

# The Little League Challenger Program

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- Founded in 1989
- Senior League Challenger Division introduced in 2015
- Little League's adaptive baseball/softball program for boys and girls with intellectual and physical challenges
- Today nearly 1,000 leagues in 10 countries offer the program providing more than 30,000 children the opportunity to participate
- Overall participation grew by 3% in 2018.

# Purpose of the Challenger Program

- To provide a community the framework to offer a structured, athletic activity for all youth in their community
- To provide all youth the opportunity to enjoy the full benefits of Little League in an environment structured to their abilities

# Recent Program Updates

- Senior League Challenger Division
  - Approved by delegates at the 2014 Little League International Congress
  - For players ages 15 and above
  - Offered by over 200 leagues in 2018
- Regulation II – Boundaries
  - Changes approved at the 2014 Little League International Congress
  - Leagues may sign up players from any area in their district, or an adjacent district, that does not offer the Challenger Program

# Who can participate in the Challenger Program?

- Any individual with a physical or intellectual challenge that cannot participate in the age appropriate Little League Baseball or Softball Division with reasonable accommodations
    - Little League Challenger Division: Ages 4-18\*
    - Senior League Challenger Division: Ages 15 and above
- \*Players age 19-22 may participate in the Little League Challenger Division if they are still enrolled in a school program and their league does not offer the Senior League Challenger Division

# Methods of Offering a Challenger Program

- 3 Options
  - District operated program managed by the DA/ADA for Challenger – *ideal option for districts that cover a small geographical area*
  - District wide program operated by a local league
  - Operated by local leagues using interleague play – *ideal option for most districts*

# Growing the Challenger Program in Your District

- Evaluate the current status of the Challenger Program within your District
  - How many leagues are offering Challenger?
    - Little League vs. Senior League?
  - Is there an ADA for Challenger?
  - What organizations are located in your district that could partner with Challenger Programs?
  - Are local Challenger Programs a well integrated part of the district and local leagues?

# Growing Challenger – Integrating the Challenger Program into the District

- Consider playing a Challenger Exhibition Game during the district tournament to raise awareness for the program
- Include the Challenger Program in any district activities
- If operating a District chartered program, schedule Challenger games around regularly scheduled local league games to increase exposure



# Growing Challenger – Integrating the Challenger Program into a Local League

- Include Challenger teams/players in all regularly scheduled activities
- Schedule Challenger games between league play games on weekend, if possible to increase exposure for the Division
- Play games on the same fields as other league games
- Use Little League players as buddies for the Challenger Program, rather than the parents or other family of the player

# Challenger Program FAQ's

- Frequently Asked Questions
  - Are there enough interested players in my community?
  - Who will run the Challenger Program?
  - Are special fields needed?
  - What are the costs involved in adaptive baseball?
  - What support can Little League provide?
  - Are grants available to assist leagues?
  - What rules are adapted for the Challenger Program?

# Are there enough interested players in my community?

- To determine the number of interested participants, leagues can work with special education departments and other community organizations
- Develop relationships with special education departments and have them assist in recruiting – explain Challenger as “adaptive baseball”
- Encourage parents of Challenger participants to recruit their players classmates/friends that may have challenges to join the program

# Who will run the Challenger Program?

- The district should appoint a ADA for Challenger and the local league should appoint/elect a board representative for the Challenger
- Local leagues and districts may choose to create a subcommittee to assist in operating Challenger
- Challenger ADAs and Challenger board members should provide regular reports to the district and local league boards on Challenger Program activities

# Are special fields required for the Challenger Program?

- Challenger games may be played on traditional baseball or softball fields
- Synthetic fields may be used
- Fields should be easily accessible and near ample parking

# What are the costs involved in offering Challenger?

- The costs to operate a Challenger Program are similar to those involved with operating any other baseball/softball program and include:
  - Little League Charter Fee: \$10 per team
  - Equipment
  - Uniforms
  - Trophies/Awards
  - Field Usage Fees

# What support can Little League provide?

- Free Training Materials
- Full time staff to answer questions
- Grants Available – Up to \$20,000 through Little League’s Grow the Game Grant Program
- Affordable Insurance Options
- Free Rule Books/Guides to operating the Challenger Program

# Are grants available for the Challenger Program?

- Leagues starting or operating a Challenger Program may apply for grants through Little League's Grow the Game Grant Program
- Maximum Award: \$20,000
- May be used for facility improvements, field adaptations, equipment, etc.



# What rules are adapted for the Challenger Program?

- Games typically are one or two innings (about 1 hour) – time limits are recommended
- Everyone bats every inning and everyone plays defensively
- “Buddies” assist players, but only as needed
- Games are non-competitive

## What rules are adapted for the Challenger Program? (cont'd)

- Teams may include up to 15 players – **10 recommended**
- Players are assigned to a team based on a combination of size, age, and skill level
- Players use “buddies” to assist them, as needed, during game play
- All teams must use a continuous batting order
- A combination of player pitch, coach pitch, and t-ball can be used in a game

# League Testimonials

- *“The Challenger Division is the best thing that our league has done in 50 years.”*
- *“Every league needs a Challenger Division. The Challenger players taught their “buddies” life lessons that no other could. The Challenger Games reminded us that it is not always about the scoreboard.”*
- *“Challenger allowed more children to play recreational sports and instilled a new sense of volunteerism in adults and players across our town. Community support has been remarkable; sponsorships have increased along with community involvement in our league.”*

# Questions?

For additional information, please contact:

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