



Getting Challenger Baseball Started in Your Community

With Suggested Timeline

(Revised February 28, 2014)

Establish a Key Leadership Group

1. contact key local community stakeholders
2. look for people that have a passion for baseball, and would love to give back to the community by helping children with disabilities
3. look for people that have a “connection” to children with disabilities eg. Person that has a child / niece / nephew / relative / friend with a disability, who may be interested in participating in, and organizing Challenger Baseball

Initial Meeting to Generate Interest and Volunteer Support

1. local media exposure for meeting
2. newsletter to parents within local league

Team of Committed Volunteers

1. contact local baseball / softball organizations for volunteer assistance
2. contact local support group for parents of kids with disabilities
3. advertise through local media (newspaper, radio, TV, etc)

Gain Support of Local League / Association and the Community

1. contact local baseball / softball league for support
 - ie. Volunteers, field space, uniforms, equipment, etc
2. contact local community organizations
 - ie. Service clubs, fraternal organizations, etc for sponsorship, volunteers, etc

Charter your Challenger Baseball program with Little League Canada

1. contact Little League Canada – Wendy Thomson (613)731-3301 (email: wthomson@littleleague.ca)
 - package for chartering Challenger Division available
 - charter fees to Little League Canada: \$13 per team
 - every Challenger Baseball program is required to charter annually

Note: As part of the chartering commitment, there are two requirements of all Challenger Baseball programs in Canada:

1. that all adult Coordinators, Coaches and key volunteers in your league, must obtain a Criminal Record Check (CRC) every year, prior to the start of the Challenger Baseball season. The required CRC can be done at your local police station;
2. that adequate liability insurance is maintained by each league. The insurance levels required and more information is available through Challenger Baseball Canada

Contact Local Associations for Persons with Disabilities and the Local School Board (Specifically the Special Needs Coordinator)

1. arrange face to face meeting to introduce concept, and desire for support
2. discuss Challenger Program and the desire to provide this opportunity for the children with cognitive or physical disabilities in the community
3. discuss the potential number of participants in the local community
4. discuss a proposed newsletter or communication, and gain the endorsement from, the Association / Special Needs Coordinator
5. discuss how to best get the word out:
 - through the local schools (school newsletter ?)
 - use the assistance of the Association / Special Needs Coordinator for ideas on how to target specific families (instead of a handout to the general population)

Basic concepts of Challenger Baseball:

1. Children with cognitive or physical disabilities, to participate “in a league ... on a team ... in a uniform”
2. Children age 4-18 years old, participate in a fun and safe environment, that caters to their very special needs
3. Able-bodied “Buddies” participate with each player, to assist and provide a safer, more enjoyable experience
4. Everyone bats each inning ... no balls and strikes ... no outs ... everyone is safe at each base ... one base at a time, until last batter who clears the bases
5. Tee ball or coach pitch
6. Games are typically an hour, to an hour and a quarter maximum

Field specs for Challenger Baseball:

1. Choose an “all-weather” field (if possible), that has the best surface to allow access for children with disabilities
2. Use a smaller diamond ... 60' base paths is perfect ... not a huge need for outfield area
3. Ensure surface is as smooth as possible, for safety and accessibility reasons

Reserve Field Time for the Season with local league for Challenger Baseball:

1. Find an optimal field time that takes into account the needs of families, as best as possible

Equipment required for Challenger Baseball:

1. Bats ... aluminum or foam
2. Balls ... soft baseballs or foam
3. Bases ... regular league bases, with exception of "honking" first base, if possible (honking base is included in "Blast Ball" gear)
4. Batting tee ... optional, and available if necessary, for batter
5. Catchers gear ... not necessary, but a fun option (particularly for higher functioning players)

Uniforms used for Challenger Baseball:

1. Whatever uniform is used, do the best possible to replicate those used in the conventional baseball program , including belts, socks, and hats
2. Various ideas:
 - Uniforms available within the conventional league supply
 - Button down is often better, particularly for children that have a larger head
 - T-shirts / $\frac{3}{4}$ Length Shirts are workable, particularly for newer Challenger Baseball programs

Put together a team of committed "Buddies" to help with the Challenger Baseball players:

1. Youth and young adults in the community
 - Assist with players ... helping at bat, pushing a wheelchair, lead a player around the base path, provide safety role, and otherwise mentor players
2. A couple of different concepts:
 - Find a specific Buddy for each player, "one on one", for the entire season; or
 - Utilize teams in the local league, to act as Buddies

How to solicit Buddies for the program:

1. Contact local league, for help in getting interested volunteers from their membership
2. Contact local high schools, to communicate the need for volunteers
 - Buddy involvement helps students complete required "volunteer community hours"
3. Contact local church groups, to communicate the need for volunteers

4. Contact www.bestbuddies.ca, to communicate the need for volunteers

Communication within your local program:

Come up with a process that works for all families and volunteers in your program, as to how to communicate important information and updates ... via email, Facebook, program website, phone, etc

Key Coordinator Positions to Fill:

Division Coordinator

- a. person to take charge and make it happen
- b. liason to local league

“Buddy” Coordinator

- a. Person to solicit and screen suitable buddies to assist players
- b. Person to organize buddies
 - i. Provide phone / email list of buddies for team coach

Coach Position to Fill:

Need to organize and coordinate team

- a. contact team re games / events, etc
- b. appoint team parent, who will assist coach in communicating with team (ie phone, email, etc)
- c. coordinate onfield warmup and game particulars (eg batting lineup, field positions for fielders)

Start up Funding Available:

1. Challenger Baseball Canada \$500 “start up grant”, immediately available upon chartering with Little League Canada
2. Little League Baseball makes available funding for Challenger Baseball programs in Canada ... “Teammates for Kids Fund”, with application information available at www.littleleague.org

Ideal Timeline for Organizing Challenger Baseball in Your Community for the Initial Season

Prior to the Start of the Season:

- Sixteen weeks:**
- Organizational meeting of keen volunteers to gauge interest, support, and determine the best way to let the community know Challenger Baseball will be starting in the spring.
 - Establish date and promote informational meeting to parents of children with disabilities and support groups in the community, as well as to local high schools and church groups to solicit Buddies.
- Fifteen weeks:**
- Meet with local baseball association to gain support as a division within the league – discuss field location and times, liability insurance, any field or player participation costs, uniforms, equipment, establish a budget, and agree on all applicable fees to be charged (eg player registration fees, and where required: deposit fee for returnable uniforms)
- Fourteen weeks:**
- Hold informational meeting and begin registration of players and Buddies.
 - Establish plan for ongoing registration of players and Buddies, and revise strategy if results are not satisfactory.
 - Establish and document the Challenger Baseball program organization ... ie Division Coordinator, Buddy Coordinator, Sponsorship and Fundraising Coordinator, Coaches, and any other pertinent positions.
 - Solicit and confirm all Coordinator positions
 - Prepare a budget for revenue and expenses – make sure revenue is equal to, or greater than, the expenses
 - Begin soliciting sponsors for the program
 - “Charter” (register) program with Little League Canada.
- Thirteen weeks:**
- Determine best estimate of number of teams. Go conservatively low, and have more players on each team if need be
 - Make decisions on uniforms for the season. Estimate registration numbers. Go slightly high, to ensure adequate number and sizes of uniforms for all players. Order jerseys, pants, socks, belts, hats, and helmets if needed, to allow adequate time for delivery prior to the season.

- Twelve weeks:** - Identify, take application, and confirm coaches for the season.
- Make application for \$500 Startup Grant from Challenger Baseball Canada.
- Eleven weeks:** - Hold initial coaches planning meeting – discuss fields, equipment, criminal records checks, and all league related matters. Establish game format, rules and expectations.
- Establish deadline for criminal record checks to be done – note all league Coordinators and Coaches, and any adult volunteers that may be considered a risk to the program.
- Establish Opening Ceremonies date, and games and events schedule for the season (note: often aligned with the local league).
- Ten weeks:** Begin organizing plans for Opening Ceremonies and special guests, etc.
- Nine weeks:** Confirm with the local baseball association that appropriate liability insurance has been set up (contact Challenger Baseball Canada if any questions or concerns)
- Eight weeks:** - Make decisions on equipment for the season. Decide if going to play with conventional baseball equipment (ie metal bats, poly-soft baseballs, helmets required, batting tee) or with “Blast Ball” equipment (ie foam bats and balls, batting tee). Either way, order “Blast Ball” bases, with honking base.
- arrange photographer for team and individual pictures- to be held at appropriate time during the season (note: often aligned with the local league).
- submit charter and \$13/team fee to Little League Canada
- Seven weeks:** Order first aid kit for every team equipment bag
- Six weeks:** Meet with Coordinators and Coaches, and update registration of players and Buddies – assess any additional need for Buddies required – review organization and the prep for the season – assign additional tasks where required
- Five weeks:** Confirm all league coordinators, coaches and appropriate volunteers are aware of need for Criminal Record Checks to be completed
- Four weeks:** - Confirm sponsors (order banners or appropriate sponsor recognition)

- Preliminary match up of appropriate Buddy for each specific player

- Based on the number of teams, create a schedule of games for the season

Three weeks: All uniforms, hats, helmets etc and equipment delivered

Two weeks: - Sort uniforms, hats, helmets (if required), and allocate to each team

- Sort equipment, etc in to team bags

- Buddies assigned for all players

One week: - Host a final organizational meeting to make sure all is covered

- Order medals / trophies for the players (note: often aligned with the local league).

- Determine idea for small Buddy “thank you” gift, if desired

- Criminal Record Checks must be complete

During the Season:

Week one: - Conduct “Buddy Clinic” prior to first game, to educate Buddies on their role (ie provide safety, instructional, mentoring, and creating fun for their player)

- Uniforms, hats, helmets (if required) to all players

- Introduce each Buddy to their specific player

- Team equipment bag distributed to each coach

- Opening Ceremonies, prior to the first game

- First game

Week Two: Submit team rosters to Little League Canada

Optimal early week: Team and Individual pictures taken

End of season: - Distribute pictures

- Organize appropriate “Wind up” event for the season – distribute medals

- Reusable uniform components returned (and uniform deposit fees returned, if applicable)