there is Senior League for players age 13 through 15 and Big League for players 16 through 18 years of age. Little League Softball was added in 1974. Little League Softball also includes Senior League and Big League teams, for the same ages as the baseball divisions.

The information in this book is designed to be helpful for coaches and managers of all Little League Baseball divisions, regardless of the level of the team.

If you are a newly appointed manager, your first important decisions will involve selecting prospects for your team in the player draft. These decisions will affect your team's success and/or frustrations. The player you could have had, but didn't pick, will come back to haunt you (for four years if he is a nine-year-old), and the player you did pick, but shouldn't have, will create frustrations for you (also for four years if he is a nine-year-old).

Throughout the book the titles "manager" and "coach" are used interchangeably, because coaching is done by both. Officially, however, the manager is in charge of the team and responsible to the league president, and the coaches are the manager's assistants.

Throughout this book, I refer to "boys" and "sons" with no slight intended to "girls" and "daughters." I am merely acknowledging the fact that the success of the Little League Softball program is filtering nearly all of the girls out of Little League Baseball. However, Chapter 12 of this book covers the rules that are different for softball.

However, if a girl signs up for baseball, as a few still do, don't overlook her. She could be good! Because I have three daughters as well as three sons, I can assure you that I am not biased toward boys in Little League. If you are coaching your daughter's softball team, this book will be just as valuable to you, and the final chapter notes the differences that apply to softball.

## THE DRAFT SYSTEM

I'll assume that your league uses one of the draft systems recommended by Little League, preceded by formal registration and tryouts under the direction of the league player agent. As a manager, you will not be doing all you should do to prepare for the important player selection process if you merely wait for tryout day and assume you will see all that you need to see then to make your draft choices. Just as the professional baseball teams use scouts and do some research prior to their player draft, so should you.

## USING SCOUTS

Scouts? The returning members of your team are your best scouts, and I always have several meetings with them prior to the draft. I give them specific assignments by school, grade, and class to recommend new boys who may have moved into the area, as well as other boys who did not play for a Little League team last year. The latter group will include boys who played in the minors and boys who, for whatever reasons, have never played in organized ball but nevertheless appear to be good athletes. It is not uncommon for an 11- or 12-year-old boy to play Little League baseball for the first time. Perhaps he forgot to register the previous year, had no buddies who were playing, had transportation problems, didn't think he would like it, or, for any number of other reasons, didn't get involved. But when one of your scouts goes to work on him, and the boy realizes that he is wanted, he may decide this is the year he wants to play baseball.

If a boy is good, you will hear about it! Obviously, you won't get all of the good prospects, since they will be known to the other managers, too, but you owe it to your team to know who they are and to pick them if you have the chance. The sequence of the player selection is usually planned in favor of the weaker team; last-place team last year picks first, and so on. Whenever it is your turn to pick, however, you may lose the opportunity to strengthen your team if you don't have a line on the best prospects.

Another obvious system of scouting (also used by the professionals) is watching the Minor League teams play. Time often prevents this, however, since they are playing on the same schedule as your Little League. The next best thing is to call the managers of the Minor League teams and ask for their advice about the best prospects for Little League. I ask for their recommendations of players not only from their respective teams but from the opposing teams as well. I usually finish by asking them who, in their opinion, will be the top 10 boys picked from the Minors in the draft next year. I recommend that you make such calls at the end of the most recent season, while their memories are still fresh.

Local school coaches are another source of helpful scouting information. They see the boys in physical education classes and intramural games and have an experienced, professional eye for spotting good potential athletes. And still another scouting opportunity is watching the other competitive sports teams in action. I watch the midget football games and basketball league games, keep an eye open for well-coordinated boys, and make a note of their names. Any new athletes who have moved into the area will usually show up in the lineup of a football team or basketball team in the fall and winter competitive leagues.

The final scouting source I use is to check out the new boys at Little League registration. One year I saw a gangling 11-year-old boy signing up and asked him if he had played before. He said he had played for a Little League team in another town and had just moved here. I noticed that his baseball mitt was well worn, and I sensed he was a ball player, even though he was nothing but arms and legs in tryouts. Before he finished his Little League career, he turned into one of the best pitchers in the league and an All-Star. The baseball mitt is a good clue, incidentally. If it is worn and dirty, the chances are its owner likes baseball and uses it a lot; if it is brand-new, be wary.

The new pitching rules, introduced in the 2007 season, have significantly increased the importance of scouting for prospective pitchers. In previous years a manager could focus on having just two strong pitchers. The old rules allowed a pitcher to pitch six innings per week, regardless of how many pitches he threw. The new rules, designed to protect pitchers' arms, limit a pitcher to 85 pitches per game.

The pitching rules were changed significantly for the 2007 season to protect young pitching arms, based on recommendations by Dr. James Andrews and Dr. Glenn Fleisig, chairman and medical director of the American Sports Medicine Institute. The new rules established mandatory pitch counts based on age. In introducing the 2008 Little League rules, the officials of Little League International heralded the new pitching rules as an “unqualified success, as districts and local leagues understood and embraced the important reasons for the change.”

The effect of that new rule was clear in the championship game of the 2007 World Series, which went into extra innings. It had been a pitching duel between two dominating pitchers, one on the team from Japan, the other on the U.S. team from Georgia. Each of those pitchers reached his maximum limit of 85 pitches, and they both had to be replaced with new pitchers who were not as dominating. The game was won in the bottom of the eighth inning, when the relief pitcher from Japan served up a walk-off home run ball to the batter from the U.S. team.

During the season it became very clear to managers that they could not get by with only two strong pitchers but should groom at least four strong pitchers; in an ideal situation, they would be equally divided between 12-year-olds and younger players so the younger ones could make up the nucleus of next year's pitching corps. The building of a strong pitching corps must start at the point of the player draft each spring, preceded by your scouting. At registration, look for new players who are big and strong and have dirty, well-used gloves. The new pitching rules are explained in detail in Chapters 3 and 7.

## **TRYOUTS**

Obviously, the tryouts will give you a final look at your prospects in action, and I treat them exactly that way: as a final look. Prior to the tryouts, you should have your prospect list made up and ranked in order of choice. The number of boys trying out, how well the tryouts are organized, and the weather will dictate how good your appraisal opportunity will be. I have seen tryouts that were a mass confusion of cold, jacket-clad



boys going through the motions of throwing, catching, running, and batting, where little, if anything, could be determined of their relative abilities.

If brothers are trying out at the same time, or if you know that a good 10-year-old prospect has a good 8-year-old brother, keep the “brother rule” in mind: you have first option on a younger brother in the current or a future draft. The younger brother of a good player who has graduated from Little League would normally be a good prospect, too, because he has the advantage of having an experienced brother to work out with him. (He will usually be one of your prospects with a dirty, well-used glove.)

If the son of a Minor League manager or coach is coming up in the draft, that could represent a double bonus for you. Not only do you get a boy with a dad who is dedicated and will work with him; you also have the opportunity of picking up another coach for your team. (Most Minor League coaches lose interest in the Minors when their sons make it to Little League and would like to move up with their son.)

## RULES OF THE DRAFT

If you are a new manager, it is important that you know the rules (local as well as national) regarding the player draft. They are not easily accessible, because they do not appear in the *Little League Baseball Official Regulations and Playing Rules*. The official regulations regarding player selection appear in the *Little League Baseball Handbook and Manual*, usually referred to as the “president’s manual,” because it is issued to league presidents. Your league president can review the official rules with you and should bring you up to date on any local rules. In particular, you should ask him to review with you:

- The player selection method used by your league (the draft system, the auction system, or some local variation)
- The provisions regarding drafting the sons of managers or coaches