

OVERVIEW

With the 50th anniversary of the historic 1974 ruling that opened Little League's playing fields to everyone on the horizon, the organization announced in August 2023 the launch of its female initiative, Girls With Game 50 (GWG50).

"Over the last 50 years, we have been on a steady journey toward making Little League more accessible for girls and women," said Nina Johnson-Pitt, Little League Senior Strategy Executive. "To truly be a program for all, we need to be intentional about leading with equity. Through some of the efforts outlined below, along with a variety of strategic efforts we are continuing to develop, our hope is that by 2032, there will truly be equal opportunities for participation among girls in the Little League program."

With its official launch on January 2, 2024, the GWG50 campaign had five key focuses: continued focus on female inclusion, promotion of the project, the 50th anniversary of the Little League Softball World Series (LLSWS), Little League's partnership with Athletes Unlimited, and additional events and celebrations. In order to fulfill those pillars of the initiative, Little League set out to focus on the history and growth of girls in baseball and softball, connect this generation of players to the ones who paved the way, and setting the future for success by increasing opportunity and coverage for girls involved in the program. In summary, Little League's vision for this season was to create the most memorable summer of softball yet.

"As we continue to see a rise in popularity around women's sports, including an increased interest in our own Little League Softball program, we are thrilled to bring another eventful Summer of Softball to life in 2024," said Ashlea Miller, Little League Director of Softball Development. "Since 2018, we have seen about an 8% increase in participation within our softball program, and as we continue to grow the experiences, opportunities, and increased visibility that these events provide, we are beyond excited for what is in store for 2024 and beyond."

CONTENT

Since the beginning of 2024, Little League has published monthly content focused on its staff members and alumnae and their personal stories connecting them to GWG50. From Staff Spotlights, Dear GWG50 Letters, Reflections, and Q&As, Little League published a wide variety of content from different perspectives to celebrate and promote the inclusion of girls on the diamond.

- **Staff Spotlights**
 - o Joy Reynolds McCoy, Chief Legal Officer
 - "I played Little League Baseball because girls were allowed to play. I had no idea until I came to work at Little League what a historic moment it was that I played Little League Baseball in 1977. From my first season, there were girls on the team, which was a big deal as it was only the third season of girls being permitted to play Little League. For me, there was nothing unusual, or different, or controversial about girls playing on the baseball team."
 - o Nina Johnson-Pitt, Senior Strategy Executive
 - I don't look at legacy as one great moment; I look at it as the things we do every single day. I hope that we become so intentional with our GWG50 work

in 2024, that it just becomes second nature and that we can eventually stop having the conversation because we have incorporated these actions into our everyday work. I hope we remain committed to ensuring that every opportunity is equitable, and as a result we see our program thrive in ALL communities, giving every family access to the benefits of Little League.

- Beata Kaszuba-Baker, Europe and Africa Region Director
 - “There’s a lot of passion for youth baseball and softball through Europe and Africa. But, what do you say when you witness a Little League practice where kids are playing with paper balls wrapped in tape just because they don’t have baseballs or softballs? The Little League mission teaches life lessons. I try to motivate volunteers by simply reminding them that they can help a child change the world, one player at a time.”
- Becky Bassett, Operations Coordinator
 - Throughout her career working for Little League®, Becky Bassett has served in a variety of roles, responded to countless questions, and has become the calming, reassuring, and informed voice for local league volunteers as they support the Little League program and communities.
- Melissa Shaffer, Human Resources Generalist
 - “Little League starts to instill in you not only what hard work is, but how it can pay off, be rewarding, and helps to build your character. It also teaches you how to be a teammate and how to win and lose gracefully.”
- Ashlea [Nash] Miller, Director of Softball Development
 - “1.) Never underestimate the power or influence you have on yourself. 2.) If you work hard enough, your dreams will become your reality. 3.) Being an athlete does not always have to be your only identity. 4.) When people don’t believe in you, smile and brace yourself for what is coming next. 5.) Don’t quit. Keep going.”
- Regina Sanso, Financial Assistant
 - “I think they can be right up there with the boys, if not better than a lot of them. Everybody gets their chance to play and now that the girls can and will play, they can go on and hopefully someday even play professional baseball.”
- Jen Colvin, Region Operations Managing Director
 - “I think the opportunities are endless and boundless. With social media showing these young ladies that there are possibilities for them, they should know that whatever they set their minds to, they can do it. I think when people understand what our values are within the program, it instills in children not just from the sport aspects, but also life lessons.”
- **Dear GWG50 Letters**
 - Ashlea [Nash] Miller, Director of Softball Development
 - “There is nothing in this world that can stop a fierce girl that is willing to do whatever it takes to follow her dreams. Allow those dreams to guide you throughout your journey. Never be afraid to be yourself, authentically, all the time, and surround yourself with others that lift you up.”

- Lauren Rude, Communications Coordinator
 - “I challenge you to be the voice that pushes back. I challenge you to lead and be an example of strength for your teammates. I challenge you to create opportunities for the next generation of females. I challenge you to be the force for good when people are trying to bring you down. I challenge you to prove to anyone who doubts you that you can defy the odds. Finally, I challenge you to set a new standard for all those little girls who will look up to you one day. It’s time to step up, just like so many females before you have, and push female sports forward!”
- Chris Downs, Director of Constituent Communications
 - “I’m sure there are hundreds of volunteers who have a similar story about an inspiring girl like you who continues to go out there and give it your all. But, more importantly, I’m sure there are hundreds of young girls looking up to YOU as their own role model.”
- Liz DiLullo Brown, Executive VP and Chief Marketing and Business Relationship Officer
 - “Above all else, I want you to believe in yourself because so many people believe in you. We are here, clapping as you begin, try, learn, fail, and begin again. Keep going! We are cheering you on!”
- Hannah James, Video Production Manager
 - “Always keep your eyes forward. Never look back at what might’ve been. Review past mistakes but don’t linger on them, instead, correct them, and keep moving forward. Setbacks aren’t failures, they’re opportunities to go in another direction. Celebrate the small victories, but never stop continuing to better yourself. Admit when you’re wrong but hold fast to the truth and don’t be afraid to get back up and finish the race.”
- Kevin Fountain, Senior Director of Communications
 - “Be fearless... Be brave... Be curious... Be strong... Most of all, be the person you WANT to be. Whatever, and whoever, that might be. We are here to support you.”
- Brian McClintock, Senior Communications Executive
 - “You Belong. It’s simple. You belong on the field. You belong in the dugout. You belong on the mound and in the circle. You belong in the batter’s box. You belong in the spotlight; in the scorebook; in the sport.”
- Kevin Feinberg, Director of Partnership Marketing
 - “Growing up, in every aspect of life, my mom always encouraged my sisters and me to get out of our comfort zones. So that is my advice to you – get a little bit uncomfortable. Step out of your comfort zone, whether that be trying something new or making sure your voice is heard. Be a difference maker like many of those that made a difference to me. Be a Girl with Game.”

- **Reflections**

- Ryan Iamurri, University of Alabama Softball Volunteer Assistant Coach

- “I have been around it forever. I was born in 1992, and the softball teams that my dad coached won consecutive championships the first five years of my life. I remember going to all of the opening ceremonies and sitting on my dad’s shoulders walking through the parade – there are a lot of great memories and photos from those early days... Competing in a Little League World Series tournament has been something I have wanted to be a part of since I was that little girl and being able to finally experience that was exciting because it was finally my turn.”
 - Malaika Underwood, USA Baseball Women’s National Team Alumna and Assistant Coach
 - “I had never played softball, so I decided to stick with baseball and wrote a letter to a number of high school coaches in the San Diego area where I could attend, just asking for a fair shot. I wouldn’t have had the confidence to do something like that, to seek out an opportunity at the high school level, had I not had just a wonderful experience playing Little League.”

- **Q&As**

- Olivia Pichardo, first female NCAA Division I baseball student-athlete
 - “I can’t remember a specific thing that anyone has told me that has really stuck with me through the years. In its own way, the fact that parents and coaches assumed I was going to switch to softball, and knowing I never planned to do that, was something that kept me motivated. Other than that, I think through the different coaches and teams I played on, which taught me that to be successful you need to have a positive attitude, be a good teammate, and be a coachable player.”
- Caroline Marks, Olympic Surfer and 2023 World Surf League Women’s Tour Champion
 - “Find your passion and have fun with it. For me, surfing has always been fun and continues to be fun and I am grateful to be able to say that. Whatever you choose to do, just make sure it is your passion and that you are doing it for you and not anyone else. Enjoy the ride, enjoy the highs and the lows, and just dream big.”
- Kelsie Whitmore, first female to play in the Atlantic Baseball League
 - You have to ask yourself what it is that you love, how much do you love it, and are you willing to work for it? There will be failure, difficulties, hardships, and heartbreak, but knowing all that, if you still want it and you persevere, then you will be unstoppable, and your goals will all be possible. Find your community and lean on them. Find the group that appreciates you and supports you not for what you do, but for who you are. It might be hard to understand this now at a young age, but as you get older don’t let yourself get wrapped up in your career, but instead in what is right, what is authentic, and what is true to you. Just be the best version of yourself.”
- Katie Reyes, 2009 Little League Baseball World Series Graduate
 - “A lot of this game is failure. If you hit a ball three out of 10 times that day, that could be a good day in baseball. It’s just what the game is. So, as a

player the biggest thing is to just work hard. If you are trying your best, that's all I want. You will have bad days, but for the most part, it is all about trying 110%. Plus, it's important to have fun. At the end of the day, you're playing baseball. Nobody wants to strike out, nobody wants to fail, so just go out there and have fun."

- Michelle DeRosa, Maria Pepe Little League Baseball Legacy Series Umpire
 - "The very first piece of advice I would give would be don't give up. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do it. I've had many instances of being passed over or passed by because I'm a female, and I wasn't going to give up. You find yourself a good support system, find a female official/mentor, and they'll support you through the process. This has been an amazing life experience, and I am glad I didn't give up. I really try to recruit female officials because other little girls need to see us big girls doing the job. And if you can see it, you can be it. As a female official, there are barriers that you have to deal with, but don't let it overwhelm you, and don't let it make you think you don't belong there. Because you belong there like everyone else."
- Malaika Underwood, USA Baseball Women's National Team Alumna and Assistant Coach
 - "I think that there's certain value in getting older and having perspective and being able to look back and say, "that failure, though, disappointing in the moment actually led me to something else. And that something else turned out to be wonderful and great." Being in the fortunate position to have had so many wonderful experiences has given me that perspective. The hope in giving that advice, of course, is to instill in others that understanding earlier in life. You can appreciate that sometimes you will have a goal, and you may not accomplish it, but it might be for a reason because there might be something even bigger and better out there for you."
- Sayaka Tsushima, 1998 Little League Baseball World Series graduate
 - "It's very tough for girls to play baseball with boys. If other girls want to try to play baseball with boys, they will have to fight to overcome this."
- Ryan Iamurri, University of Alabama Softball Volunteer Assistant Coach
 - "The world has been sleeping on women's sports... You see events now like the NCAA Women's Final Four in March Madness with more than 18 million viewers, the Nebraska Women's Volleyball team playing in front of a crowd in a football stadium, and even at the Women's College World Series they have added an entire second story of seating that wasn't there when I played back in 2012, which is huge for softball. So, you know, the more games and moments like those, the bigger it's going to get."

EVENTS

Leading up to the conclusion of the 2024 Little League Baseball World Series, Little League's efforts to promote its GWG50 campaign was demonstrated by two major events in the summer: the [2024 Maria Pepe Little League Baseball Legacy Series](#) and the [50th Little League Softball World Series](#).

Wrapping up the competition season, Little League welcomed back most of its 23 LLBWS alumna to honor them prior to finale of the tournament.