

Understanding the Little League Draft

Without a doubt, the player draft is the most misunderstood process in Little League baseball. The draft system provides a balance of player talent, and thus a competitive little league program. Here's how it works:

TRY OUTS are held for all players eligible for the draft. In the primary division, all children ages 9 through 12 must try out. The tryouts are conducted in the presence of all managers who shall observe the ability of each candidate. The candidates should be grouped by league age. At the tryouts, each player is given an opportunity to bat, field, throw, and run. The managers observe and score the players according to their ability.

The Major division is the official program of Little League Baseball Inc. At the discretion of your local league, Minor, Farm, and Tee Ball programs may be provided to train youngsters to ultimately play in the Major division. By having this "Farm System", every child who tries out, will play baseball with players of similar ability.

PRE-SEASON DRAFT: After the tryouts are completed, the player agent conducts the Major draft. When Major teams have returning players, the order of the draft is usually in the reverse order of last year's standings. The last place team drafts first. Each manager selects one player at a time, in rotation, until each team has 12 players.

Most leagues, in an effort to encourage parity in a division and to expose the players to a variety of coaching styles and strengths, have chosen to redraft the entire Major division every year.

After the Major draft, the remaining players are drafted into the Minor division(s). The Minor managers do not have returning players, and usually draw lots to decide the order in which they draft. When applicable, the same system is used in the Minor B draft. In some leagues, all 8-year olds play in a Farm or Minor C division. If so, then the division is formed with the 8-year olds and any players left in the player pool.

REPLACEMENT DRAFT: As the season progresses, a Major or Minor team may lose a player. Loss of a player can result from a player moving out of the area, or injury, etc. When a vacancy occurs in the Major division, the manager scouts players in the Minor division. He then selects the player he believes will best help his team and contacts the player agent to draft the player to his team.

The draft creates a vacancy in the Minor division, and the Minor manager must now draft a replacement. The replacement may be drafted from the next lower division, or if applicable, from the player agents list of late sign ups. Although this draft is sometimes seen as a disruption for the player's family, the player almost always welcomes the chance to move up. Moving up to a higher division is something your child will be proud of, and you should be as well.

As you can see, the system allows teams to be balanced, and therefore competitive. In a well drafted competitive division, the Championship team will not be obvious until the season ends. And the draft system allows your child to play with other children of similar ability.

To insure your children have a good little league experience, encourage them achieve at their own rate! Neither push them beyond their ability, nor hold them back when they are making progress.

And more importantly, please remember Little League is a recreational/educational program. Little League has a mandatory play rule, so all players who try out will play baseball.