

# Youth Sports Report – Baseball & Softball Leagues



As leagues are registering kids for the 2022 Baseball or Softball Season, it is important to know your audience and what options your league partners, Little League, Cal Ripken, USA Softball, etc., have to offer.

Many leagues are trying to offer their upcoming season status quo, but a lot has changed over the last year and a half. This does not mean that sports should not or cannot continue, but as Stephen Covey said, wise managers, “Seek to understand before being understood.”

At the National Academy of Athletics, we suggest that leagues do their research on the following fronts:

1. What changes, rules, regulations, or protocols do your league partners require. Knowing if the updated protocols or requirements will work within your community and your league Governing Board philosophy is vital to get your season off on the right foot.
2. Facility use agreements are changing – If your league manages their fields, you are in the minority and very blessed. Many leagues rely on the partnership with City funded facilities or school campuses. Before getting too far along in the registration process, it is an excellent idea to revisit with the organizations that control your facilities and find out if they will be available this year, what changes or new requirements or additional expenses they may be implementing this year.
3. As things change, it is essential to check with the families and their players, understand their beliefs, comfort level, and willingness to participate under any new protocols. You do not want to get in a position where your protocols are too strict or not strict enough, the families do not feel comfortable, and they want to quit. Dealing with processing tons of refunds or making the families in your league community unhappy is not a recipe for success this year or in the future. A simple survey can help answer the critical questions needed to create the foundation of your protocols for the upcoming season.
4. We all know that the lifeblood of any volunteer youth sports organization is excellent organization by the board, and training has been provided for the volunteer Coaches. We suggest that leagues connect with the past coaching staff and board members to get their input. Information is power. The more league managers know who will return as coaches and who is willing to help run things, the better chance of offering a smoothly run and successful youth league program.
5. There is a national shortage of youth sports officials and umpires. As the season plan is being established, umpire's early recruiting and training are critical. We are finding that by doing additional training and raising the official's pay, many leagues are helping to attract more qualified umpires.
6. With challenges in acquiring equipment or uniforms, we highly suggest that leagues connect with their suppliers, local printers, and vendors to ensure that everything needed to operate the

league will be available on time. Don't forget to check on pricing. Many items have gone up in price significantly. The cost of a baseball may not seem to impact the budget too much, but just .50 per ball, when you order 400 balls for the season is an additional \$200, it all adds-up.

7. Lastly, but not least important is understanding any additional insurance requirements. The costs can go up significantly with the changes in protocols, school requirements, city requirements, and new limit requests for insurance. As leagues set their season player fees, it is crucial to ensure that they cover any additional insurance or cost associated with operating the league.

Communication is a vital management component in any healthy business, family, or youth sports organization. The ability to create trust with everyone involved with the league while helping to create an environment of open, transparent, and clear information is often the difference between a well-run league or a dysfunctional league.

Your league can take several steps to run like a well-oiled machine. The following are a few programs that we believe are vital to helping create confidence, transparency, and an atmosphere that allows the players to thrive, engage the parents and empower the coaches to teach.

1. The 3-pronged approach ensures that the players, coaches, and parents are all on the same page. Communicating the league goals, expectations, and requirements helps start the season right. It is vital to have the league president or representative involved with the Parent Orientation. We are also finding that bringing in a third party to help communicate the leagues' philosophy, protocols, changes, or even the league's needs is a great way to pull the league community together and create a "like-minded" mentality.
2. Especially now, the players need individual skill development. Many kids have not played sports for twelve months or longer, and they may have had limited time with in-person instruction. We have found that pre-season player clinics are essential to help kids re-engage or even remember simple fundamental

skills. Maybe the most important, be reminded of how the social, emotional, boundaries, and benefits of playing on a team will impact them on the field, in the classroom, and at home.

3. No matter what league or organization you are involved with, the fact is that the program is only as good as the coaches on the field. The day-to-day interaction with the kids and the communication with the families are essential to have a successful league. There are tons of great videos and information on the web, but that does not always translate into helping the coaches be great teachers, communicators, game or practice managers, or develop a philosophy in line with your league. We believe that coaching clinics, training, handbooks, and sport-specific skills and drills are critical to support your volunteer coaches and managers.

Youth Leagues will need to check with the State, County, and City COVID guidelines and the updated information provided by the CDC. The following are some updates as of 11/15/2021.

## **The CDC**

Not a lot of REQUIRED regulations, just a lot of “should” and “recommended.”

- For kids – Extracurricular activities that involve heavier breathing will be at higher risk without masks, without ventilation, and without physical distancing. The CDC recommends wearing a mask during indoor sports.
- In general, students, educators, and staff do not need to wear masks when participating in recess and physical education outdoors unless they are going to be doing close contact or crowded activities.
- The CDC recommends physical distancing at sporting events (such as fields, benches/team areas, locker rooms, spectator viewing areas, spectator facilities/restrooms) along with signage about wearing masks for all guests to see.
- This CDC guidance is meant to supplement—not replace—any federal, state, local, territorial, or tribal health and safety laws, rules, and regulations with which camps must comply.

## The American Camp Association

“To maximize protection from the Delta variant and prevent spreading it to others, wear a mask indoors in public if you are in an area of substantial or high transmission.” – Youth Sports Programs should follow their state and local guidance at a minimum. In addition, camps in areas with substantial or high transmission should strongly consider updating their policies to incorporate masks for vaccinated and especially unvaccinated individuals indoors.

## LittleLeague.org

It is highly encouraged that each league and district adhere to the guidelines set forth by their respective state and local government and health officials regarding public gatherings, organized youth sports, and sporting events when determining how and when to return to Little League activities. Leagues should contact their state and local health authority and other municipalities for guidance before resuming any Little League activities.

With all this information, kids need to play now more than ever. The Aspen Project Play has a great article that goes into detail about the values and benefits of “play.” I highly suggest the league president, manager, or board member read [the Aspen Project Play report](#).

The [National Academy of Athletics](#) strives to help kids safely return to playing sports and participating in athletics. We have a proven track record of providing fantastic youth sports experiences and helping league managers create an engaging atmosphere for the families in their community. Our team members are creating opportunities for leagues, school, and recreation departments to bring our youth sports, physical education, and athletic programs to over 125 communities, and the list is growing. If you would like to find out how the National Academy of Athletics can be of service to you or your community, visit [NationalAcademyofAthletics.com](#), email [info@NAofA.us](mailto:info@NAofA.us), or call 1.866.90.SPORT.