

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 you prepare for the upcoming baseball season:

Registration Update

We have nearly 350 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): 8 teams
Rookies: (Age 7/8): 8 teams
Minors: (Age 9/10): 5-6 teams
Majors: (Age 11/12) 6 teams
Babe Ruth: (Age 13/14) 1-2 teams
Babe Ruth: (Age 15/18) 1 team

Coaches

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

We have all 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, March 1st from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. 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.

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, March 1st from 12:00 to 1:30 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 3rd and 10th 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 3/15 or 3/16 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" received at registration 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.

Playing Up or Down: A few players' skill level warrants them "playing up" with older kids or "playing down" with younger kids. This should be the exception and the final decision on what age division a player will play in is made by the Age Level Coordinator....not the parent or player. As a general rule, your son or daughter should play in the age division noted below based on their age as of April 30, 2008. Unless you have received prior approval from Stewards of the Game, your child should report to Skills Week for their respective age group. If the Age Level Coordinator feels like they would either dominate in their own age division, or risk injury, they will recommend playing your child "up" or "down" based on their assessment of their skill level.

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 at practice. So, let's not rush kids to Kid Pitch or Machine Pitch too fast. They have plenty of years ahead of them for that.

The schedule for our 1st week of Skills Evaluation is outlined below. We will communicate the schedule for the 2nd week once we have additional field time locked down with the Town of Huntersville. Please note directions to all fields can be found on the Parent Information button at 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, 3/3, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 1 & 2, 6:00 - 8:00

Saturday, 3/8, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 3 & 4, 2:00 - 4:00

Last Name M-Z:

Thursday, 3/6, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 1 & 2, 6:00 - 8:00

Saturday, 3/8, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 3 & 4, 4:00 - 6:00

Rookie (7/8)

Last Name A-L:

Thursday, 3/6, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 3 & 4, 6:00 - 8:00

Saturday, 3/8, : North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 3 & 4, 12:00 - 2:00

Last Name M-Z:

Monday, 3/3, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 3 & 4, 6:00 - 8:00

Saturday, 3/8, : North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 3 & 4, 10:00 - 12:00

Minors (9/10)

Last Name A-L:

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

Saturday, 3/8, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 1:45 - 3:30

Last Name M-Z:

Thursday, 3/6, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 6:00 - 8:00

Saturday, 3/8, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 12:00 - 1:45

Majors (11 - 12) All Players

Last Name A-L:

Tuesday, 3/4, Huntersville Athletic Park: Fields 1 & 2, 6:00 - 8:00

Saturday, 3/8, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 1 & 2, 3:00 - 5:00

Last Name M-Z:

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

Saturday, 3/8, North Mecklenburg Park: Fields 1 & 2, 5:00 - 7:00

Babe Ruth (13 - 18) All Players

Saturday, 3/8, Southlake Christian Academy: 2:00 - 4:00

* 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

Field Clean-up Day: March 15th

Please pencil in a mandatory Field Clean-up Day for Saturday, March 15th. All the church and corporate fields that we'll be using this spring are in need of a spring clean-up. These institutions have been so terrific and gracious in allowing us to use their fields. We need to start off the season by sprucing up the fields. Whenever we leave the fields, we want to leave them in better shape than we found them; and of course obey all church and corporate rules. (i.e. Park in parking lots...not along the field)

Plan to bring rakes, shovels, hoes, de-weeding tools, trash bags, wheelbarrows etc. Our players and their parents can really make a huge difference in the appearance of these fields in a couple of hours. I assure you, there will be some real-time life lessons learned on teamwork and stewardship as we all work together to spruce-up the fields. We will email out a Field Clean-Up schedule for each Age Division prior to the 15th.

*Note: You can imagine how the weeds have grown up since last fall!!! We've found that giving the weeds a dose of Round-up prior to Field Clean-up Day makes the job a lot easier. If you'd like to volunteer to do this, please contact Ben Travis at 704-577-2035, our Scheduling & Facilities Team Lead and let him know. Otherwise, bring a lot of sharp hoes. Also helps to spray the fields after Field Clean-up.

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 5:30 before daylight savings time kicks in. These times will likely be pushed 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 weekgame 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 28th 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 representatives from each team participating in sprints around the bases, fielding contests, home run derby, etc. This is really a blast for the kids; so please pencil this in on your calendars now.

*****We need someone to step up and help organize Opening Night** in order for it to be a fantastic evening for all. 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, etc. Please call or email me if you can lead this team.

Regular season games will start up around March 29th. 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, pair of orange socks 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 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 belts **AND EXTRA ORANGE SOCKS** now in stock. So....pls drop by their store in Birkdale to pick up your pants....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 will distribute raffle tickets as soon as we get them back from the printer. 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 Family Fun Day....later in the season.

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. Toward the beginning of the season, the coaches will get together and select 12 or so of the most skilled players in that age division to participate in our Challenge program; assuming there is sufficient interest amongst the coaches, parents and players. The intent of the Challenge Program is to provide those kids 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 kids 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 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 very desperately need volunteers to step-up and lead our Communications, Baseball Special Events (i.e. Opening Night, Family Fun Day, etc) and Golf Tournament volunteer teams. Please let me know if you serve in any of these key roles.

MULTI-SPORTS VOLUNTEER TEAMS

Communications - Team Lead: **OPEN**

Fundraising - Team Lead: Frank Walsh (704.875.7886)

Outreach - Team Lead: Teresa Sharp (704.992.0681)

Golf Tournament - Team Lead: **OPEN**

BASEBALL-SPECIFIC VOLUNTEER TEAMS

Administrative - Team Lead: April Agosto (704.894.0704)

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

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

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

Special Evens Team - Team Lead: **OPEN**

****This team plans, publicizes and executes all baseball-related special events (i.e. Opening Day, Stewards of the Game Day at Davidson College, Family Fun Night, Coaches Game, etc

Equipment: Team Lead: Kevin & Dawn Hatley (704.987.0665)

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