

Thanks for signing your son or daughter up for Stewards of the Game Baseball.

Outlined below is some information that I trust you will find helpful as we all prepare for the upcoming baseball season:

### **Registration Update**

We have nearly 300 young people registered to play baseball this spring...with forms still rolling in! Here's how we expect the teams to break out:

T-ball (Age 5/6): 7 or 8 teams  
Rookies: (Age 7/8): 7 or 8 teams  
Minors: (Age 9/10): 6 or 7 teams  
Majors: (Age 11/12) 5 or 6 teams  
Babe Ruth: (Age 13/14) 2 teams  
Babe Ruth: (Age 15/16) 1 team  
Babe Ruth - Metro League: (18 and Under): 1 team

### **Coaches**

We had a great turnout at our Coach's Meeting this past Saturday. Once again we have been blessed with some terrific coaches this season.

We have most of our Head Coach assignments filled for this season...except for a few t-ball teams. Those of you interested in serving as an assistant coach should make a point to get to know the head coaches at the upcoming Coaches Clinic and during Skills Week. Once the teams are formed...head coaches will select their two "official" assistants. While a team can only have one head coach and two official assistants on the field during a game, we need loads of help during practice running the skill stations; so please let your head coach know if you're willing to help out.

### **Coaches Clinic**

Coach's Clinic will be held THIS Saturday, February 28th from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon at North Meck Park Field #3 in Huntersville. This field is located on Highway 115 just south of the intersection of Sam Furr Rd. Detailed directions to all fields can be found by accessing the Parent Info tab on our website at [www.stewardsofthegame.org](http://www.stewardsofthegame.org).

David Darwin, who pitched at Duke and then played 5 years in the pro's, will be with us from 9-10 to review various pitching, throwing and fielding techniques. Please bring your gloves and be ready to move around a bit. We will be reviewing practice routines, demonstrating fundamental baseball skills....and exchanging coaching tips and drills with one another. Coaches, both head and assistants, please make every effort to attend this session. This will be a general coach's clinic covering the basic fundamentals of the game. We will plan to hold additional, more specialized, follow-up clinics during the season to cover other specific elements of the game.

### **New Parent Orientation**

We will hold a New Parent Orientation THIS Saturday, February 28th from 1:00 to 2:30 at North Meck Park in Huntersville. We have reserved the shelter that is just beyond the playground. I encourage all new parents, both moms and dads if possible, to attend. If you've played with Stewards of the Game before but have not been able to attend one of these, you are very welcome to join us. We will review the philosophy of Stewards of the Game, how that philosophy translates to the field...as well as answer any logistical questions you may have about practice routines, uniforms, game schedules, playing time, Challenge Play, etc.

### **Skills Evaluation Week / Team Selection**

Skills Evaluations for players 5-12 will be held the weeks of March 2nd and 9th Skills Week for our 13 to 18 yr old Babe Ruth Division will begin on Saturday, March 8th. Rather than doing a single skills day and try to assess skill level in a couple of hours, we will actually practice several large groups of kids together for several weeks, putting them all through a series of instructional drills. At the close of Skills

Evaluations, once the coaches get a sense of all the players' ability, the head coaches will meet on 3/14 or 3/15 and divide up the teams. Players will then be called by their coaches....and practice schedules for the following week confirmed.

Aside from having fun and getting some of the baseball rust off, one of the key objectives of Skills Evaluations is to assess the skill level of all players to enable us to achieve parity across teams within each age division. We always receive a number of requests for players to be placed on specific teams for a variety of reasons (i.e. carpool, friendships, etc.). The head coaches will have access to the "special requests" noted on registration forms and will do their best to honor these requests; as long as team parity is not jeopardized. However, there is simply no way we can honor **all** these requests. It is important to spread talented players and experienced coaches around as it leads to greater skill development and more FUN for all. So, achieving team parity will take precedence over accommodating all special requests. We appreciate your understanding on this matter.

### **Skills Evaluation Schedule**

The schedule for the first two weeks of Skills Evaluations is outlined below. Please note directions to all fields can be found on the Parent Information button at [www.stewardsofthegame.org](http://www.stewardsofthegame.org). Players are asked to attend as many sessions for their respective alphabetical groupings as they can. If you have a conflict with one of the sessions, feel free to attend a session designated for the other alphabetical group for the same age division.

#### **T-Ball (5/6):**

##### Last Name A-L:

Monday, 3/2, Big Waymer & Little Waymer Fields, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/7, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 3 & 4, 2:00 - 4:00  
Tuesday, 3/10, Big Waymer & Little Waymer Fields, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/14, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 3 & 4, 2:00 - 4:00

##### Last Name M-Z:

Thursday, 3/5, Big Waymer & Little Waymer Fields, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/7, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 3 & 4, 4:00 - 6:00  
Thursday, 3/12, North Mecklenburg Park: Field #1, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/14, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 3 & 4, 4:00 - 6:00

#### **Rookie (7/8)**

##### Last Name A-L:

Friday, 3/6, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/7, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 3 & 4, 12:00 - 2:00  
Thursday, 3/12, Big Waymer & Little Waymer Fields, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/14, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 3 & 4, 12:00 - 2:00

##### Last Name M-Z:

Tuesday, 3/3, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/7, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 3 & 4, 10:00 - 12:00  
Monday, 3/9, Big Waymer & Little Waymer #2 Fields, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/14, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 3 & 4, 10:00 - 12:00

#### **Minors (9/10)**

##### Last Name A-L:

Monday, 3/2, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/7, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 12:00 - 2:00

Monday, 3/9, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/14, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 12:00 - 2:00

Last Name M-Z:

Thursday, 3/5, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/7, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 10:00 - 12:00  
Thursday, 3/12, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/14, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 10:00 - 12:00

**Majors (11 - 12)**

Last Name A-L:

Thursday, 3/5, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 3 & 4, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/7, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 2:00 - 4:00  
Tuesday, 3/10, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/14, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 2:00 - 4:00

Last Name M-Z:

Monday, 3/2, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 3 & 4, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/7, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 4:00 - 6:00  
Friday, 3/13, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 6:00 - 8:00  
Saturday, 3/14, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 4:00 - 6:00

**Babe Ruth (13 - 16) All Players**

Time and Date: TBD Look for email from Babe Ruth coaches in mid-March

\* Please note the schedule for Skills Week can also be viewed by clicking on Field Schedule from the Parent Info tab under Baseball Program button at [www.stewardsofthegame.org](http://www.stewardsofthegame.org)

**Playing Up or Down: Stewards of the Game Policy**

*"As a general rule, Stewards of the Game does not allow players to "play-up" or "play down" in an age division above or below their actual age. The only exception to "playing up" will be those rare instances where a player's skill level is so advanced that they would clearly dominate the game at their age level or put their peers in harm's way on the field. The only exception for "playing down" will be instances where there is a high probability of a player being severely injured or embarrassed if they were to play with kids their own age."*

- Any exception to this rule must be approved by the Age Level Coordinator (ALC) for their age division, the ALC for the age division they wish to play in and the Director of Baseball for Stewards of the Game.
- A request form for playing-up or playing-down can now be found on the Parent Information screen under Baseball Program. Please print and complete this form and get it to the Age Level Coordinator (ALC) of the age division your child would normally play in. The ALC will then get with myself and the ALC of the age division you are seeking your child to play in. We will collectively evaluate the requests and get back to you as soon as possible.
- Any player who was allowed to play up this past fall will be allowed to play up this spring; if the parent so chooses to do again. This will eliminate the problem, this spring only, of a player having to drop back down from an age division they have already been allowed to participate in.

I often hear parents express that their 6 yr olds should "play up" because they can hit a pitched ball. But more often than not, their swing mechanics are not what they should be, they can't properly catch or throw a baseball and they don't understand the game enough to move up. Pro ballplayers still hit off tees in practice.....as do ALL our players in the older age divisions. So, let's not rush kids to Machine Pitch or Kid Pitch too fast. They have plenty of years ahead of them for that. Kids grow up fast enough as it is; no

need to speed it up. This policy will also allow the more talented ballplayers to further develop their leadership skills by mentoring and leading players in their peer group who are not as advanced as they are.

### **Practices & Games**

Generally speaking, aside from T-ball, teams will be practicing twice a week. Practices will likely be on the church / corporate fields we have been granted access to. Games will traditionally be played on town fields where access is controlled by the various Parks & Rec departments. Due to a shortage of field space, most teams will have one practice during the week sharing a field with another Stewards of the Game team...and one practice during the week with the field to themselves. Practicing with another team has its advantages; as it allows coaches get a chance to work with all kids. Of course this reinforces the spirit of cooperation amongst Stewards of the Game coaches...as they will sometimes be assisting players on teams they will be competing against later in the week. This will also permit us to hold short, controlled scrimmages at the end of practice- once the players have completed their drills. Weekday practices will likely have to start at 5:00 or 5:30 before daylight savings time kicks in. These times may be moved back a bit once daylight savings time arrives.

Many of you have asked what days of the week practices and games will be on. Of course, it's impossible to give you an exact answer at this stage as that is dependent on which team your son or daughter is placed and the field time we are able to secure. But here are some "**general guidelines**" on how the season will **likely** play out:

#### **T-ball:**

Pre-Season: One practice during the week ...and one on Saturday

During Season: One practice during the week ....game on Saturday

#### **Rookies:**

Pre-Season: 3 Practices per week...two during the week and one on Saturday

During Season: 2 Practices during the week with games initially just on Saturday and then later in the season - one game during the week and one on Saturday.

#### **Minors / Majors**

Pre-Season: 3 Practices per week...two during the week and one on Saturday

During Season: 2 Practices during the week ...with one game during the week and one on Saturday.  
(Note: Majors teams will inter-locking with East Lincoln league for games)

#### **Babe Ruth**

Pre-Season: 3 Practices per week...two during the week and one on Saturday

During Season: 2 Practices during the week ...with one or two games during the week and one on Saturday. (Note: Babe Ruth teams will inter-locking with Charlotte Babe Ruth leagues for games)

Again, the days and times are general practice and game guidelines only for you to pencil in your calendars for now. These may change depending on what team your player is on....field availability, etc. We have set aside Wednesdays as a "family day" for youth group, bible studies, family time, etc. So, we will aim to not practice or play games on Wednesdays.

#### **Opening Night**

Mark your calendars for Friday, March 27th for our Opening Night ceremony. You will not want to miss this. The players will parade around the field with their teammates, have their name announced over the loud speaker. As we did last year, following the parade, we will have Skill Competitions by age division with a representative from each team participating in sprints around the bases, fielding contests, long toss, home run derby, etc. This is really a blast for the kids; so please pencil this in on your calendars now.

**\*\*\*We need volunteers to help organize Opening Night** in order for it to be a fantastic evening for all. Please contact Amy Murray at 704.483.2861 to volunteer to assist in the planning for this special night. This entails coordinating the pick-up of a sound system from one of our local churches, putting up the field decorations we have in storage, finding someone to sing the national anthem, overall event organization, etc.

Regular season games will start up around March 28th. Regular season will likely wrap-up around the end of May...with post-season Stewards of the Game tournaments wrapping up around mid-June. So please make your vacation plans with these dates in mind. For those impacted, All-Star tournaments could last through mid-July or later if we continue to advance to State and Regional play.

### Uniforms

- After Skills Week, team coaches will be furnishing each player with a practice T-shirt and an embroidered black hat that they should wear to ALL practices with their black pants. As a reminder, they will keep these items at the end of the season.
- Prior to the start of the regular season games, we will also issue every player a "home" & "away" Stewards of the Game baseball jersey to be worn at games only. The concept behind the "home & away" jersey is to put all kids on a "level playing field"...so to speak. Our teams will all be dressed alike.....wearing "orange" jerseys when they are the "home" team...and "black" when they are the "visitors". As you can imagine, outfitting players with two jerseys each is quite expensive. **It is imperative that each player return both game jerseys at the end of the season....so that we can recycle them next fall and spring.**
- Just a reminder....you will need to purchase a pair or two of black baseball pants and a pair or two pairs of orange socks for your child to wear at every practice and every game. Elastic / Drawstring style for T-ball, Rookie and Minors Age Divisions (5-10). Majors and Babe Ruth Age Divisions (11-18) will wear black pants with belt loops. Parents of Majors and Babe Ruth players will need to purchase an orange belt for their players.
- Please note that **Dick's Sporting Goods** is one of our corporate sponsors again this year. They have a good supply of black baseball pants, orange socks and orange belts now in stock. So; please drop by their store in Birkdale to pick up your pants and socks....and any other baseball items like gloves, bats, cleats, batting gloves ,etc. that your child may need. Dick's Sporting Goods has really stepped-up to the plate to support Stewards of the Game this year and we would sure like to return the favor by patronizing their business best we can.

### Raffle Tickets

Coaches should be distributing raffle tickets as soon as the players get placed on a team. Again, once you sell the tickets, you keep the proceeds as you paid for these at time of registration. Please return completed raffle ticket stubs to your Team Parent. We will hold the raffle at our Championship Celebration at the Majors Championship Game at the close of the season; where we also recognize Christian Character, All-Academic and All-Star players.

### Challenge Play

As I hope you've read about on our website and registration flyers, we have established a "Challenge" program to supplement our regular season play at the 7 and up age divisions. Soon after Skills Evaluations have concluded, the coaches will get together and select 12 or so of the most skilled players at each annual age increment (e.g. 8U, 9U, 10U, 11U, etc) division to participate in our Challenge program; assuming there is sufficient interest amongst the coaches, parents and players.

Challenge teams are formed each season from scratch based on all registered players in the current season. (The only exception to this is the 12U Cooperstown Team that has to be formed in the fall in order to meet funding deadlines.) In order to be fair to new families joining Stewards of the Game each season, Challenge players from past seasons are NOT automatically guaranteed a spot on the Challenge team in the upcoming season we can. Therefore, if your child is interested in participating in our

Challenge Program, it is very important that they attend all the various Skill Evaluation sessions for their assigned age division so they can be adequately evaluated prior to the selection process.

The intent of the Challenge Program is to provide those players with more advanced skills the opportunity to compete against higher-level competition from other Challenge teams from other leagues. This will likely entail additional weekend games and tournaments....maybe once a month or so. Of course, these teams will also have occasional weekend practices as well....so they can gel as a team.

Of course, participation on a Challenge team is purely optional. The inclusion of a Challenge program within Stewards of the Game brings with it the reality that some kids will make it....and some won't. We believe there are life lessons that can be learned by that experience...on both sides of the coin. While some leagues believe in segregating the skilled players from the less-skilled players at an early age as part of their regular season program....we will not do that until the players reach middle school age...13 and up. Up until that time, all our kids will have the chance to play together during the regular season. Our "challenge" philosophy is to "strengthen the weak without weakening the strong". The stronger and weaker players will be blended together during the regular season; so that the players can help one another get better. The "challenge" aspect of the program will, however, provide the more talented players with several opportunities during the season to further test and develop their skills against stiffer competition via some additional, advanced play.

**CHANGE:** Challenge players 13 and up now practice and play together as a unit all season; competing against other Challenge-level teams in an advanced "National League" division of the Charlotte Babe Ruth league. Players not making these 13 and up Challenge teams will be placed on less advanced "American League" teams within Stewards of the Game and compete against other Babe Ruth teams also comprised of less advanced players.

The Challenge teams will not necessarily be the "All-Star" teams at the end of the season. The Challenge teams may be fluid. A player who's worked hard during the regular season and improved their skills may be asked to participate in a Challenge game midway during the season. A Challenge player during the regular season may not make the All-Star team at the end of the season. On the flip side, a player who did not make the Challenge team at the beginning of the season may improve his or skills to a point where they make the All-Star team at the end of the season. There will be an incremental cost of participating in the Challenge games. We will simply divide the team's tournament fees amongst the participants....on a weekend by weekend basis.

Of course, if you have any suggestions for this aspect of our program...or questions about the selection of the "challenge" players, please consult your son or daughter's coach.

### **Inclement Weather**

With regard to games, the various Parks & Rec Departments make the "go / no-go" call on whether or not the fields are in suitable condition to play our games on town fields. The hotline numbers to call on game day are listed in the Inclement Weather section of our Parents Info button on our website. With regard to practices, individual coaches make the call on whether practices are "on" or "off" ..so please look to your head coach. or their designated team parent, for info on whether practices are rained-out or not.

### **Volunteer Needs**

As you know, Stewards of the Game is a certified 501(3)c non-profit organization led completely by non-paid VOLUNTEERS. Yes, we all have day jobs believe it or not. As the program grows, and we maintain our commitment to continually enhance the quality of the experience for our players and family members, we **must** continue to build our volunteer base. As you can imagine, there is plenty of work to go around, if you can call it "work." Over the past couple of years, we have established Volunteer Teams to organize the many, many tasks that have to be completed to pull-off a successful season.

A number of you have already stepped-up to help on one of these volunteer teams...but we need MORE help. Please give prayerful consideration to the volunteer needs outlined below. **If you have a talent & passion in serving on one of these teams, please contact the Team Lead listed below.** For more

information on the responsibilities of these teams, please go to the Parents Corner button on our website and click on Volunteer Opportunities.

**As you can see below, we have a few TEAM LEADER positions that are now OPEN.** We also desperately need volunteers to step-up and help out on volunteer teams outlined below such as Outreach, Equipment, Uniforms and Special Events. Please contact one of the team leads below if you can help out on one of these teams.

### **MULTI-SPORT VOLUNTEER TEAMS**

**Communications** - Team Lead: **OPEN**

**Fundraising** - Team Lead: **OPEN**

**Outreach** - Team Lead: Teresa Sharp (704.992.0681)

**Merchandising** - Team Lead: Scott Crosbie (704.895.4190)

### **BASEBALL-SPECIFIC VOLUNTEER TEAMS**

**Administrative** - Team Lead: Beth Naspinski (704.483.4917)

**Coaches** - Team Lead: Mike Sharp (704.992-0681)

**Publicity** - Team Lead: **OPEN**

**Registration** - Team Lead: Mike Sharp (704.992-0681)

**Scheduling / Facilities** - Team Lead: Ben Travis (704.875.0395)

**Special Evens Team** - Team Lead: Amy Murray (704.483.2961)

\*\*\*\*This team plans, publicizes and executes all baseball-related special events (i.e. Opening Day, Stewards of the Game Day at Davidson College, Home Run Derby, Championship Celebration, Coaches Game, etc)

**Equipment:** Team Lead: Tony Tascione (704.896.1053)

**Uniforms** - Team Lead: Bob Schaffer (704.948.7175)

### **Parents Corner on the Website: A Couple of MUST Reads**

We have created a Parents Corner on the website to provide you with streamlined access to general league information and ensure parents have a keen understanding of the philosophy, core values and league principles that are the foundation of Stewards of the Game.

A few MUST Read items on the Parents Corner of our website:

- Stewards of the Game Philosophy: Taking it to the Field (What Stewards of the Game Baseball should look like between the white lines)

- Playing Time Philosophy
- Directions to Fields
- Inclement Weather Lines
- Parental Pledge that each parent should have signed at registration
- Volunteer Opportunities.

Well, I think that's enough info for now! Look forward to seeing you out on the ballfield this spring.

Make it a blessed day!!!

Mike Sharp  
Co-Founder: Stewards of the Game  
Director of Baseball